

Mennonite Historian

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



Good Earth Productions of Toronto visited Manitoba this summer to prepare a half hour documentary on Neuberghthal to be aired later this year on the History Channel. In addition to using archival photographs from the Peter G. Hamm Collection at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, they interviewed Historian Lawrence Klippenstein in Reinland, Manitoba. (Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz)

Mennonites and the 1900 Galveston Hurricane

by Dora Dueck

A recent best-selling book by Erik Larson called *Isaac's Storm* tells the story of a hurricane that struck ashore at Galveston, Texas in 1900. This hurricane inflicted so much death and destruction that it still ranks as the worst natural disaster in America's history.

The storm hit the lovely, "boom" port of Galveston (vigorously competing with Houston some 50 miles north for pre-eminence on the Texas coast) on the evening of September 8. It consisted of winds surpassing 120 miles per hour, driving rain, and a huge and deadly wall of water. By the time the storm was over early Sunday, September 9, it had razed much of Galveston and destroyed many buildings, trees, crops and animals inland as well. And it had killed at least 6000 (perhaps as

many as 10 000) people.

The story of the 1900 storm has a Mennonite angle to it, not told by Larson, but documented in letters to Mennonite newspapers of the time such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the *Zionsbote*. The hurricane ended at least one fledgling Mennonite settlement in the coastal plains of Texas--at Westfield--and severely tested (and emptied) another--in the Richmond-Rosenberg area.

The Westfield settlement was founded by a group of Mennonite Brethren families, led by minister Heinrich Bergthold. They had abandoned the struggle to make a living in Colorado and set out, May 1897, in a caravan of 18 wagons for Texas. On October 18 they unloaded their belongings on homesteads near the village of Westfield, in Harris County, some 15 miles

north of Houston. They began optimistically, building primitive houses and breaking the land for cotton and corn. The land was "prairie" with some wooded parts; one writer described the region as "romantic". In January 1898 Johann Heinrichs reported to the *Zionsbote* that they were now 13 families in Westfield, with a total of 110 persons. Several Mennonite families from other parts of America had also settled in Fairbanks, in the same county.

Another Mennonite settlement formed somewhat further south, west of Houston, in the Rosenberg-Richmond area of Fort Bend County, and at East Bernard, in the neighboring Wharton County. The beginning of these ventures cannot be ascertained from reports to the two newspapers, but the *Handbook of Texas Online* states, "In 1896 a colony of northern Mennonites purchased a league on Big Creek...Fifty families established a community there with a road system, several stores, and separate schools for black and white students." P.S. Warkentin wrote in the 9 March 1898 *Rundschau* that there were currently some 75 Mennonite families in the East Bernard, Katy, Rosenberg, and Westfield communities. Church affiliation was mixed. Some were Krimmer Mennonite Brethren under the leadership of Bernhard Kroeker. At least some considered Gerhard Neufeld of Mountain Lake, Minnesota (connected with the Bergthal group in Manitoba) "our elder". Warkentin was Adventist.

The regular letters from these settlements to the wider Mennonite constituency in the *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* over the next few years reported on weather conditions, crops, prices, church events, visitors, deaths, births, and marriages. The *Rundschau* tended to carry more details of what was termed the *irdischen* (earthly) and the *Zionsbote* (a church paper of the Mennonite Brethren) emphasized spiritual and congregational concerns. Taken as a whole, they reflected a mixed experience of hopefulness and discouragement. Adjustments to the subtropical climate, new plant cultures and unfamiliar farming methods, compounded by malaria, insect plagues, hostile "old settlers", and the 1899 flood of the Brazos River, took their toll. Nearly half of the Mennonite families of Westfield, for example, left after one year. Those who remained--so said the letter writers, at least--were satisfied with their lot and believed

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Galveston Hurricane

(cont'd from page 1)

the hardships of the pioneer stage would be overcome. Regular *Rundschau* correspondents David Nikkel (Westfield) and P.S. Warkentin (variously East Bernard, Richmond, Fairbanks) were particularly passionate boosters of settlement in Texas.

Accounts of the September 1900 "*Schreckensnacht* [night of terror] for people and cattle" read like a jolt in the flow of the usual news. "No pen can describe this terrible night," said J.P. Thiessen of Rosenberg. Nevertheless, some tried. They described the rising wind, the knee-deep water, the fearful experience of being inside swaying and moving buildings. They told of trying to free trapped animals and of waiting out the night in a large corn granary. Thiessen said he and his family were "tossed back and forth like balls" as they escaped their disintegrating house; buildings were "rolled about like little boxes".

One of the most poignant letters came from a grieving Bernhard Kroeker, his thoughts "very scattered" and "feeling like

the wind lifted the house, threw them out [Jeremiah] in Lamentations 1:12 ['is there any pain like my pain?']. His wife Katharina died of internal injuries when wind dropped the floor and then carried the rest of the dwelling another quarter of a mile further until it broke apart.

The storm caused three other deaths in the Mennonite community of Rosenberg-Richmond: the wife of Jakob A. Klassen (probably of a broken neck) and two young girls from the families of Heinrich Rempels and Daniel Wiens'.

The scene that greeted the Mennonite settlers at storm's end was *Verwuesterung* [devastation]. The worst hit in terms of property damage was the Richmond colony. Peter Neufeldt's report to the *Rundschau* took readers from one place to another, naming and assessing the losses. Besides the four deaths, he estimated at least \$8200 damage. Besides this, crops had been destroyed. It was "painful to beg", he said, but they would need help.

Assistance was swift to arrive in the Galveston region from all parts of the United States. The Mennonites also rallied around their co-religionists in Texas.

Gifts of money and goods kept the Mennonites from immediate destitution, but many families lost heart for living in Texas. By December, all the remaining settlers of Westfield had gone north, mostly to Oklahoma. Texas Historical Association records state that after the Galveston hurricane only "two or three Mennonite families" remained in the colony on the Big Creek. Reports to the *Rundschau* and *Zionsbote* cease from Westfield and Fairbanks after the storm, but continue from Richmond and East Bernard for some years. (Further research will be needed to follow the fates of the Mennonites who remained in the Gulf region.)

Author Erik Larson claimed in an interview with CNN that *Isaac's Storm* was not as much a disaster book as a "cautionary tale about an era in which great technological progress created a flawed sense of invincibility". His book describes tensions in the (then) recently established U.S. Weather Bureau and questions the alleged heroism of Galveston meteorologist Isaac Cline. It is not clear, however, whether this theme of "technological hubris" is Larson's own view from a distance or if he gathered it from commentators in 1900.

At any rate, the judgment of Mennonites who experienced the storm reflects both their religious world view and their position as settlers caught up within all the promises and disappointments of the expanding American frontier. The hurricane clearly chastened the keenest supporters of Texas settlement; the voices of Nikkel and Warkentin both go silent in the *Rundschau* for several years after their storm reports. But neither they nor other writers supposed that technology had failed them. The content of the Mennonite newspapers of the time indicated a keen observation of, and recording of, of the weather; many farmers owned thermometers, even barometers. Such efforts can be seen as a kind of mastery of their environment, at least the knowledge of it. But the ultimate cause of events, climatic or otherwise, was still "God's hand."

God's hand had been "hard" on them this year, what with too much rain, insects, worms, and then the storm, said A. Koop of East Bernard, but should not the "difficult be taken" as well as the good? J.P. Thiessen of Rosenberg quoted a poet: "*Was Gott tue, das ist wohlgethan, Es bleibt gerecht sein Wille.*" John D. Nickel of Fairbanks suggested the hurricane was a "warning...to seek God's face more earnestly."

While such expressions can be read as reflexive, out of a religious understanding of the world, they were not applied without struggle. "I visited a family [after the storm] that is also presently greatly tested by illness," wrote minister Heinrich Bergthold of Westfield. "The dear brother put his head in his hands and wept, nearly despairing. I tried to comfort him and to point him to the Lord, while my own heart, I confess, was storming almost like a hurricane."

Sources:

- 1) Harms, John F. *Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde 1860-1924*. Hillsboro, KS, 1925. 95-100. 2) Hatcher, Thurston. "'Isaac's Storm' a cautionary tale for the new century." CNN.com book news. 3) <http://europe.cnn.com/2000/books/news/09/07/isaacs.storm/> 4) Larson, Erik. *Isaac's Storm*. Crown Publishers, 1999. 5) *Mennonitische Rundschau*, letters from Texas (Westfield, Rosenberg, Richmond, East Bernard, Fairbanks), 1898-1901. 6) The Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online>. 7) *Zionsbote*, letters from Texas (Westfield, East Bernard), 1897-1901.

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Editors: Abe Dueck (CMBS)

Alf Redekopp (MHCA)

All correspondence and unpublished manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.,

Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

Phone 204-888-6781

www.mennonitechurch.ca/heritage/

e-mail:

aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

or

1-169 Riverton Ave.,

Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5

Phone 204-669-6575

www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies/

e-mail: adueck@mbconf.ca

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Genealogy and Family History

by Alf Redekopp

Queries

Suckau - Searching for information about Anna (Suckau) Penner's parents or siblings. Anna Suckau was born on 27 Aug 1845 in Russia. She was married to Jacob Penner, son of Franz Penner and Katharina Fast. Anna died on 27 Oct 1930 in Langham, Saskatchewan and Jacob died on 26 June 1904 in Langham, Saskatchewan. Anna and Jacob had four children: (1) Jakob Penner, born on 3 Nov 1876 who married Maria Goertzen on 8 Oct 1899; (2) Franz Penner who was born on 5 Nov 1878; (3) Agatha Penner who was born on 7 Nov 1880, who married a "Warkentine" and was living on 26 Oct 1977 in Langham, Saskatchewan; (4) Anna Penner who was born on 21 Mar 1886 and who married Gerhard F. Epp. Anna died 25 Oct 1977 in Henderson, York County, Nebraska and Gerhard F. Epp died 25 Apr 1959 in Henderson, York County, Nebraska. Please contact Barb Pinkerton, 52536 Bordeaux Way, Shelby Twp., Michigan, USA 48315 or e-mail: fbepink@home.com.

Suckau - Searching for information about Abraham Suckau's parents or siblings. Abraham was born about 1843 and married Katharina Loewen. Abraham and Katharina had six children: (1) Abraham Suckau born on 3 Mar 1869 who married Margaretha Willems; (2) Susana Suckau was born 23 Jul 1871 who married Johann J. Wall; (3) Peter Suckau born on 30 Oct 1873 who married Anna Pankratz and they had children of Heinrich, Emma, Anna, Katarina and Minna; (4) Katharina Suckau born about 1875 who might have married Cornelius Fast; (5) Margaretha Suckau born on 16 Feb 1879 who married Johann C. Fast; (6) Helena Suckau born 14 Jun 1881 who married Johann H. Gaede. Please contact Barb Pinkerton, 52536 Bordeaux Way, Shelby Twp., Michigan, USA 48315 or e-mail: fbepink@home.com

Kehler - Looking for records about the family of John Kehler (b. 11. March 1884) and his wife Maria Peters (b. 13. March

1883) who arrived in Canada in 1912 and settled in Saskatchewan near Swift Current. Also, looking for the port of entry, place of origin in South Russia and any specific records of their residency in Canada from 1913-1922, when the family moved to Mexico. Contact: Vincent Correll, 840 E. Cole Ave., Fresno, CA 93720 or e-mail vcorrell@qnis.net or fax 559 221 2660.

1847 Molotschna Colony Voters List

by Tim Janzen

A n 1847 Molotschna Colony Voters List has recently been extracted from the Odessa Archives, Fund 6, Inventory 2, File 10510 and made available on the web at: www.mmhs.org.

The voters list was originally compiled in late September and early October in 1847 and contains the names of the 1075 owners of farms in the 43 villages of the Molotschna Colony at that time. This file was among a large group of files from Fund 6, Inventory 2 which were microfilmed in 1999 and 2000 at the Odessa State Archives. There are a total of 5 microfilms from this group of files covering the years 1847 to 1851 and File #10510 is found on the first microfilm of the group. These voting records are among the most important material which is found in this set of microfilms. Microfilms of this material are available at the following Mennonite Archives: the Center for M. B. Studies in Fresno, California, the Center for M. B. Studies at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, the Mennonite Historical So. of British Columbia in Clearbrook, B. C., and the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Prior to this time Mennonite researchers have had no comprehensive listing of the owners of farms in the Molotschna Colony after 1835, which is when the last available census was taken. The voters list is especially helpful in that it identifies the early settlers of villages not

yet established at the time of the 1835 census, namely Gnadenfeld, Waldheim, Landskrone, and Hutterthal. Unfortunately, the heads of many families, particularly young families, were not included in this voters list because they did not own a farm and thus were not entitled to vote. Delbert Plett has estimated that about 2/3 of families in the Molotschna Colony in 1846 did not own a farm and I believe his estimate is probably reasonably accurate. Researchers studying this voters list should thus be careful when attempting to drawing conclusions about the identities of the men included in the list. Even with its limitations, however, this 1847 voters list is still a significant addition to the available Mennonite records for the Molotschna Colony for this period.

The voters list is available in two versions. In one version an attempt was made to spell the names of both the farm owners as well as the villages exactly as they appear in the original documents. In the modified version spellings have been standardized for surnames and some village names. This second version has also been sorted alphabetically by surname. The number of the farm or "wirtschaft" that each voter owned is given in the original document for all of the villages with the exception of Ohrloff and Lichtfelde.

The original documents also include the names of the candidates for whom the owners voted in the election. These names have not been included in the extraction.

Available again!

The Bergthal Gemeinde Buch (previously out of print)

This 439 page book comes in two major divisions. The first section deals primarily with the residents of the Bergthal Colony and their descendants. The second section includes information on all Mennonites who immigrated to the East and West Reserves in the 1870s. The index to all heads of households who immigrated in the 1870s complete with a cross-reference to the passenger lists, 1881 Federal Census and church records shows spouses and their birth dates.

Price: \$20.00 plus shipping & handling.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
E-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

Preface to Grandpa's Revelations of God's Grace in my Life's Journey

by Ed Friesen

"*Dichta Friesa*" (Poet Friesen) is what the Mennonites in southern Alberta called him and he was proud of the name, for in his mind there was no higher calling than poetry. He worked as hard at his poetry as any sugar beet farmer worked at making beets grow on the irrigated fields surrounding Coaldale. He did not make as much money as even the poorest sugar beet farmer; indeed, he lost money and had to supplement the pennies his poetry earned him with money from his meager pension cheque to pay for the paper, stencils, and duplicating fluid needed to print multiple copies of his poems. The farmers expected and received full value for their sugar beets from the refinery in Taber and they willingly paid retail to the local grocers, the Martens brothers, for the finished product so their wives could make the *perishki* they consumed at Sunday *fasha*. One can place a monetary value on the temporal, on sugar, but poetry is an altogether different matter. The consensus of the vast majority of the Coaldale Mennonite community was that poetry should be freely given and Grandpa gave freely. Children would come to his door in the days prior to special occasions such as Mother's Day and ask for verses that they could recite in church. Grandpa always had something for them, especially if the occasion was Mother's Day; poetic inspiration flowed freely for Grandpa when writing about that most sacred of topics, motherhood. And so from the mouth of children came Grandpa's poems: images danced gleefully on the stage of the Mennonite Brethren Church to the beat of Grandpa's German as it held in poetic tension somber religious advice and playful down-to-earth humour. The late model Oldsmobiles that sparkled in the sunshine on the parking lot of the Coaldale M.B. church on Sunday mornings belonged to the Martens brothers and to the sugar beet farmers. Grandpa did not own one of them. Grandpa never owned a car, but he soared on the wings of poesy. Pegasus, that winged horse poets use to symbolize their flights of fancy, was Grandpa's mount, and that horse will give you a more exciting

ride than any Oldsmobile, although Pegasus won't transport you physically. When Grandpa wanted to get to church or anywhere else, he walked. He walked all over Coaldale. Like Thoreau in Concord, Grandpa traveled a good deal in Coaldale observing life as lived there, chatting with fellow Mennonites, and grappling with the chaos of life as he attempted to mold it into the ordered language of poetry.

Poetry was Grandpa's passion, especially in his later years; he had a burning desire to communicate with his fellow human beings and he wanted to be remembered, he wanted to "leave his name in the world," as he often said. But because he wrote in German and his living descendants now speak English as do his people, the Mennonites, at least those living in Canada, "*Dichta Friesa*" is rapidly fading from memory.

Besides an impressive collection of German poetry Grandpa left behind a short biography. Several of his now English speaking descendants have requested that it be translated, so my mother and I got together in the spring of 2001 and attempted the task.

My mother, Annie Friesen, was the wife of Grandpa's oldest son. She, of course, knew her father-in-law well and had a good grasp of the German spoken by the Coaldale community they both lived in. My wife, Agatha, who has a better command of the high German than do, also helped from time to time when we struggled with the more difficult passages.

Grandpa was born in 1880, in Orloff, Ekaterinoslav, Russia, now the Ukraine. In 1912 he, his wife, and their two young boys left Russia and emigrated to Canada. By the spring of 1914 they were on a homestead near Cadillac in southern Saskatchewan. In summer he tried to make the Saskatchewan prairie produce grain; in winter he taught German in Manitoba to descendants of the Russian Mennonites who had emigrated to Canada in the 1870s. His biography is very short focusing primarily on his spiritual struggles; day to day happenings unconnected with spiritual significance in Grandpa's mind are, unfortunately, largely omitted. No doubt many events that would interest us have been lost forever. There is, however, one story dating back to the Cadillac homestead that has been rescued and I will share it now. My dad told me this story. I call it "The Harpooned Horse."

Back in the second decade of the twentieth century horses were used to work the land on the homesteads of southern Saskatchewan. Money was short, and fences were scarce; horses roamed freely and could come right onto the yard of Grandpa's homestead. One day just at suppertime a horse grazing near the homestead shack was stricken with an itch in its rear-end. There are few trees in southern Saskatchewan available to a horse with an itchy posterior so the horse sauntered over to the shack where it pushed its hind-end against a wall and commenced to gyrate its hams in search of relief. Unfortunately for the Friesens, but perhaps lucky for the horse, it chose a spot on the wall where there was a window, and this window was just above the table where the Friesen family was seated for their evening meal. Suddenly the glass shattered and sticking over the borscht and the buns on the table was the hind-end of a horse. Grandpa had a fork in his hand and realizing with his quick poetic mind that forks are easily transformed to harpoons he rammed the instrument deep into the horse's posterior. The horse, having found instant relief (Grandpa apparently hit the spot!), saw no reason to stick around and took off at full gallop across the Saskatchewan prairie carrying Grandpa's fork with him. The fork was never retrieved.

The Saskatchewan experiences in Grandpa's life occurred before my time; Grandpa was fifty-eight years old and living in Coaldale when I was born. My personal memory of him dates back to a time when he had already devoted his life entirely to his poetic pursuits. I remember his little house cluttered with scribblers and pencils, typewriters of various sizes, and duplicating apparatuses including a prized Gestetner machine. From where he got his incentive to continue I do not know; he received little encouragement from those nearest him. Although a few admired what he could do with words -- Printer Loewen who published the local newspaper respected him as Coaldale's leading authority of the German language -- the vast majority of local residents saw little value in poetry. But to Grandpa poetry was a consuming passion; transfusing the mysteries of life into the rhythms and rhymes of his beloved German was a sacred calling.

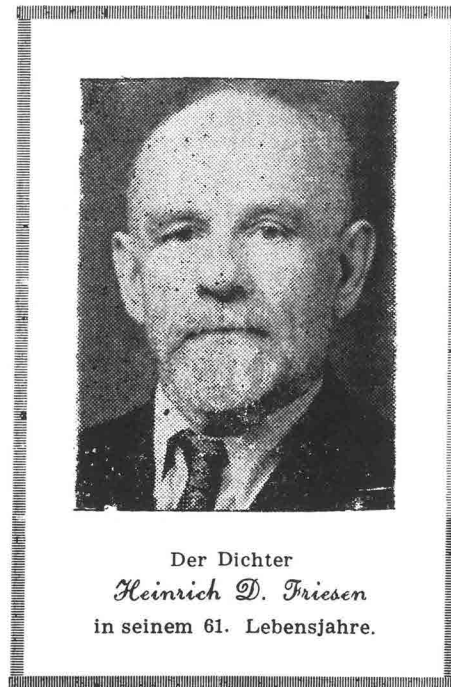
He loved German and fought to

preserve it within the Mennonite community, but at the same time was aware that his world was rapidly turning to English. He, himself, made efforts to learn English. Once when I visited him I noticed his Complete Works of Shakespeare lying open on the table. Surprised, I asked, "Why are you reading Shakespeare?" I was in high school at the time and didn't think anyone read Shakespeare unless it was assigned by a teacher. "If you want to learn English," Grandpa replied, "you might as well go to the best." I have Grandpa's Shakespeare in my possession and from his markings and notations can guess what parts of Shakespeare he read and what impressed him. He read Shakespeare not only to learn English, he read him critically. On the first page of *Love's Labour's Lost* he comments in English: "This drama is not worth reading." In a more pointed criticism he says that Holofernes, a schoolmaster in the play, uses too much Latin. Surprisingly, he makes only one marginal comment in *Hamlet* and it is a poignant one. In Act 1, Scene ii, Gertrude, the Queen, tells Hamlet her son, "Thou know'st 'tis common, - all that live must die, / Passing through nature to eternity." The idea of passing to eternity was much in Grandpa's mind, as his biography reveals. The passage is marked with a cross and in the margin opposite it Grandpa has written the date June 30. I do not know the significance of the date; I believe his wife died in September. Perhaps his father died on June 30.

Near the end of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Venus lamenting that she remains alive after her lover Adonis has been slain, says:

Since thou art dead, lo! here I prophesy,
Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend;
It shall be waited on with jealousy,
Find sweet beginning but unsavory end;
Ne'er settled equally, but high or low;
That all love's pleasure shall not match his woe.

Grandpa drew a circle around that stanza. He knew sorrow. Venus' words rang true. I remember a letter he wrote to me in the 1950s when I was a student at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. "Have you experienced yet," Grandpa wrote, "that some prayers consist only of weeping and Amen?" I hadn't, and still haven't, but Grandpa must have many



times. He lived in a community that measured the worth of a man largely by how well he could farm. Grandpa was not a good farmer. He left his homeland in his prime at the age of thirty-two to raise a family in a strange land with a strange language and with a highly secular culture quite foreign to Mennonites from the steppes of Russia. It is difficult for parents in any generation to live in the same world as their teen-age children; for Grandpa it would have been even more difficult, virtually impossible. He was a poet speaking a language rapidly dying in his community, indeed, a language often spurned, for in both world wars it was the language of the enemy. He also missed not having a formal education. He could rationalize some of the pain away and tell himself that he had attended the best school of all, God's school, but in the end it was just that, a rationalization. He confided in me once that his dream had been to become a professor. He envisioned himself entering a classroom of students eagerly anticipating his arrival. A student would

immediately rush to the front and help him take off his overcoat. He would then deliver his lecture to raptured students at the end of which he would again be helped with his coat before he returned to his office surrounded with students still listening with admiration to his every word. He never became a professor; maybe it is just as well. Had he been a professor he may have purchased his coats from Eatons rather than the Salvation Army from where, I believe, most of his coats came, but he would have had to put them on and take them off himself, and he would have discovered first hand that the passion to learn, a passion he felt so deeply, is rare even among university students.

Grandpa spent his last days in a nursing home in Medicine Hat. He was a man of slight stature (a "*Schlichter*") and very agile right to the end. He did not like the nursing home and made frequent attempts to escape. Once when he managed to get outside dressed only in under shorts and a blanket he was spotted and a group of health care workers gave chase across the compound. Grandpa easily outran his hard-breathing pursuers. They thought they had him when he got to the fence, but they were wrong. Over the fence went Grandpa and blanket bounding across the prairie. The sweat-drenched health care workers had to get fresh recruits to track him down and return him to his room.

Editors Note:

A copy of Friesen's biography and much of his poetry is available at the CMBS.



Alison Minor and Daniel Wilson of Realization Films Inc. preparing to interview Dr. Abe Dueck, Director at Centre for MB Studies for a documentary on the Russian Mennonite Exodus in August 2001. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.



Student Assistants at MHC



Myron Dyck, Archival Assistant for a 2nd summer. Professor John J. Friesen (background) held a research office at the Centre during his sabbatical while he was writing the history of Mennonites in Manitoba. (Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz)

Through the Summer Career Placement Program, a division of Human Resources Development Canada, the Heritage Centre was able to hire Myron Dyck for 8 weeks as an Archival Assistant. Since this was the second summer that he was hired, experience from last year was an additional benefit to the Centre. He worked at numerous tasks. He sorted through new archival collections, developed file lists and created findings aids.

Myron processed several major collections which included the records of Gospel Mennonite Church (Winnipeg) and the Zoar Mennonite Church (Langham). The Zoar records were also microfilmed by Myron.

With another grant from the Canadian Council of Archives Control of Holding Program, Myron also worked an additional 6 weeks processing a backlog of Conference of Mennonite in Canada records which originated from the General Secretary's office from the 1980s and early 1990s.

Myron Dyck is originally from Altona,

Manitoba and is currently in his final year in the Faculty of Education at the University of Winnipeg.

Another student who was back at the Heritage Centre for a second summer, was Rachel Mills. She came to the Centre last summer as a research assistant for Professor John J. Friesen of Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), who was at that time beginning a project of writing a history of Mennonites in Manitoba. Rachel assisted John with preparing a bibliography and locating appropriate photographs that might be used in publishing the completed manuscript.

This summer Rachel was hired by the Centre to process a backlog of records originating with the Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) offices of the Registrar, Business Manager, Admissions Office and President. This included not only sorting through 10 large boxes of files, but also over 2000 photographs.

Rachel emigrated from England in 1994 and took up residence with her family on a farm eight miles south of Steinbach. She completed an honours B.A. in History at the University of Toronto a year ago and is currently beginning in the joint masters program in Canadian History offered by the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba.

The project at the Centre this summer would not have been possible to complete at this time without the assistance received from Federal Government through the Canadian Council of Archives.

A.R.

Dr. Thiessen of Bethania

by Alf Redekopp

Dr. Isaak Thiessen was the physician responsible for the Bethania Mental Hospital established in 1910 by the *Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz* in South Russia. Several photographs related to this institution and its staff can be found in Gerhard Lohrenz's *Heritage Remembered*, pp. 128-129. What happened to this institution, its famous physician and his family?

A short autobiography of Olga Martinowa Thiessen was recently sent to the Centre by Inge Seel of Germany. In it Olga writes: "My parents were Dr. Isaak

(cont'd on p. 11)



Rachel Mills preparing the file inventory list for the CMBC Registrar's /Business Manager's files. (Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz)

Summer Visitors

The Mennonite archival Centres in Winnipeg have seen many visitors this summer from across Canada and from various international locations. Many of these visitors have been genealogists coming for our rich sources in Russian Mennonite history. The Heritage Centre has also seen a number of people come to use the new 109 reels of microfilm that Harvey Dyck recently donated that originated in the Zaporozhye Archives. One of the users has been David Sudermann of Minnesota who visited Winnipeg from August 14-24. David continues to work on the project of Mennonite estates in Russia.

From August 14-16 independent film producer Alison Minors, and camera man Daniel Wilson of Realization Films, Inc. visited the two archival centers. Alison was intrigued with her grandmother's story of the Mennonite exodus out of Russia in the 1920s and decided to do the story. The project soon blossomed into telling the larger Mennonite exodus story. Minors and Wilson scoured the photo collections of both archives and filmed over 250 photographs and documents for use in the one-hour documentary. The project will hopefully be completed by the end of this year. It has not been determined when it will be available for public viewing.

C.S.

M.A. Thesis Received

Don Krocker, "Manitoba Mennonite Archives and Canadian Mennonite Collective Memory". Master of Arts thesis, Department of History (Archival Studies), University of Manitoba, October 2000.



The former North End Mennonite Brethren Church (now Elmwood MB Church) building at the corner of Burrows and Andrews in Winnipeg, built in 1917. Standing in front of the building are Gabrielle Hamm and Donovan Giesbrecht (summer student workers at CMBS) with Abe Dueck, Director of CMBS. This was the second church building owned by the congregation and only the basement was ever completed.



The new North End Church on College Ave. was built in 1929 (now Blessings Community Church-Pentecostal) and was used until 1954, when the present church on Henderson Highway was completed.

Over 700 Tapes of Coaldale Radio Ministry Catalogued

On August 31, 1952, the first Gospel Bells radio program produced by the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church was aired on Radio Station CHAT in Medicine Hat, Alberta. The idea of such a program was initiated by a group of local young people and preparations were begun in 1949 by the Youth Committee. The program was supported largely through voluntary donations at an initial cost of \$22.00 per half hour. Eventually (1960) the church took full responsibility. The program was aired on various stations, including CJOC in Lethbridge and the Dawson Creek, BC, station. After 17 years of continuous broadcasting, the last program was aired on November 17, 1968. In the meantime a German broadcast called "Brot des Lebens" was begun in 1960 and aired from CHEC in Lethbridge. Later it was moved to Camrose and then also aired from Drumheller. This broadcast discontinued in 1973. In its place, the

church sponsored "Licht des Evangeliums" which was produced in Winnipeg.

In order to produce these programs, expensive equipment needed to be purchased and a studio built. A full-fledged studio was built in the local Bible School in 1962. The individual who was responsible for recording the programs was George Siemens, a member of the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church.

Several years ago a collection consisting of over 700 tapes aired on the programs was donated by the Coaldale Church to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Don Petker, who was moderator for a time, brought the tapes to Winnipeg. The tapes consist of various sizes of reel-to-reel tapes (mostly 3"). The tapes include recordings of the radio choirs, male choir, quartets, trios and solos by various individuals as well as messages given on the programs. Several tapes consist of special services of the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church.

The Coaldale program was by no means the first to be produced by Mennonites or Mennonite Brethren in Canada. The first such venture by Mennonite Brethren occurred in Saskatoon when H. S. Rempel began Gospel Tidings, a 15-minute program in October, 1940

The tapes were catalogued this summer by Gabrielle Hamm, who was working under the Career Placement program of the Federal Government.



Gospel Bells Radio Group, 1952. Photo: Coaldale MB Church (1926-1976) 50th Anniversary Book, p. 29.



CENTRE FOR

**Mennonite
Brethren
Studies** IN CANADA

1-169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R2L 2E5

New Documents from Russian Archives

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, as well as several other archives, recently received a collection of documents from the Omsk Regional State Archives in Russia. These were made available through the generosity of Dr. Tim Janzen of Portland, Oregon. The researcher who was active in locating and copying the documents is Anton Vladine at the University of Moscow. Several students at Fresno Pacific University, working under the supervision of Paul Toews, provided identification and brief descriptions of the materials.

Among the materials are a number of documents of special interest to Mennonite Brethren. These include four documents pertaining to the Karpovka Mennonite Brethren congregation in 1934/35 and four pertaining to the Apolonovka Mennonite Brethren congregation in the Omsk region. There are membership lists with birth dates, occupation, social status, etc., a request for registration of the Apolonovka congregation, and a list of council members. There is also a questionnaire completed by MB minister, Isaak Abraham Toews.

Almost all of the documents are in the Russian language. As more and more Russian materials become available, the need for competent translators becomes more and more urgent.

CAIN Grant

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies recently received a grant of \$3030 from the Canadian Council of Archives for a description project for Mennonite Brethren congregational records. This project is part of a massive programme of the Canadian Archival Information Network which is seeking to place a

(cont'd on p. 8)



The Hochstadt public school building and the students with teacher around 1920, after the building had served as a worship centre for the Bergthaler church for some years. Photo: Courtesy of the late William J. Kehler of Altona, MB.

Hochstadt near Altona: Some Historical Notes.

By Lawrence Klippenstein

Hochstadt was a community east and north of Altona in southern Manitoba. It was founded around 1880 when Bergthal Colony settlers from the East Reserve moved to the West Reserve to find better land.

The community became more widely known when the first sessions of the newly founded *Konferenz der Mennoniten im Zentralen Kanada* held its first sessions here in 1903. The building used was then a worship centre for the Bergthaler Mennonites of the West Reserve. The worship centre was relocated to Altona in 1912 when a new church was built there, so the building in the photo (taken around 1920) then became a school for the community. It was purchased for this purpose for \$750.00, with \$175.00 required for renovations.

The new Hochstadt school district was named Kleinstadt. It had earlier been under one board which directed the schools of Neubergthal, Gnadenfeld and Hochstadt as one district. Since the Department of Education already had one school named Hochstadt on its records (it was located in the East Reserve), it would not allow another district to use the same name.

The village of Hochstadt broke up around 1885, possibly because there was friction between those who supported private schools and those who wanted a public school. I recall someone trying to convince my father to send his children to

a private school, but Dad refused so we children in the family all attended the public school. The private school was closed in 1910.

Based on notes from William J. Kehler. Bill passed away several months ago.

Isaac T. Ewert (1902-1984) Personal Papers

Ed Boldt, Historian/Archivist of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ontario, recently reported that he had received a collection of sermons of Isaac T. Ewert. Ewert was a pioneer minister, pastor and Bible school teacher who lived in Kitchener, Ontario. The collection consists mostly of German language sermons. Ewert served as pastor of the Zion Mennonite Brethren Church in Kitchener from its beginning in 1961 to 1977. The church was dissolved in 1982. For a time Ewert was principal of the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Bible School and also served as moderator of the Ontario Conference.

The collection is currently housed in the archival storage room at Tabor Manor in St. Catharines, Ontario.

A.D.

Eichenfeld Memorial Dedicated

In April, 2000, a "Mennonite International Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union" was formed in Toronto under the chairmanship of Harvey L. Dyck. A tour group under the leadership of John B. Toews of Regent College recently participated at the unveiling of the first project of this committee--a monument to the civil war massacre victims at Eichenfeld, Ukraine. 80 men and women were slaughtered in Eichenfeld on October 27/28, 1919. They were buried in unmarked graves. Many of the tour participants at the unveiling are relatives of those who were massacred. The memorial, which also refers to several other massacres in the region, was designed by Paul Epp. The inscription reads:

IN SORROWFUL REMEMBRANCE OF
MENNONITE VICTIMS OF CIVIL WAR
MASSACRES IN THE NIKOLAIPOLE
VOLOST

In Eichenfeld/Dubrovka:

Seventy-seven men and three women
on the night of 26-27 October 1919, and
the following days and buried in eleven
nearby mass graves

In Hochfeld/Morozovka

twelve men and three women on 16
October 1919

And elsewhere in the Volost

thirty-one men and one woman from 1918
to 1920

"They will beat their swords into
plowshares and their spears into pruning
hooks." Isaiah 2:4.

Erected in a spirit of reconciliation by
relatives of the victims and friends of the
Mennonite story.

May 2001

CAIN Grant

(cont'd from p. 7)

great deal of archival information from
various Canadian archives on the internet.

Bert Friesen has been hired to work on
the CMBS project. His work will consist of
researching and describing approximately
45 congregational records. Most of the
congregations to be described are from
Alberta and Saskatchewan. These descrip-
tions will then be loaded on the SAIN/
MAIN internet site (Saskatchewan and
Manitoba Archival Information Network).

Letters to the Editors

Re: June 2001 Mennonite Historian

Thanks very much for your June 2001 *Mennonite Historian*. It was excellent, especially Peter Letkemann's "Mennonite-related Documents from the Zaporozhye Archives" and all the dedicated efforts of Dr. Harvey Dyck. The research by Margaret Bergen on the tragic "Massacres of Ebenfeld and Steinbach, Borosenko Colony, 1919" also was very good. Thank you, Margaret! Sincerely,

John P. Nickel
Battleford, SK

P.S. I taught at Ebenfeld School, Laird, Saskatchewan, 1948-49, not knowing of those terrible Ebenfeld massacres.

Re: That Picture, p. 11 of MH (March 2001)

Immediately recognizable to me is the singular Heinrich J. Braun referred to in Abe Dueck's *Moving Beyond Secession*. He is in the second row, just to the right a bit, between Dyck and Dirks. This suggests that this picture represents one of those sessions documented in that book. It would be good if David Epp, p. 123 of *Moving Beyond Secession*, could be isolated. Too bad the picture did not produce more clearly...

Peter Penner,
Calgary, Alberta

You invited your readers to help you identify some of the ministers in the picture. I believe I can help you with one. The person standing in the front line, third from the right, with the beard, could be Rev. John F. Kroeker. Mrs. Kroeker mentioned in her diary of September 29 that her husband, together with a Mr. Teichroeb, left for Slavgorod and Gruenfeld for a conference. A few lines further down, she mentions that her son, Hansi, is doing some heavy work and he is only 12 years old. From that information, I would presume the conference was held in 1915. Hansi was born in 1903.

At that time the question of the Mennonite young men doing alternative service in WW I was very uppermost in the minds of church leaders. I can only assume that this might have been one of

the agenda items for the conference.

I hope this will help you. I am including a picture of Mr. Kroeker which may help you to verify and identify the person in the front row.

Helen Kornelsen,
Watrous, Saskatchewan

Regarding the photograph of the ministers' conference which appeared in the *Historian*, identified as Col. 521:2 at the Heritage Centre, just wanted to add some information.

Firstly, my guess would be that this picture is taken in front of the Gnadenfeld church, in the Molotschna Colony. (See photo in Rudy Friesen's book, p. 227.)

Secondly, I was sure that the 3rd person from the left in the second row of those standing higher -- the younger man with dark hair and moustache -- is Aeltester Peter Neufeld 1875-1927. I have been in touch with his granddaughter, and she confirms that it is her grandfather.

I recognize several of other faces, but can't put a name to the face.

Hope you're enjoying the Summer.

Margaret Kroeker
Mennonite Genealogy Inc.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Editors note:

Margaret Kroeker also phoned earlier to say that the tall man standing third from the right end of the second row, was her grandfather, Andreas Vogt (1854-1914). Thank you to all who responded to the challenge. -- A.R.

Correction

In the June 2001 issue of *Mennonite Historian* p. 7, the Arthur who was honored at an Order Of Canada Investiture Ceremony was Arthur Kroeger not "Krueger". I apologize for any grief this caused those who bear this name or whose relatives bear this name. Alf Redekopp

Magadan (Russia)

Peter Letkemann recently returned from a trip to Magadan (Russia), the former administrative centre for the worst of the worst labour camps in the Soviet GULag system. Persons interested in seeing photos and reading about this region can visit the following web-site: <http://members.home.net/memoria.publishing/>

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Horst Gerlach's *Hutterites in West Prussia* was first published in German in the *West Prussian Yearbook* in 1999. This English translation, published by Shirley Tschetter in South Dakota (e-mail: setcandy@aol.com), is available as a 32-page booklet. The core of Gerlach's article is a description of the Hutterite Colony that existed near Mennonites in West Prussia for a brief period beginning in 1604. Contacts established during that time were renewed later, when members of both groups had settled in New Russia.

In the June 1999 issue we noted Peter Letkeman's *As I Remember It*. A second small volume (106 pages) of memoirs, *Where Has The Time Gone?* (Castlegar, BC: Liconda Books, 2001) is more anecdotal and less chronological. Readers interested in the Mennonite connection with New Church (Swedenborgian) people in Renata, BC and Wetaskiwin, SK will find many references to a number of such families. \$17 plus postage; Box 132, Robson, BC, V0G 1X0.

Terry Martin's 2001 Bechtel Lectures in Anabaptist Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel College focused on "The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State, 1917-1925." The three lectures deal with the revolution and immediate aftermath (1917-1926), the period of collectivization and famine (1926-1934), as well as the terror of forced labour and exile. Martin's study makes extensive use of newly accessible archival resources to supplement information from earlier studies.

Peter D. Zacharias' ground-breaking village history of Reinland in 1976 quickly sold out and became a much sought-after volume. The Reinland Centennial Committee has reprinted *Reinland: An Experience in Community* with an added 16-page photographic essay (in color). The latter is also available separately for \$7. This book deserved reprinting because the author captures beautifully much of the communal spirit and ethos of church and village in the first century of Mennonite settlement on the Manitoba prairie. 350 + 16 pages, hardcover, \$40. A. E. Ens, Grp. 16, R.R. 1, Box 218, Winkler, MB, R6W 4A1.

To read *The boys write home: letters*

from *World War II*, compiled by Leona J. Krause (1998) is like listening in on one half of a family conversation. "The boys" are mostly the brothers Menno and Tony Bergen and the recipients of the letters are mostly their sister Emma and brother Norman. Menno, the most prolific writer, has a witty, informative, and reflective style. The letters cover from 1942–1946 during which time the "boys" served in the Canadian armed forces. 135 pages, Duotang binding.

Journey diaries of Mennonites coming to Canada from Russia in the 1870s or the USSR in the 1920s are relatively common. Marvin Bahnman of Fort Worth, Texas has now compiled, in English translation, such diaries from three members of the Bahnmann family who came between the major migrations: *Our Heritage: The Last Days of the Heinrich Bahnmann Family in Russia and Their Voyage to North America in 1903*. (106 pages, 8½ x 11) Sisters Margaretha (age 25) and Henrietta (14) have perspectives reflecting their age at the time. Their brother Nicolai (24) took many photographs along the way, influencing his narrative. He had earlier studied at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, so that this was not his first voyage to America. The family lived in Schoenfeld, Russia.

Bahnman has been at this kind of work for some time, publishing *Our Heritage: Remembrances of My Life in Russia, 1866–1895*, from the diary of Katharina (Wiens) Bahnmann Dyck Regier (281 pages) in 1997. He can be reached by e-mail at: mbahnman@aol.com.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 12)

Here is a history in the making without doubt. When a comprehensive work is tackled, one can move on to fine tune the organization of this large mass of data, periodize the story in more integrative ways, stylize the chapter headings and outlines more adequately, and add interpretive structure to the story as a whole.

There is more than raw data however. One finds some new perspective on the larger Canadian Mennonite story. For instance, the work of *Aeltester* Johann Funk can be seen from a viewpoint that differs somewhat from the one that is familiar to us in the work of Henry J.

Gerbrandt's *Adventure in Faith* telling the Bergthaler story.

The reference to an independent Hoffnungsfelder Gemeinde with its own church book (it may be the one that was always hard to identify in the Mennonite Heritage Centre collection, but now referred to as an "early West Reserve Bergthal Church Record--Vol.715") is an intriguing allusion to what clearly deserves further study.

This reviewer was also not really aware that the Sommerfelder community has experienced no less than seven major member losses in its one hundred years plus of church life. These happened during the Bergthaler division of 1891-92, the Mexico emigration of 1922, the Paraguay departures of 1926, the Rudnerweide division of 1936 which meant parting with nearly 1000 members, the 1948 Paraguay emigration, the division of 1958 which created the new Reinlaender Mennontengemeinde, and the largest single loss to the parent group of 1355 members, and most recently in 1988 there was another loss of over 100 members when a Winkler congregation declared its independence from the main body.

That, according to Bergen, would compute to a total of just under 3200 members leaving, with just over 4000 remaining around 1990. Always there were ministers also who left. The challenges brought on by these disruptive changes, is not really dealt with here. That may well get some attention in the next round also.

An exciting frontier has opened with this volume. The Sommerfeld Mennonite Church is after all one of the fastest growing Mennonite church bodies in Manitoba, perhaps Canada, today. Compiler Bergen, the supervising committee, and the church deserve much gratitude for providing this publication. Many readers and church people within and beyond the Sommerfelder fellowship will be waiting with much anticipation to see what will follow next.

Now Available

Esther Epp-Tiessen, *J.J. Thiessen : A Leader for His Time*. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2001) pb., 344 pp. \$23.95 plus postage & handling. Order from Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Adolf Ens, Jacob E. Peters and Otto Hamm, editors. *Church, Family and Village: Essays on the Mennonite Life on the West Reserve*. The West Reserve Historical Series, no.3 (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2001) x, 310 pp. Price 20.00.

Reviewed by Victor G. Wiebe, Librarian, University of Saskatchewan.

For its third offering the West Reserve Historical Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, has published a mixed collection of 22 essays entitled, *Church, Family and Village: Essays on the Mennonite Life on the West Reserve*. This joins the earlier works *Reinländer Gemeinde Buch* and *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve*.

The first essays are on the Russian colonies at Fürstenland and Pukhtin followed by an essay on immigration to Canada and another on the building of the pioneer Post Road. Biographical survey essays of *Obervorsteher* Isaak Müller, three *Ältester* and their churches (Johann Wiebe and the Reinländer Church, Abraham Doerksen and the Sommerfelder Church and Johann Funk and the Bergthal Church), put a personal face on the West Reserve. Later essays describe the reorganization of the Reinländer Church into the Old Colony Church and another essay on the beginnings of the Rudnerweider Church. There are also village histories of Neuenberg, Edenberg, Altberghthal and an examination of Hoffnungsfeld as a village which is remembered for its renewal movements. A selection of source documents provides a unique perspective on some aspects of West Reserve activities: a 1885 Pentecost sermon, a number of published children's letters, and selections from the *Bruderschaft* reports, all translated into English. Not to be overlooked, *Church, Family and Village* includes an essay about the Mennonites of Carrot River, Saskatchewan and another about Mennonites in Mexico, which indicates how widely dispersed the West Reserve has become.

Together these essays give readers a better understanding of the origin and variety of West Reserve denominations and of the different *Ältester* structures. The recent 125th anniversary celebrations of

Manitoba Mennonites has led many to ponder the difficulties, the blessings, and the changes that the pioneer Mennonites experienced. The Mennonite families described in these essays have now been in Manitoba for about five generations, whereas they were in Russia for only three generations. The acculturation pressures and technological changes experienced in Manitoba have been much greater than in any other period of Mennonite history.

It may be appropriate to question why the Manitoba Local History Committee chose to include essays which range from Russia to Manitoba to Saskatchewan and Mexico. A number of the essays and the biographical information suggest that the history described is not the history of a geographic space but the history of a small group of families. Indeed, a number of essays describe then as family clans. Perhaps "local history" is still the best way to think of them for in spite of their many moves to new geographical locations they are still only a small restricted group of families.

The binding of the book is sturdy and the book has the now familiar shiny black cover. Each essay has several illustrations. They include such diverse topics as portraits, families groups, village landscapes, farm machinery, maps and pages from printed publications. This is a very fine selection of illustrations, but unfortunately the quality of many of the photographs is poor. If one of the goals of the West Reserve Historical Series is to reproduce photographs, as is stated, then a better method of reproduction should be investigated because there are some very fine images in this book.

By providing source documents in English, readers get a feeling for the variety of materials that can be used to tell the West Reserve story. Often these give human form to otherwise impersonal facts. The short essay "Sommerfelder Youth Letters" by John Dyck, for example, gives the text of letters to the magazine, *Der Christliche Jugendfreund*, by eight children. The essay provides some comment on what the children wrote about but little commentary on the context of the letters, particularly in relation to the wider Mennonite and Canadian environment. The reader has to provide this for himself. For example, were the pioneer children of a hundred years ago connected to similar children in Germany, Russia, Pennsylvania

or Kansas? This article implies that they were.

As indicated above, this is a mixed collection of very readable essays. A few have been published before, some are recent writings by professional or experienced lay historians, and others are decades old memoirs by participants. Some essays provide new information about the West Reserve, while others provide a fresh perspective on one of the core areas of Mennonite settlement. Altogether, the 22 essays provide an important introduction to a much broader and comprehensive West Reserve history which is yet to be written.

Loewen Reunion 2002

Descendants of Heinrich Loewen (1823-1908) and Sara Toews (1827-1889) who emigrated to Manitoba from Russia in 1876 are invited to a reunion on the weekend of July 13 & 14, 2002. The event will take place in Gretna, Manitoba at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute. Heinrich and Sara had five children: Anna (1850-1910) married Erdman Nikkel, Heinrich Jr. (1852-1937) married Aganetha (Dick) Loewen, Katharina (1859-1930) married Klaas Peters, Jacob (1861-1928) married Katharina Giesbrecht, and Peter (1869-1943) married Katharine Gerbrand. A computer file in process currently contains 2927 descendants and an estimated 600 or more Nikkel descendants remain to be entered.

Residential facilities at the MCI including those for the disabled, and food services for the weekend, are being reserved. Benno and Mary Loewen, who farm near Gretna about half a mile from the original homestead, will accept advance registrations by telephone at 204-324-5339 or by mail at Box 127, Altona, MB R0G 0B0.

For more information, contact Howard Loewen, 324 Victoria Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R2M 1X5. telephone: 204-253-0742 or email: loewphoe@mb.sympatico.ca or Dolores Harder, 36010 Spyglass Court, Abbotsford, B.C. V3G 2W7 604-557-0855 email: harder0855@home.com.

Dr. Thiessen

(cont'd from p. 6)

Thiessen, the head doctor of the Mental Hospital "Bethania"... My mother was



Dr. Thiessen, responsible physician of the "Bethania institution, with his family.

Katharina Wallman. I was born in the house of my Grandparents, Andreas Wallman. During the Revolution this house was burned to the ground and my grandparents then found shelter with my parents at "Bethania"... I am now 86 years old and most likely the last of our family living in Russia..." She goes on to sketch out her life's activity and in doing so, we learn what happened to her father.

Having abandoned Bethania in 1927 due to the flooding of the village, the family resettled in a house in Chortitza. After 1930 her father Dr. Thiessen was employed at a hospital at the "Dneprostoy". In 1933, her father was first arrested, even though he had stayed clear of politics. His sentence was light. He was simply required to relocated to Alma Ata and his family could accompany him. The family decided to move with him when he was assigned to Tashkent.

When they arrived in Tashkent, Olga worked as a chemist while her father continued to work as a physician. Shet married a high ranking engineer which most likely spared her some of the terrible events of 1937, when her parents were both arrested and sentenced to labour camps where her mother died after two years. Her father survived the 10 years of labour camp and was again able to work as a doctor in Rybinsk. Olga writes that her father received much joy from his grand daughters who he visited each summer until he died in 1960.

Olga continued studies in Moscow becoming a chemical engineer, who due to her language skills (fluency in German, Russian, and some English) was able to attend a number of international conferences related to atomic energy. She attend her first international conference in Pittsburg (USA) in 1969.

Book Reviews

Horst, Isaac. *A Separate People: An Insider's View of Old Order Mennonite Customs and Traditions*. (Kitchener: Herald Press, 2000.) 262 pp.

Reviewed by Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg.

This book is similar, yet different from the dozens of memoirs by Canadian Mennonite septuagenarians. It is only indirectly autobiographical. Mostly, it is a biography of a people by one of its actors, Isaac Horst, a practicing Old Order Mennonite from Mount Forest, Ontario and an author of eight previous books. The text itself is a reproduction of almost 100 insightful Canadian *Mennonite Reporter* columns by Horst, who uses the old rhetorical device of the master fielding questions of the novice to introduce the reader to his exclusive and often veiled Mennonite group. The columns or mini chapters range from history, to travelogue, to anecdote, to sermon. In the process one learns much about the Old Order communities; their service order, courtship rituals, colonization processes, minister selections, technology 'wars' (to use the *Dachwaggeli* or the open buggy), and even their schisms (the way in which cartolerating Markham Mennonites came to be separate from the horse-and-buggy Waterloo Old Orders).

But the book is more than a guided tour. It is a defence. Yet it is not so much a defence of the Old Order church institution, as of a way of life that is nonconformist, nonresistant, and agrarian and given to "discipline, obedience and discipleship." [29] And in this apologia, Horst is specific, defending an array of practices, including excommunication, women's unpaid work, corporal punishment, farm life, unannounced visiting, controlled dating, and so forth. The defender of the faith is also an unrelenting biblicist. He notes unequivocally in the introduction that he will not "apologize for such Scripture texts" as "If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." [16] In the process of defending the old way, he also lectures us 'moderns' on our waywardness. Indeed, a good part of the

book is a prophetic critique of the world beyond the Old Order boundaries, the wider Mennonite world and even Canadian society in general. Horst's list of modern vices is long -- feminism, television, church truancy, urbanism, sexual licence, and social assistance are only a part of this list. Horst always returns, however, to his primary task, to defend Old Order culture. But as he does, he seems to possess a hope that Old Order culture could be accepted more widely. Indeed, Horst finds allies and indeed authority for his viewpoints from non-Old Order sources; among them are Heinrich Balzer, the *Kleine Gemeinde* preacher of the 1830s, Theron Schlabach's 1980 *Gospel vs. Gospel*, Herschberger's 1940s treatise on community utopiansim, and John Howard Yoder's 1961 *As You Go*.

All this provides a sense of the very germ of Old Order life. One senses how important an alternative reading of Mennonite history is: missionary movements, John Oberholtzer, elaborate Mennonite institutions may be celebrated in mainstream Mennonite histories, but they are the bane to the Old Order mind. One obtains a glimpse of Old Order piety; in this book people "come to Christ," [110] they encounter "believer's convictions," [116] they "look to Christ" [122]. Individualism is spurned at every turn: candidates for the ministerial are "comforted" not congratulated; children are discouraged from obtaining "good paying" jobs; readers are chided for seeking in Christianity a "crown without a cross." [174] It is a fascinating account therefore of the cultural material that is used to bolster and invigorate the Old Order communities. Nothing staid and mindlessly traditional compels these people.

Horst is also a skilful communicator. Margaret Loewen Reimer who invited Horst to write these "insider's views" writes in the introduction that "Horst's is not a simple or predictable voice; it keeps surprising us with unexpected turns and shifts in tone...." [p. 10] Indeed, Horst moves from irony, to ridicule, to chiding, to humour. Occasionally Horst's voice becomes almost abrasive. He notes categorically that Old Order women "would rather do...sewing, than to work outside the home" [110] and he is certain that "showing photographs to friends...is a demonstration of pride." [187] But overall

the book works well to introduce a people who have been able to resist the technologized and consumeristic urban world that Canadian and Manitoba Mennonites have come to accept as normative. It is enough to make a 'modern' squirm. *The Canadian Mennonite* staff merits congratulations on convincing Mr. Horst to write. Unfortunately, the Old Order Mennonites remain the only conservative Mennonite group that we 'moderns' romanticize enough to listen to: the voice of the 'plain people' of Manitoba -- the Hutterites, Holdemans, Old Colonists -- too often comes to us by way of the dissenter, not the good natured 'insider' apologist..

Peter Bergen, compiler and author. *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, that is, the Background and First Hundred Years of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church* (Winkler, MB: Sommerfeld Mennonite Church, 2001), hdc, 308 pp., \$40.00.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, former Historian-Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Its title notwithstanding, this work is viewed by Bergen himself as "still unfinished.. and (to) be regarded as a preliminary work to facilitate the writing by others of a more comprehensive history of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church " (p.302). It is a modest assessment of a significant achievement which is definitely a prerequisite for doing the further work that is envisioned.

In this volume we find an impressive first round of relevant material, including a useful identification of pertinent church registers, brief but well-summarized biographies of the ministers who served their congregations, more detailed write-ups on their *Aeltesters*, beginning with Abraham Doerksen, whose ministry is high-lighted, right up to *Aeltester* Peter Heppner still active in the church today, an introduction to all the worship groups of the whole church, and other features such as important data on the Sommerfeld *Waisenamt* (Orphans' Office) - not to mention hundreds of photos, charts and maps that are crucial for such a study.

(cont'd on p. 10)