

Reflections on *Sophia*

by Dora Dueck

Two boxes of materials recently delivered to the Centre for MB Studies contain correspondence, financial reports, circulation lists, minutes, leftover copies, and more, all pertaining to the 1991-2003 existence of the magazine *Sophia*.

Sophia was begun in 1991 by Ester DeFehr and other members of the Covenant Fellowship Ladies Group of McIvor Ave. Mennonite Brethren Church, Winnipeg, as a magazine “for and about women.” DeFehr was passionate about women’s calling within both home and church, including senior pastorates. Thus the first issues featured recipes and musings about friendship alongside articles like “Christians Can Be Feminists.”

The third issue announced a “temporary hiatus” for restructuring. The magazine then became the responsibility of an interested group of Winnipeg women. Sarah Klassen was editor. She served until 1996, when Lori Matties was named editor. Ester DeFehr had moved to North Carolina in 1993, but she remained publisher and a significant patron of *Sophia*.

The (usually) 24-page magazine, published three and then four times yearly, continued to seek to represent women in both private/domestic and public/church concerns. It won praise, as well as criticism, for its “gentle feminism” (because of either word in the combination).

Sophia associated itself with the struggle for broader recognition of women’s roles in the MB church, particularly after the recommendation that all church positions be open to women was defeated at the General Conference of MB Churches convention in 1993. It was not successful at achieving a formal link with the MB conference, however.

The connection to MB concerns, as reflected in an early mission statement (“*Sophia* offers a forum for women in the Mennonite Brethren church...”) loosened over time. In 1998, a new mission statement described *Sophia* as “a forum for Christian women...,” though stating it had been “conceived and brought to birth by Mennonite Brethren women.” Editorial responsibility also expanded to one issue a year that was put together by women in some other region of Canada.

A significant challenge faced *Sophia* in
(cont'd on p. 2)

Mennonite Historian

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



At first, joint services were held at the Arnaud United Church and at the town hall. In 1934, the Mennonite Brethren purchased the home of Ed. Smith, seen above, and transformed it into their first church building. The church was used until 1952, when the building was destroyed by fire. Photo credit: Centre for MB Studies, NP52-2-16

MB/GC Beginnings in Western Canada: Convenience Unites What the “Spirit” Divides

by Donovan Giesbrecht

“Beating the GCs at floor hockey—nothing could be better.” As Winnipeg play-write Jason Neufeld recalled his M.B. youth group days, the crowd of Mennonites in the audience could hardly keep from laughing. We were laughing at ourselves mostly. Laughing at our suspicions, prejudices, and self-conceit, laughing at the petty differences that continue to divide us.

But to the early Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites (Grosse Gemeinde), these differences were hardly petty. The Spirit was leading, and in good protestant fashion, it was leading even the most sincere disciples in different directions. Soon matters of biblical interpretation and Christian conduct placed stark barriers between

MBs and GCs. In 1860, two distinct groups emerged out of one, both set on excluding the other.

With time, these divisions lost some intensity. As the 19th century came to a close in South Russia, the Mennonite Brethren showed a slight openness to the church they had separated from. They softened their stance on inter-marriage, and began to reconsider the exclusion of non-immersed Mennonites from the communion table. The two groups also began working together in public education and alternative service, and even held several inter-Mennonite Bible conferences.

Common experience continued to unify

(cont'd on p. 11)

Reflections on *Sophia*

(cont'd from p. 1)

the mid-90s after reports that women at a U.S. theological conference had evoked *Sophia* as a goddess. This raised constituency concerns about what MB women were up to, as well as considerable discussion within the *Sophia* collective itself about changing the magazine's name. The name was retained, but its biblical meaning ("wisdom") was reiterated to readers and others.

And what is the meaning of the endeavour that was *Sophia* – those 13 years, those 42 issues, these 2 boxes?

No definitive assessment of what it meant is possible this near to the magazine's closure. (*Sophia* ended with the Fall 2003 issue, due to falling subscriptions and the ongoing struggle to sustain it with volunteer staff and limited money.)

It should also be noted that I am reflecting as someone who was involved with *Sophia*, as one of its writers and a member of the editorial committee for seven years.

Several observations can be made, however.

One word that repeatedly surfaced within, and in reference to, *Sophia*, was "voice." *Sophia* was a place where

women, particularly MB women, spoke.

It was not the first time they had found voice. Women participated significantly in the storytelling genres (conversion stories and the like) of the early decades of the first MB periodical, the *Zionsbote*, begun in 1884. Furthermore, MB women embraced the missionary dynamic of the MB church and poured their energies for leadership and fundraising into very active women's organizations, which Gloria Neufeld Redekop has called "a parallel church."

With the rise of feminism in the 1970s, however, women began to move out of enclaved living of all kinds, and MB women too sought to integrate more fully into society and church. Doors to greater participation seemed to be opening. In 1975, Canadian MBs declared women "eligible to be selected as delegates to conferences and to church and conference boards and committees other than boards [whose work is of the nature of eldership]." Subsequent resolutions permitted further involvement. Still, there was an ongoing resistance to, and limitations on, women's participation.

Sophia could be viewed as a kind of retreat to a gendered enclave, where conversations about new realities, both hopeful and discouraging, could take place. (This is not to say that its stance was inward facing, however; its "gentle voice of dissent," as Lori Matties puts it, always assumed engagement with the issues of church and conference.)

It gathered as a lively, intelligent, loyal community averaging some 350 subscribers (but perhaps twice as many regular readers, including many supportive men) and for more than a decade burst into print with words and images, with ideas, stories, and theological reflection.

If any meaning is clear to me as a participant it's that there was tremendous, pent-up womanly energy longing to flow into the church's speaking, and that *Sophia* became its channel. *Sophia* was connected to the church by virtue of its participants' connections to it, but it was also, by default perhaps, at odds with and free of it.

Interestingly, women's groups declined in the 1970s and 80s, and the beginning of *Sophia* overlapped with and reported on the last Manitoba MB women's conventions. It is also interesting to note that *MCC Women's Concerns Report*, a bi-monthly paper begun in 1973, probably fairly described as more radically feminist than *Sophia*, also ended in 2003.

Did *Sophia* shape the MB conference in any significant way? I'm not sure. Unlike women's societies, which were powerful sources of money, support, and prayer for the conference-sustained enterprise, *Sophia* was not able to achieve institutional recognition, nor the wider readership and consensus of MB women.

A more promising angle for future researchers, however, might be to consider *Sophia's* role in the lives of its producers and consumers. In sustaining them spiritually, releasing their creative gifts, and welcoming their insights *Sophia* was, for many, a place of the church even if not in it.

Dora Dueck is associate editor of the *MB Herald*.

The Manitoba MB Women's Network

by Lori Matties

The National MB Conference in 1993 caused a lot of disappointment among some women when a Board of Faith and Life recommendation to allow churches to decide whether they would hire women as their senior pastor was defeated.

The Women's Network arose out of a meeting in Winnipeg in the fall of 1993. Its purpose was to help women network together, to educate and support one another, and to make their voices heard in the MB Conference. Three committees formed, one in Manitoba, one in Ontario and one in B.C.

The network was active for several years, but support for it dwindled as the *MB Herald* refused to publish letters about women in leadership and the national conference fell into silence on the subject in the spring of 2004.

However, after the Manitoba Conference passed a recommendation to allow all members of the church use all their gifts to serve the church regardless of their gender, and it was discovered that the Board of Faith and Life would not bring this issue to a vote at the 2005 National Conference, many of the women in the former network joined in a letter writing campaign to the BFL. It may have been this campaign that encouraged the BFL to finally respond to the issue with the resolution that passed at the 2006 conference (to allow churches to decide for themselves whether a woman could serve as their senior pastor). So perhaps, though its formal structure no longer exists, the network itself is still alive.

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Editor: Alf Redekopp (MHC)
Ken Reddig (CMBS)

Associate Editor: Conrad Stoesz
(CMBS/MHC)

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

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
P: 204-888-6781

E: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca
W: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives
or

1310 Taylor Avenue,
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
P: 204-669-6575

E: kreddig@mbconf.ca
W: www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies

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Genealogy and Family History

Canadian Mennonite Genealogical Sources Online

By Conrad Stoesz

Genealogy has flourished with the increasing use and acceptance of computers and the internet. Genealogists have become known for their tenacity and networks they create for the sharing of information. New resources are coming online all the time with avid volunteers indexing, scanning, and creating databases.

One of the earliest Canadian Mennonite genealogical compilations included the Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites of Ontario and was published by Ezra E. Eby in 1895-1896. This 2-volume set entitled *A Biographical History of Waterloo Township*, contains genealogies of about 140 of the early families living in the Waterloo County, Ontario. Since then, Allan Dettweiler has continued where Eby left off and created a database of the Eby book and added descendants of the people in the original book. Currently the on-line database at www.ezraeby.com includes over 80,000 names but is expected to reach about 500,000 when fully updated.

For the Prussian/Russian Mennonite story the provincial Mennonite historical societies have been active hubs for this kind of activity. The BC society site at www.mhsbc.com/genealogy and the Alberta society at www.mennonites.ca/mhsa/ have been the most prolific in these activities with new obituary indexes to *Der Bote* 1950-2004, *Mennonitische Rundschau* 1930-2001, *Canadian Mennonite* 1953-1971, 1997-2002, and *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 1961-2004 which augment existing paper based indexes but do not replace it as both resources have some listing that do not appear in the other. For example there are obituaries listed for Susanna Friesen, Wilhelm Jacob Friesen, and Abram J. Friessen in the paper *Mennonitische Rundschau* index 1930-1939 that do not appear in the online version. The indexers of these online version have also included the birth and death year for each individual where available, which makes finding people with common names much

easier. These and many other periodicals are housed at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Both Centres now have their periodical inventories online. See www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/serials/ and www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies/holdings/periodicals/.

The Manitoba society also has created new tools for genealogical research focusing on the transcriptions of primary documents with a wide array of Prussian, Russian, Canadian and Latin American documents. The Saskatchewan society has worked at a cemetery headstone transcription project of over 70 cemeteries recording vital statistics from these headstones.

Community archival centres are also contributing to the amassing of electronic resources. The Altona & District Heritage Research Centre has produced an index from *Red River Valley Echo* for births, deaths and weddings 1941-2004. Check it out at: www.townofaltona.com/adhri/

The *Winnipeg Free Press* is a long running newspaper that has extensive obituaries printed in it. Bob Strong has worked at extracting Mennonite-related obituaries from the online version of this paper starting in about 1999. The project includes information about the deceased person and their family. At last count this resource has over 40,000 listings online. Check it out at <http://worldconnect.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?db=wfpobits>.

For people looking for obituaries of people who died in Paraguay the *Mennoblatt* is a good periodical to check out. This periodical is held by both centres and an index to the obituaries 1931-2000 can be found on the web at <http://www.mennonites.ca/fca/>.

Interest in genealogy is wide spread in Canada and Library and Archives Canada has taken note and responded with a new online genealogy centre found at www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy/. This web site contains numerous searchable databases including divorces, immigration, land, naturalization, and census records. Census records on this site are searchable by geographic location. Volunteers with automatedgenealogy.com are working at transcribing the census

data, making it searchable by name -- a more valuable resource. Currently 1901 is searchable and much of 1911.

Provincial government offices for vital statistics have also been working towards making more of their records available to the public. The Manitoba site at <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/cca/vital/Query.php> and to some extent the Saskatchewan site at http://vsgs.health.gov.sk.ca/vsgs_srch.aspx are searchable online with a 70-100 year time lag. Full detailed records can then be ordered from their offices. Other provinces such as Ontario provide information on how to find vital statistics on microfilm but as of yet are not searchable online.

Alberta is working on an ambitious project known as *Our Future Our Past: Alberta Heritage Digitization Project*, located at www.ourfutureourpast.ca. This searchable resource contains a wide array of digitized documents that are subject and word searchable including community histories, newspapers, photographs, legal histories etc. Another project where Alberta's innovation is located, is at www.ourroots.ca. The Universities of Calgary, Laval, Toronto, and Dalhousie are 4 of the 8 major partners in this online local history project with support from another 20 institutions. This searchable database contains local history books from across the country that have been digitized and placed online for anyone to use. There are some Mennonite related materials on the site, which continues to grow.

Of course, genealogy is not only popular in Canada and there are many other sites specific to other regions. One site that is international in scope is the genealogical materials collected by the Mormon Church, found at www.familysearch.org. Much of their material is searchable online and some of it available online. They have a large published family genealogy section where entire books can be viewed online. There is some Mennonite content on this site.

With no end in sight to the popularity of genealogy and to the amount of primary sources that could be placed online, we can continue to look forward to increasing volumes of resources online.

Conrad Stoesz is Archivist at Centre for MB Studies and Mennonite Heritage Centre

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

The Files of the Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein (AMLV)

by Peter Letkemann

I. The All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Association (AMLV)

On Friday, 3 March 2006, the Mennonite Heritage Centre received a set of 31 microfilm reels containing the records of the former All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Association (AMLV) for the period 1920 to 1928.

The *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (AMLV) came into existence on 18 May 1923, when the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee in Moscow approved the constitution of the association.¹

The first official meeting of AMLV delegates took place in Alexandertal (Alt Samara) from 10 – 16 October 1923, with representatives from the Mennonite settlements of Alt Samara, Neu Samara, Orenburg, Ufa, Kuban, Arkadak, Zentral, Omsk, and Slavgorod.²

Within a few months of this initial meeting, local chapters (and subchapters) of the AMLV had been organized in Mennonite settlements throughout the Russian Federation (RSFSR). In total, there were 19 chapters; with 56 subchapters.³

The Head Office of the AMLV was located in Moscow and headed up by F.C. Thiessen, J.W. Ewert, Peter Fr. Fröse (Chairman), Franz Fr. Isaak (Vice Chairman) and Cornelius Fr. Klassen (Secretary) (seated left to right in photo), together with a staff of assistants and secretaries.⁴

The purpose of the association, like that of its sister organization in the Ukrainian Republic – the *Verband Bürger holländischer Herkunft* (VBhH) – was outlined in Article 1 of its constitution: “to promote the restoration, development and improvement of Mennonite agriculture and agricultural industry, and to improve the cultural level and prosperity of Mennonite communities in particular and Russian agriculture as a whole.”⁵

During the years of the New Economic Policy [NEP] in the Soviet Union, 1921–1928, both the AMLV and the VBhH made use of all legal means available to them in order to improve economic, social and educational conditions in the Mennonite villages of Russia and Ukraine.

But as the result of the Revolution and ensuing Civil War, many Mennonite villages were overcrowded with “refugees” – Mennonite land owners who had fled their estates, farmers whose land had been confiscated by local soviets, and factory workers who had lost their livelihood as industries were destroyed. As part of the economic reconstruction, it was felt that this “excess population” needed to be “drained off” through emigration to North America. Thus, both the AMLV and the VBhH devoted a great deal of time and energy to matters of emigration.

Within two years there were signs that the AMLV was achieving its economic objectives. All regions were reporting a marked improvement in agricultural production – in the quality of seed grain and the quantity of crop yields, as well as the quality and quantity of livestock production. Many of these improvements were due to the role of the

AMLV in securing machinery and loan credits from Mennonites in North America and Europe.

At the 3rd annual meeting of the AMLV in Moscow, 13–16 May 1925 [Photo⁶], delegates were able to receive their first copy of *Der Praktische Landwirt* [DPL], the new monthly journal of the association.

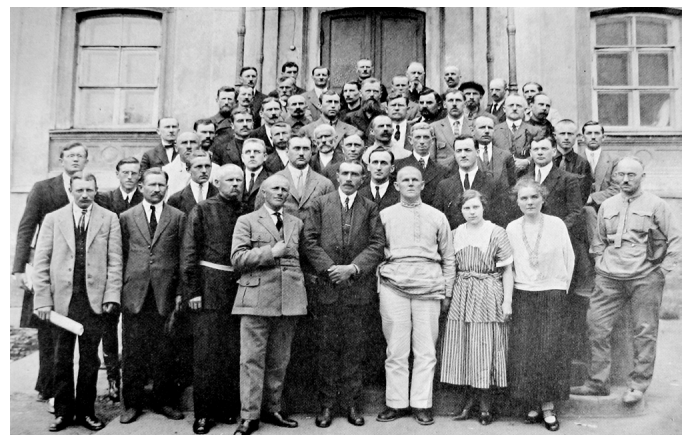
Peter Fröse outlined the purpose of DPL as follows: to increase reader awareness and understanding of Soviet government activity and decrees related to economic development, to provide educational articles by leading agricultural experts, and to share aspects of agricultural and economic activity and progress in other Mennonite settlements.⁷

From May 1925 until December 1926, the AMLV was able to publish 19 monthly editions of DPL. Copies of these editions, together with supporting materials and correspondence can be found in the microfilmed documents: files 205 thru 211; and 281 thru 292.

Though the AMLV was initially approved and tolerated by Soviet authorities, by 1926 there were signs of growing disapproval and opposition, especially from the German Section of the Communist Party.⁸ The Mennonite cooperatives were operating successfully, but parallel to the Soviet system, and it was felt that it was time that they be integrated into the system. Individual sections were coerced to abandon their association with the AMLV and join the state run Co-op system: the Slavgorod section did so in December 1926; Omsk in January 1927. By 1928 the executive in Moscow gave up trying to maintain an independent organization, and on 10 June 1928 they sent a letter to the State Cooperative Association declaring that



AMLV staff



AMLV Annual Meeting, 13–16 May 1925

the historic mission of the AMLV had come to an end.

Three of the prominent AMLV leaders were able to emigrate, including: C.F. Klassen and his family (they left Russia for Canada on 24 September 1928), Franz Fr. Isaak and Franz C. Thiessen.

Johann W. Ewert and Peter F. Fröse were not as fortunate. Ewert was arrested in Alexandertal in 1930, released in 1931; rearrested in 1938 and shot.

Peter Fröse remained in Moscow and made invaluable contributions to the cause of Mennonites fleeing through Moscow in the summer and fall of 1929. As the crisis attained world wide media attention in October 1929 and threatened to embarrass Soviet authorities, Peter Fröse was arrested by the GPU on 15 October 1929, and accused of being a leader of this emigration movement. He was imprisoned, tried and exiled to the labour camps of the GULag. Unlike many others, however, Fröse survived 11 years in exile and was finally released on 15 October 1940. During the Second World War he was able to come to Germany, where he died in the 1950s.

II. GARF – Fond 423

At some point in mid-1928 the files located in the head office of the AMLV in Moscow were confiscated by the GPU, and hidden away for almost 70 years in the archives. In the late 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian authorities “declassified” the files and made them available to scholars. They are now located in the **State Archive of the Russian Federation** (GARF: *Gosudars-tvennii Arkhiv Russkii Federatsia*).

In November 2004, Paul Toews (Center for MB Studies, Fresno) was able to examine the files, now listed as Fond 423. Recognizing the importance of the collection, Paul immediately undertook the long, slow and sometimes frustrating negotiations necessary to have the collection microfilmed.

The finding aid catalog of Fond 423 lists 355 files, with a total of 57,797 pages, dating from 29 November 1920 to late 1928.

a) Administrative Files

i) The administrative files of the AMLV itself account for 40,992 pages, or about 70% of the collection: including:

- i) 1,856 pages (files 205 to 211; and 281 thru 292) of files for the journal *Der Praktische Landwirt*;
- ii) 7,645 pages of correspondence with various Soviet agencies;
- iii) 31,068 pages of book-keeping records for the period from November 1922 to September 1927. (Because of financial constraints these accounting files #312-355 were not microfilmed.)
- iv) The collection also contains 405 pages of correspondence between the AMLV and the VBhH in Kharkov.

b) Mennonite Regional Associations

The remaining 16,805 pages of records relate to the various regional associations in all parts of the RSFSR. The most extensive records come from the Kuban (2,915), Omsk (2,146), Alexanderthal (1,429), Crimea (1,149), Davlekanovo (1,035), NSAM (988), and Slavgorod (982). The contents (and number of pages) are summarized in the following table:

1. Alexanderthal (ASAM)	1,429
2. Arkadak	707
3. Chortitza (Kleborob)	44
4. Crimea	1,149
5. Davlekanovo	1,035
6. Donetsk	10
7. Ebenfeld (Saratov)	32
8. Gnadenfeld (Molochna)	153
9. Halbstadt (Molochna)	134
10. Kirgizia (Nikolaipol)	462
11. Kuban	2,915
12. Luxemburg (NSAM)	988
13. Millerovo	350
C. A. DeFehr	193
14. Omsk	2,146
15. Orenburg	582
16. Pesochinskii	328
17. Rovnopol	236
18. Schoenwiese	349
19. Pavlodar (Semipalatinsk)	415
Cornies Co-op	
20. Slavgorod	982
21. Tersk (Suvorovka)	839
Tiege (Odessa)	37
22. TRAKT	626
23. Yenesei	21
24. Zelenopolsk	308
25. Zentral	<u>335</u>

16,805

While official AMLV communications with Soviet authorities are conducted in Russian, much of the internal correspondence and record keeping of the various regional chapters is in German. In fact, I would estimate that at least 1/3 of the documents are in German.

This valuable collection now awaits the attention of scholars and graduate students: to illuminate the economic, social and cultural activities and achievements of Mennonites in the Russian Republic during the first decade of Soviet rule, in the same way that Natasha Ostasheva has done so for Mennonites in Ukraine.⁹

End Notes:

1. Peter F. Fröse, “The Founding of the Union,” in John B Toews, *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930, Selected Documents*, 203.
2. The minutes of this meeting are found in J.B. Toews, *Selected Documents*, 219-256.
3. Peter Fröse, “Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia* I, 63. A complete list of chapters is found in GARF, fond 423, delo 4, 64-66.
4. Photo in Quiring & Bartel, *In the Fullness of Time*, 186, no. 2.
5. “Constitution of the Union,” J.B. Toews, *Selected Documents*, 204.
6. Photo in Kaethe Klassen, *My Father Franz C. Thiessen*, 43.
7. Peter F. Fröse, “Was erwarten wir von unserem ‘Praktischen Landwirt’?“, *Der Praktische Landwirt*, Vol. I, no. 1 (15 May 1925), 1
8. Peter Fröse, “AMLV,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia* I, 63; and Andrej Savin, “Die Mennonitische Gemeinden in Sibirien und der Allrussische Mennonitische Landwirtschaftliche Verein in den zwanziger Jahren,” in Detlef Brandes and Andrej Savin, *Die Sibirien-deutschen im Sowjetstaat 1919-1938*. (Essen: Klartext, 2001), 82-141.
9. Natasha V. Ostasheva, “Die süd-ukrainischen Mennoniten auf der Suche nach einem ‘dritten’ genossenschaftlichen Weg 1921-1926,” in *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur der Russlanddeutschen* V (Essen: Klartext: 1995), 38-52; see also *Na Perelome Epokh* (Moscow, 1998), reviewed in *Preservings* No. 20 (June 2002), 129.

Peter Letkemann lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.



Mennonite Heritage Centre

600 Shaftesbury Blvd Winnipeg MB Canada R3P 0M4

Summer Projects

For almost three months, the Centre was privileged to have **Leigh Peters-Fransen** work as an archival assistant. This position was made possible through a grant from the Canadian Council of Archives through the federal program called *Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations*. As a recent graduate with a history major from the University of Winnipeg and a keen interest to know more about Mennonite conference history, she was well suited to work at updating the file lists and descriptions of the records generated by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, a fonds consisting of 80 metres of textual records and other materials.

Another project that was completed this summer was the addition of over 200 scanned maps to the Centre's website, courtesy of William Schroeder of Winnipeg. Check this out at: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/Schroeder_maps/. The **William Schroeder maps** (and historical notes) related to Mennonite history were created over a number of years. This collection consists of the original versions of the maps by Schroeder. Some of them were re-drawn and appeared previously in Huebert and Schroeder's *Mennonite Historical Atlas* (Winnipeg, MB: Springfield Publishers, 1990, 1996), but many have never been published before.

A.R..

Jake K. Wiens (1924-2006)

We are deeply saddened to hear of the death of our long-time volunteer at the Centre, whose funeral is taking place just as we bring this issue to the press. For over 20 years, Jake filed, indexed and translated. Many German Gothic handwritten documents were transcribed and made accessible for future generations. We extend our sympathy and prayers to his wife Katherine and the rest of the family.

Offspring of Ancient Oak planted near Heritage Centre

By Bert Friesen

On 8 June 2006 an oak tree was planted next to the Heritage Centre. This oak is a result of an acorn from the original Chortitza oak tree being brought to Canada by Abe Epp of Niagara-on-the-Lake. He planted the acorn, nurtured the sapling, until it is now a sturdy young tree of 2 metres in height. John R. and Marian Friesen received this tree from Epp and donated it to CMU to mark their 50th wedding anniversary.

Gerald Gerbrandt, the president of CMU welcomed all present. He introduced the speakers, John J. Friesen, John R. Friesen, and Alf Redekopp.

John J. Friesen gave a brief history of the Mennonite association with the Chortitza oak tree. It was likely already over 600 years old when the Mennonites arrived there in 1789. In that case, he stated, it likely was a young tree at the time when Ghengis Khan (1162-1227) invaded Russia around 1220s. The Mennonite era near this tree lasted about 150 years until the 1940s. Since the 1980s Mennonites have regularly traveled back to their Russian homeland and have brought back acorns from this tree. These have been planted in many parts of North America.

John R. Friesen, retired Winnipeg pastor, related how his roots trace back to the Chortitza settlement in Ukraine and how he had some 30 years earlier tried to produce an oak sapling from some acorns,



John R. Friesen sharing at the tree-planting

but with no success. He said that this tree will serve as a reminder of a heritage to which many of us connect.

Alf Redekopp, director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, spoke the dedicatory prayer. He prayed that the seed which has produced this tree would be a remainder for us of our history and God's provision for us and our future. May we also continue to plant the seed of God's mercy and grace in our world.



The "Big Old Oak" from the village of Chortitza. It had a height of 36 metres. The crown had a diameter of 43 metres, and the trunk about 3.4 metres. Tourists like William Schroeder who created this photo had to take several images to capture the entire tree.



The Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) had their annual board meeting in Winnipeg this year and were joined by some Library and Archives Canada (LAC) staff. As the newest archival facility in the province, CMBS was invited to host a reception for the CCA and LAC and other archival staff in the province. After a few short informal speeches tours were given leaving ample time for networking and talking over a version of a traditional Russian Mennonite fasha as seen here. - Photo by Conrad Stoesz

A busy summer of activity

One part-time and two summer staff have left their positions for further study this fall. Assisting the Centre with various projects since early November in 2005 is David Perlmutter. David's work at the Centre came with the assistance of a Federal Government program. David indexed several English-language periodicals, relabeled the entire Historical Library, digitized lists of students who attended the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, wrote several brief biographies of fiction writers with Mennonite backgrounds and compiled the Recommendations and Resolutions of several Provincial and Canadian Conferences. David will enter a Masters program at the University of Manitoba in Archival Studies in September. We wish him well and thank him for his good work.

After some 5 summers and one full year Donovan Giesbrecht is entering his final year of study towards a teaching degree at the University of Manitoba. Donovan has completed many grant projects at the Centre during his long tenure at the Centre. His largest single project was to index the photographic collection at the Centre. This index has greatly increased the accessibility of the 10,000 or more photographs currently housed in the Centre. In addition Donovan filled in as archivist following the retirement of Abe

Dueck as Director of the Centre. This summer Donovan was on a Young Canada Works project. We thank Donovan for his years of interest and dedication to the work of the Centre. We wish him well in his future teaching career.

New to the Centre this year was Janelle Hume. Following a year of service with Mennonite Brethren Missions and Services International in Germany, she returned in June and spent two months on a Canadian Council of Archives Grants project via the Association for Manitoba Archives. Janelle created fond-level descriptions of collections as well as creating file lists of documents within each of those collections. All of these descriptions are in the process of being placed on our website for researchers to access.

New to the Centre for the next year is Aileen Friesen. Aileen is currently completing her second Masters degree in history with a specialty in Russian/East European studies. Aileen has fluency in Russian and German and has begun working with some of the collections that have Russian language content. Aileen has spent time doing research in Russian archives and previously worked on summer student projects at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

K.R.

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Historical Commission

At its June meetings in Winnipeg, the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission of North America appointed Ken Reddig as the next Executive Secretary of the bi-national commission. Reddig will remain as Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg on a part-time basis and devote ¼ of his time to the projects of the Historical Commission.

For the past two years Abe Dueck has held the position of Executive Secretary with the understanding that a new person should be sought. During Dueck's two years the Commission embarked on a new initiative to research and write a Global Mennonite Brethren History. Coordinating that project is Paul Hiebert, missionary anthropologist, with Abe Dueck continuing to provide leadership as well.

The Historical Commission has the mandate to collect and preserve historical materials relating to the Mennonite Brethren churches of the United States and Canada. It serves as the bi-national clearinghouse and coordinating agency between the various Mennonite Brethren regional centers. Readers will perhaps be most familiar with the quarterly publication of the Commission, namely the Profiles series of biographies of significant leaders of the wider Anabaptist and Mennonite Brethren church.

Readers will perhaps be most familiar with the quarterly publication of the Commission, namely the Profiles series of biographies of significant leaders of the wider Anabaptist and Mennonite Brethren church.
K.R.



Aileen Friesen, Donovan Giesbrecht and Janelle Hume

Two Mennonite Homesteaders: Two Points of View

by Karl A. Krause

Gerhard J. Epp and Heinrich Wieler, his brother-in-law, were homesteaders. They and their young families emigrated from South Russia to Canada in 1893. In 1894 they filed for homesteads in what was to become Saskatchewan, their adjoining homesteads approximately six miles west of Rosthern, then little more than a whistle-stop on the new rail line that ran from Regina to Prince Albert. They took land in Eigenheim, a rural Mennonite community, then newly established. Not only were their homesteads side-by-side, so, too their farmyards.

Both men were diarists. Fortunately, their diaries have survived and have been translated from German into English. Epp's diaries¹ include the years 1891 to 1919, but with occasional gaps. Although born within a year of each other, Epp in 1864 and Wieler in 1865, Wieler outlived Epp by 30 years. His diaries² include the years 1892 to 1949, but also with occasional gaps.

The men shared important personal similarities. Both were God-fearing, steeped in Christian faith and the Mennonite tradition. Both cared deeply for their families, their day-to-day entries reflecting this care. Both worked hard to adapt to their new Canadian environment, neither ever expressing that coming to Canada had been an error.

Despite their familial connections – Wieler was married to Epp's sister Elizabeth – and geographic proximity, they were very different. Their diaries for the 25 years they lived side-by-side in Canada reflect these differences. Epp, my maternal grandfather, was a teacher, preacher, and farmer. Wieler was a farmer, auctioneer, and one of the leaders in the establishment of two mutual aid associations, one for hail insurance and other for children's aid (Waisenamt). Epp's entries are often long and descriptive, frequently moving into matters scriptural and theological. Wieler's entries are day-to-day, brief and to the point: business transactions, commodity prices, the weather, some family matters, and interactions with associates and acquaintances.

Occasionally they describe the same event, yet their descriptions are often so



A rare photograph of Heinrich Wieler and Gerhard J. Epp of Eigenheim, ca 1900. Standing is their nephew Gerhard Andres.
Photo courtesy of Karl A. Krause.

diverse one wonders who experienced what. Their entries for July 24, 1913, are among several that reflect this diversity. Epp, ever in awe of the work of the Creator, writes:

We were cleaning up the loose earth which was still lying around the house ... when, around 4 o'clock, very dark clouds started arising in the Northwest. The air had been so sultry all day that they looked all the more dangerous. The awesome darkness, criss-crossed (sic) with almost white lines, soon covered all of the ... horizon. Soon we could hear the continuous rumble of thunder, but Graciously the Almighty One in the storm by-passed (sic) us.

On the same day Wieler, by then a director of a hail insurance company³, writes:

A lot of hail damage in this area, around Rosthern. South of us and south of Rosthern many thousands of acres of grain were destroyed. We only had a bit of rain. At Gerhard Enns, north of Rosthern, the hails (sic) had broken 45 windows. Over 300 acres of grain were hailed out at Enn's (sic) too.

Sometimes when describing a shared activity, one told part of the story and the other another and complementary part. The following brief entry illustrates this. On October 19, 1899, Epp with uncharacteristic brevity writes:

Started threshing with David Woelk's threshing outfit.

Wieler, ever the pragmatist, elaborates: We began threshing at Gerhard Epps (sic). Threshed 718 bushels of oats, 1026 bushels of wheat.

Because the media of the time was primarily print media and because both men struggled with English, the amount of information they would have received about events outside their immediate community was limited. Yes, they read newspapers, but these were German papers such as *Der Nordwesten* and *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Furthermore, by the time the papers arrived at their homes, perhaps a week or more had passed since publication. As a result, major events, even events that affected these men, at least indirectly, drew limited or belated comment, if comment at all. For example, Wieler makes no mention of Saskatchewan becoming a province in 1905, despite his being a friend of Gerhard Enns, the first MLA for the area (Epp, for whatever reasons, did not keep a diary that year.) Neither refers to the outbreak of World War I. Yes, there are references to Canadian citizens, both male and female, being required to register. This practice presented a concern because both men saw it as a potential threat to military exemption granted to Mennonites by the federal government in 1872⁴.

Epp makes two specific references to actual hostilities, the first on April 14, 1917, when he mentions that the United States has declared war on Germany. The second reference, on December 1, 1918, was written more than three weeks after the cessation of hostilities:

...[The] horrible blood-letting (sic) of the terrible world war has been halted.

Not surprisingly, the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 generated numerous entries although the epidemic affected their families differently. The Wielers were affected more directly because several members became very ill. The Epps, spared from severe illness, became involved more as caregivers, including my mother Helena, then a 17-year-old. Both families were spared death even though death was all around.

One "outside" event capturing the attention of both men was centred upon the resistance and eventual death of Almighty Voice near Duck Lake in May 1897. Why this incident piqued their interest is difficult to assess although their being within 25 miles of the event may have been a factor. Epp's entries, despite his being known as compassionate and caring, could today be regarded as inflammatory. On May 29 and 30, 1897, he writes:

There was great excitement among the people. A special military train had just

passed through town...[Rosthern] to Duck Lake. The long sought-for murderer, a young Indian, had been found. However, he with 2 accomplices were (sic) hiding in the bushes. Anyone who dared to enter the woods was greeted with a hail of bullets. As a result, the postmaster of Duck Lake and two others were killed and four heavily wounded. Hence the strengthening of the police force and their going to the trouble area with 2 cannon, to make the evildoers harmless and to prevent anymore people from becoming victims of the redman.... This morning eyewitnesses reported that the bushes which the police surrounded was (sic) peppered with bullets. Then, when the war-cries and fire of the Indians had died down, the police charged into the trees, where they found the bodies of the young adventurers, terribly mangled. So peace is restored again.

Wieler's account, although similar, is briefer and without elaboration:

18 miles from Duck Lake a band of murderers were (sic) discovered. As I was told, they were 7 Indians. The father of the leader had been arrested the day before and had him (sic) tied to a bush. On the 27th the Indian had killed 3 policemen and fatally wounded 7 private citizens.... A special train with 70 armed soldiers and two cannons came to Duck Lake. The postmaster and three soldiers from Duck Lake were killed.

Over time, Epp focused increasingly on matters spiritual and theological, especially as his involvement in the church increased. This involvement required travel and his being away for considerable periods of time. Despite this inconvenience, he seemingly relished his work, especially his association with those who lived in outlying Mennonite communities. Then, beginning in 1916 and continuing until his death in March 1919, Epp faced deteriorating health. Although he does not dwell on his ailments other than to mention them, he uses numerous entries to explore his relationship with God, perhaps none better than his entry of December 10, 1918:

Oh, the long nights on a sickbed, but still they can be blessed hours, those hours filled with pain. The Lord sent his angel, who awakened the most precious promises in my soul telling me of the faithfulness of my wonderful Savior.... If it is Your will, and You want to call Your servant, who, so far from being perfect, has attempted to serve You, then I say, "Here I am, You have called me."

Wieler, on the other hand, stays the course, his entries still remarkably

consistent.

Although he occasionally mentions illnesses, he rarely elaborates. Even a 10-day stay in hospital in May 1947 draws only a brief entry:

I was taken to hospital on the 16th. I spent 10 days in Dr. Penner's and Dr. Ewert's care. I was discharged on the 26th. Son Johann took me home with his car.

He writes less frequently now and acknowledges that he, too, is pondering death and what lies beyond. On February 5, 1946, he writes:

I said to my wife... [who died on September 9, 1946]: "Our time is probably up." Our prayer is: May the Lord be merciful to us, because we want to die saved, to be with Jesus for ever. May God give it.

Yet, his final entry on March 15, 1949, one month before his death on April 13, remains completely in character:

G. Klaassens and I went to G.G. Epp's, for Mrs. Epp's birthday. 58 years old. 17 degrees of frost.

Both men left remarkable legacies, legacies in which their differences are evident yet again. The Eigenheim Mennonite Church, of which Epp was a founder and one of its original ministers, is still a vibrant congregation. He was one of the founders in 1905 of the German-English Academy (now Rosthern Junior College) and one of a group of men who in 1902-03 laid the foundation for what in time became the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. And the homestead he established is still in the family.

Wieler left his mark in other ways. As mentioned, he gave considerable attention to the work of the *Waisenamt* (now Mennonite Trust Ltd)⁵. He took an active role in what became the Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Saskatchewan, initially as Gehilfsältester (assistant director) and later serving this organization at various times as president and as director⁶. Acknowledged as a pioneer auctioneer, he was inducted in 1984 into the Auction Era Hall of Fame at the Western Development Museum in North Battleford SK. And, like Epp, the homestead he founded is still within the family.

Whatever their motivation, these men built well and their families and community have reaped the benefits. Additionally, they documented their activities as diarists, each in his unique way.

Endnotes

1. Diary of Father Gerhard Epp from 1891-1919. Translated from German to English by Elizabeth Epp, daughter, 1978-79, 1982. Typewritten.
2. Diary of Heinrich Wieler (1892-1949). Translated from German to English by Ingrid Janzen Lamp, 1983. Typewritten.
3. Doell, Leonard. *Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Saskatchewan, 1894-1994*. Published by the company, ca 1994. There are several references to Wieler, in his position as Gehilfsältester, recording the work of the organization in its earliest years.
4. Ens, Adolf. *Subject or Citizen? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994, p. 172
5. Ratzlaff, William J. *Interwoven History of Mennonite Trust Ltd*. Published by the company, ca 1982.
6. Hail Insurance. [e-mail Ken Reddig to Carl Krause]. May 2, 2006. Reddig indicates that a review of a microfilm copy in the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies of the Mennonite Mutual Hail Insurance Co. 1909-1983, yielded numerous references to positions held by Heinrich Wieler in the years 1909-1920, the only years reviewed.

Karl A. Krause lives in Saskatoon, SK

The John and Margaret Friesen Lectures
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Check www.cmu.ca for times

Reformation Day

October 31 is Reformation Day. It is an important church festival that is celebrated by Christians all over the world. It commemorates the day that Dr. Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. This act triggered the movement in world history known as the Reformation that led to the formation of what we today know as the Protestant church.

For years spiritually earnest people tried to justify themselves by charitable works, pilgrimages, religious performances and devotions. They hoped such actions would help them escape God's anger and punishment. An Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther, like many others of his time, was distressed by his sins and lived in terrible and constant fear of God's judgment. Luther did everything a devout and conscientious monk should do, but he did not find the peace of mind he was seeking.

In 1508 Luther was sent to Wittenberg, Germany, to pursue a doctoral degree and to teach philosophy at the newly established university. He also became assistant pastor at the Castle Church. In the course of his preaching and studying (especially his careful reading of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans), the Holy Spirit revealed to Luther the love of God in Jesus Christ.

At the time the church was into fund-raising, as churches are to this day. To raise money they sold *Indulgences*, certificates that promised people release from all sin including temporal and eternal punishment.

Luther felt that the sale of indulgences was not Biblical. He wrote a document of *Ninety-five Theses* and posted them on the door of the Castle Church on October 31st, 1517. This was not an act of defiance or provocation as is sometimes thought. Since the Castle Church faced Wittenberg's main thoroughfare, the church door functioned as a public bulletin board and was therefore the logical place for posting important notices. Today, a professor might publish an article in a journal or post it on a web site. By posting his document on October 31st, the eve of the All Saints' Day mass, Luther ensured that his *Theses* would come to the attention of the throngs of literate Wittenberg residents and educated

visitors who filed into the Castle Church for worship the next day.

A little over three years later, he was excommunicated by the pope and declared a heretic and outlaw. This was the beginning of the Reformation.

Martin Luther and his colleagues came to understand that if we sinners had to earn salvation by our own merits and good works, we would be lost and completely without hope. But through the working of the Holy Spirit, the reformers rediscovered the gospel -- the wonderful news that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again to redeem and justify us.

But many protestants have forgotten the importance of Reformation Day and also All Saint's Day. Instead we have permitted the day to be given over to a secular day, Halloween. Instead of being a day to celebrate the work of God through his servants on this earth, it is a day of ghoulish behaviour entertaining the macabre.

Reformation Day could be a day of witness. It could be a day of reconciliation, renewal, regeneration as well as reform. Why then do we permit the secular institution that Halloween has become, divert our attention from both All Saint's Day and Reformation Day?

Both the Centre for MB Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre are working on materials that could be used within the family and the church on Reformation Day. Please write or email us for these materials. We hope they are a small beginning to renewal within your own life, the life of your congregation and the community in which you live.

Let's make Reformation Day a day of joyful recommitment to Christ Jesus our Lord.

K.R.

Correction re. photo caption

We have been corrected by a reader with a close eye for details. Edsel Burdge, Editor of *Conococheague Mennonist*, Mennonite Historical Association of the Cumberland Valley, Shippensburg, PA, writes: "...I believe the caption on p. 1, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (June 2006) "Building community through eating together during an Amish barn-raising," is mislabeled. From their clothing style, I would guess the persons to be Old Order Mennonites, not Amish."

Thanks for writing!

Book Review (*cont'd from p. 12*) towns—especially Morden—or among rival brands of Mennonite churches, hockey teams, ethnic groups, or businesses.

Winkler has always, it appears, poured its energies into making money, but at least two religious and social movements have attempted to impose limits on the idea of progress. Winkler repeatedly voted against changing liquor laws to allow for liquor sales in the town, and famously and decisively Winkler's voters had Video Lottery Terminals removed from a local hotel in 1999, and continued to decline VLT revenues.

Not shrinking from controversy, the book also tells the story of Nazi sympathizers in Winkler during the Second World War, the sawing in half of the Hoffnungsfeld church some time after 1914, the theft of funds by the credit union manager in 1950, and other shadowy aspects of town life.

Any community history is also the story of the individuals who shaped the place, and surely one of the most remarkable men in Winkler's history was J.R. Walkof, the son of Romanian-German immigrants who was principal of the Winkler School for 25 years, ending in 1940. How many educators do we know of whom it is told that they threw the town constable through a café window?

The historian of a small place that has grown into a bigger place faces the question of what to do with our society's continuing dominant paradigm--the myth of progress. The "conservative" Mennonites repeatedly tried to impose a limit on accumulating wealth, based on a spiritual argument. They lost this competition. But with phenomena like the growing gap between rich and poor, and industry's role in harming the earth's environment, communities everywhere, even in southern Manitoba, are called upon to think and act, not just in terms of charity for the unfortunate, but in terms of a revised, far simpler way of living. What chapter will Winkler write for itself in this regard? That might be the subject of another book.

The design of *Living Between Worlds* deserves special mention. The text is artfully interspersed with photographs, charts, maps and anecdotes, creating a pleasurable visual as well as mental experience for the reader. There are appendices of early Winkler families and of civic officials since 1906. Readers will also be happy to find a comprehensive index.

Book Notes

By Adolf Ens

In *Constantinoplers: Escape from Bolshevism* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006), pb, 370 pp., compiler-editor Irmgard Epp pays tribute to her father, Cornelius H. Epp, by publishing the stories of some 30 of the men/families who escaped from Russia via Turkey shortly after the communist revolution and civil war. The stories vary greatly in length, breadth of content and quality of writing but their totality tells a story that receives only a paragraph or two in most accounts of this era. While the focus is on the 115 “Constantinoplers” a section of the book also tells the story of families who came to Batumi, Georgia and via Turkey to America from there.

Lebenserinnerungen: Aufgezeichnet von Jacob Pauls für die Familie (Virgil, ON: Selbstverlag, 2005), pb, 245 pp. contains the memoirs of Jacob Pauls, born 1918 in Chortitza, South Russia, and coming to Canada via Germany (1945-1947) and Paraguay (1947-1965). An English translation by Mark Bachman, entitled *Reminiscences: Recorded by Jacob Pauls for His Family* (pb, pp. 223), is also available. While the immediate target audience for this memoir is Pauls’ family, there is much in the larger narrative that will be interesting to others, especially those whose families came to Canada on a similar trajectory.

Theses and dissertations are not of a literary genre that is usually represented in this column. However, Alvina Block’s 2006 doctoral dissertation (302 pages) for the history department of the University of Manitoba is an exception. This study of “Changing Attitudes: Relations of Mennonite Missionaries with Native North Americans, 1880–2004” is significant not only for the church groups studied (primarily CMC and GCMC), but as a look at one aspect of the social and theological history of Canadian Mennonites.

Canadian Mennonites with a background in Russia/USSR will be interested in a new historical periodical published twice yearly by the Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums e.V. Entitled *Rückblick: Glaube und Gemeinde im Spiegel der Geschichte*, each 24-page issue (beginning in June 2004) contains three to five historical

articles dealing with aspects of Mennonite history from the 16th to the 20th centuries. A Canadian contribution in #2/2005 is Peter Letkemann’s essay on Mennonite choral singing during the early years of the Soviet era (1917–1943). A subscription outside of Germany costs 7 Eur, which includes surface shipping costs.

MB/GC Beginnings

(cont’d from p. 1)

in the 20th century. Now MBs and GCs shared the hardships of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent emigration. They worked together on immigration committees (the precursors to MCC), establishing new settlements in Western Canada, liquidating travel debt, and providing material aid for those in need. Mennonites had learned to *work* together, but as J.A. Toews noted, *worshipping* together was another matter altogether.¹

Taking Toews’ view somewhat for granted, I was surprised to find that a significant number of Mennonite churches in Western Canada began as joint efforts of Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonites. While preparing a binder of church histories for the 2006 Canadian Conference of M.B. Churches, I found nearly a dozen such churches. Most began in the 1920s and 30s, as Mennonite settlement extended beyond the East and West Reserves. These include congregations in Arnaud, Springstein, Sperling, and Niverville, Manitoba; Gilroy and Warmen, Saskatchewan; Gem, Alberta; and Greendale, British Columbia; and I suspect that this list could be extended considerably.

The stories behind these congregations are remarkably similar. MB and GC farm families settle a remote area of land; they are poor and small in number; they worship together in each other’s homes; then in rented community halls and school buildings. After a year or two of joint services, the congregations grow in number and in wealth. Now each group has enough resources to construct its own church building. Two churches are built and the two groups permanently divide.

At times, I think there is something quite positive about church schisms. To me, schism testifies to the vitality of Christian belief. It stands against the apathy and indifference that characterizes our age. When Christians are willing to

divide over theology, we can be sure that theology still matters, that our beliefs are still full of conviction, however misguided.

On the surface at least, the stories mentioned above lack this redeeming quality. As long as the new Mennonite settlers were poor and outnumbered, theological differences could be overlooked. When size and wealth increased, theology took centre stage. Mennonites could worship together if they had to, when they couldn’t pay the rent without a joint effort, when they lacked the numbers to feel significant on their own. When these deficiencies were overcome, however, separation became the more convenient option.

Surely this is not the whole story. Several questions remain about these early MB-GC interactions: What was the role of culture, class, and conference leadership? What other forces developed conference-consciousness in Western Canada? What were the intentions of those involved in the original joint services? Did they always view their cooperation as a short-term arrangement?

At an historical level, this story needs to be broadened. It also needs to be told—largely because the story challenges us to reconsider our own divisions and attempts at cooperation. Where we are divided, are we divided with integrity, as a matter of conviction and significant theological difference? Or, are we divided simply because we have the numbers and resources to be so? If we can unite our ministries and institutions when funding and support is low, why can’t we do so in times of plenty? Perhaps it is time to recognize some of our divisions for what they are: matters of prejudice and convenience, not simply matters of the spirit.

Endnote

¹ J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975), 100-03. Here Toews discusses several of the 19th and 20th century forces of unity mentioned above.

Donovan Giesbrecht lives in Winnipeg and has worked at the Centre for MB Studies as a summer archival assistant for a number of years.

Book Reviews

James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe – Russia – Canada, 1525 to 1980*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006. 400 pp., pb.

Reviewed by Adolf Ens, Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite University

With his doctoral dissertation at Oxford University in 1978 James Urry established himself as a new voice to be reckoned with among historians of Mennonites in Russia. The publication of *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood* marks Urry's first major publishing foray into the pre-Russian period of Mennonite history, including the Anabaptist era, and into post-Russian Mennonite developments in Canada. It will prove to be a very helpful framework for understanding the sometimes erratic political involvements of Canadian Mennonites.

Urry uses the term "politics" in a broad sense, covering a wide range of "political ideas, institutions, events and actions." (5) In western Europe the nature of Anabaptist-Mennonite interactions with the larger society as well as with governments involved a sense of collective identity as a people and went beyond strictly church-state relations. As an introduction to the story of Mennonites in Russia, there is in the first three chapters a broad discussion of *privelegia* as a way of defining the status of a people who were not full citizens and whose "church" was not a recognized state church. While the aspects of "privilege" (e.g. exemption from military service) were appreciated, most of these agreements left Mennonites with an outsider status, "aliens restricted by legal mandates." (53)

The next three chapters give a more detailed account of the shifting attitude of Mennonites in Russia from about 1790 to the consolidation of Soviet power at the end of the 1920s. As their economic prosperity and sense of communal identity strengthened, their quest for power increased. Their petitions to the government portrayed Mennonites as loyal subjects of the tsar who had made important contributions to the development of the country. By the time of the revolution and civil war, some leaders legitimized the Mennonite self-defence units. As Urry bluntly puts it: "In spite of assertions of nonresistance, privilege,

wealth and power were to be defended by the sword." (139)

Considerably the longest section of the book is devoted to Mennonites in Canada, primarily those in Manitoba. During the friction that resulted from the introduction of municipal government into the Mennonite settlement by the Manitoba government in the 1880s, the variations in political stance among the several Mennonite groups is noted. By the 1890s some of them had gained an understanding of the Canadian political system and were willing to exploit it to their personal and collective advantage. This took the form both of cooperation in the area of education and Mennonite participation in the electoral process at provincial and federal levels. It included participation in political parties and the democratic process and also of seeking patronage.

A fascinating chapter is the one in which Urry traces the development of multiculturalism in Canada. As political parties shifted to wooing ethnic blocs of voters, Mennonites increasingly came to be identified as an "ethno-religious community" (223) and in their own vocabulary allowed for a non-religious Mennonite "identity." This has given rise to confusion in various published lists of "Mennonites" running for political office. Some, it appears, are ethnic (non-religious) Mennonites while others are non-ethnic (religious) ones.

Urry's approach is descriptive and analytical. As is his style, this book is very thoroughly documented with almost a hundred pages of endnotes and a substantial bibliography. He remains true to his goal not to reduce the variety of Mennonite political activity into a single form nor to "construct a Mennonite theology of politics or establish a Mennonite political ideology." (4) This does not keep him, of course, from making sharp observations along the way as he traces the shifting political posture of Mennonites in Canada.

Some readers will be fascinated by this look into details of the people involved in the early stages of Mennonite forays into the political arena and at their church and other connections. Some will gain new insight into external political factors that influenced "internal" decisions. Still others will find new ways of looking at the idea of separation of church and state still held as a significant principle, and the extent to which Urry sees Canadian Mennonites as being integrated citizens in

Canadian society. No longer are they the quiet in the land. Whether they have indeed become "the loud in the land," as the title of Urry's conclusion suggests, the reader will need to answer after taking a careful look at this insightful chapter.

One of the area conference ministers of Mennonite Church Canada put *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood* on his list as recommended summer reading. I recommend it strongly for your list of books to read if you have not yet done so. James Urry has done us a great service by working at this theme for a decade and producing this book.

Hans Werner, *Living Between Worlds: A History of Winkler* (Winkler: Winkler Heritage Society, 2006), 226 pp.

Reviewed by Ralph Friesen of Nelson, BC

The City of Winkler celebrates its centennial this year, and coincident with this celebration a new history has been published. As histories of rural population centres go, this one is even-handed, scrupulously documented and well-written. It is also entertaining, funny, and courageously willing to tell of the inevitable conflicts that accompany the life of every place on earth, even peaceful Mennonite ones.

Winkler, though it is often thought of as a "Mennonite" town (or city, now that its population exceeds 8,000) did not have traditional *Strassendorf* beginnings. Instead, it was a project of German immigrant entrepreneur Valentine Winkler, who was persuaded by the residents of Mennonite villages to the south to establish a market centre on a spur line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. German, Jewish and Anglo Saxon merchants set up businesses in Winkler that served the Mennonites to the south. It was not until World War I that the actual population of the town became majority Mennonite.

Hans Werner traces the commercial, cultural and religious development of Winkler practically up to the present day. He also provides the context of events and trends in the larger society and even internationally, showing how Winkler either reflected or contradicted such trends. In one sense the story of Winkler "living between worlds" could also be called a story of competition in a small town. There was always, and continues to be, a high degree of competition in this place, whether with neighbouring

(cont'd on p. 10)