

# Mennonite Historian

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



Great-grandson Menno Funk speaking to an 125th anniversary group about *Aeltester Johann and Louise (Dueck) Funk* whose headstones are still erect at the Altberghthal cemetery two miles west of Altona. Photo credit: Elmer Heinrichs.

*Altona church marks 125*

## Food, fellowship and reminiscing marks Altona Bergthaler Mennonite Church anniversary

by *Elmer Heinrichs, assignment writer, Altona, Manitoba*

People came from far and near, some from out of province, to join current members of the Altona Bergthaler Church for a weekend of worship services with food, lots of fellowship and reminiscing to mark its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary Saturday and Sunday, August 25-26, 2007.

The weekend began with a music night Saturday evening, followed by a service of celebration and fellowship meal at noon Sunday, an informal program of sharing by current and former pastors followed on Sunday afternoon, concluding with an old-fashioned *Faspa*.

A number also chose to join in visits to the gravesite of Bishop Johann Funk, at Alt-Bergthal, east of Altona, with Pastor Rick Neufeld presiding over a brief service of thanksgiving.

Others took a brief tour to the conference memorial marker at Hochstadt, site of the first Bergthaler Church

built in 1882, northeast of town. Here Mennonites settled about 1876, and this church hosted the first Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada in July, 1903.

Funk, ordained in 1882, was the first Bishop of the Bergthaler Church, and many members of the Hochstadt church later became part of the Altona Bergthaler Church (ABC).

A variety music program opened with a string quartet and led the congregation in a theme song "This is the Place." Program highlights: a mixed quartet, a duet, a men's ensemble, a worship team, a ladies double trio, an ABC male quartet, and solos by Carilee Dueck and Teresa Hamm.

Songs by Curt and Wanda Friesen, and the singing of Linda Hiebert concluded the night. At the outset Saturday, Pastor

*(cont'd on p. 2)*

## Centenary Anniversary of the Omsk Bruderschaft

by *Paul Toews*

Joseph Stalin is reported to have said that it is easy to send agents to close churches but the peasants will build churches deep in their souls. That church hidden from view for so long was on very public display as the "Omsk Bruderschaft" celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on July 29, 2007 in Mirolubovka, a small village some 115 kilometers west of Omsk, Siberia.

A large banner with the inscription "100 Years under the Cover of the Almighty" provided the theme for the approximately 2500 people who gathered in a large tent in a clearing in the birch forests of western Siberia. Many came in buses, vans and cars. Roads into the village were also congested with children and adults walking in from many directions and distances. They all came to remember the triumph of the faith community over a history filled with suffering and persecution. Strong preaching, a 200-voice choir with occasional orchestral accompaniment, a brass ensemble, a sixty-voice male choir, small vocal ensembles and many original poems added to the power of the event.

The sermons focused on establishment of the church, the purposes of the church, the suffering church and sustaining the church. Heinrich Goertzen in the first sermon set the tone by beginning with the biblical words "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Nicolai Dueckman, presbyter of the *Bruderschaft*, concluded with deep emotion and a quivering voice by appealing to his listeners to preserve the "sacred space in our hearts" which sustained them through difficult times. Running through every sermon and testimony were very personal reminders of the cost of maintaining the faith. Dueckman himself spent five years in prison for his religious activity. Others in the audience were also survivors of the gulag system.

In preparation for the centennial celebrations Peter Epp authored *100 Years under the Cover of the Almighty: A History of Omsk Evangelical Christian Baptists and their Association* (translated title of an authorized 860-page book). Throughout the day Peter Epp and Ivan Duerksen provided historical vignettes from

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## Altona Marks 125

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Rick Neufeld and Council Chair Byron Loepky unveiled a 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary banner, quilted by sisters Kathy Dyck and Helen Dueck, and other members.

In Sunday morning's worship, pastoral team members, Jayson Giesbrecht as song leader, and Dan Kehler as worship leader, led the worshippers through praise, confession, responding to the light, the Word that lights our path, with Pastor Rick Neufeld presenting a message, entitled "Bearers of God's Light".

The worship also included a 48-voice choir under the direction of Henry Peters, a string ensemble of Peter Elias, Ang Loepky, Judith Klassen, and Krista Loewen, a children's feature by Grace Harms, and Scripture readings by Menno Funk, Josh Neufeld and Kate Enns.

In his meditation, Neufeld noted that about 125 years ago Bergthalers came from Russia and met near here to express their faith in God. "As we reflect I'm thankful for those who went before us, who inspired us, and gave us hope in despairing darkness. Let's let our lights shine."

After a hearty noon meal Menno M. Friesen emceed a program "Remembering the Past, Light for the Future," which

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gave an opportunity for current and former pastors to reminiscence about the past, and offer their insights about the church.

Former pastors sharing were Henry J. Gerbrandt, the first salaried minister, David F. Friesen, Jake F. Pauls, Walter Franz, Peter Bartel, Peter Penner and Randy Klaassen, by letter. They noted circumstances which led them to Altona, shared some difficulties, and highlights.

Gerbrandt noted that when he came the Altona church was a meeting place, one of many. "Before I left each Bergthaler Church was independent, and the transition to English was well underway." Klaassen noted that he and Renate had enjoyed living and beginning a family here.

T.E. Friesen, who grew up in the church and whose father, D.W. Friesen, was a deacon for 37 years, brought personal greetings and on behalf of Altona Mennonite Church.

Many members also presented personal memories, as did many former members, some from many years ago. Among these were sisters Esther Heinrichs and Ruth Zacho, and Victor Schulz. Director Ruth Falk delivered greetings on behalf of Mennonite Church Manitoba.

Jake Sawatzky, chair of the anniversary committee, explained why the church was marking its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "A Bergthaler group began a church at Hochstadt in 1882, and later many transferred to Altona" where a 28 ft. x 50 ft. Bergthaler Church was built in 1912. As well, Sawatzky noted, "Johann Funk was ordained *Aeltester* of the Bergthaler Church in 1882."

Henry Thiessen, chair of the pictorial directory, and church council chair Art K. Dyck announced that the new member pictorial directory and history will be dedicated to Menno and Margaret Funk. An initial payment of \$30 will reserve one of the hard-cover books.

## Omsk Bruderschaft

(cont'd from p. 1)

the book. They divided the story into three parts: 1) appearance of Mennonites, German Baptists and Russian Baptists and the development of congregations until their destruction in 1937/38; 2) the awakening beginning in the late 1940s and continuing into the 1980s; 3) the period of freedom beginning in 1987.

The anniversary specifically marked the 1907 establishment of the Tchunayevka Mennonite Brethren church as an independent congregation and formation of the Union of Russian Baptists- Siberian branch. The Mennonite story in the greater Omsk region began in 1897. The Tchunayevka village church began in 1901 as an affiliate of the Rückenau (Molochna) congregation, the mother church of the Brethren movement. It was in one of thirty-six Mennonite settlements that by 1913 stretched along about 200 miles of the Trans-Siberian railway, both east and west of Omsk. The Union of Russian Baptists began as a result of German Baptists, Russian Baptists and Russian evangelical Christians - the latter two often called Stundists - also moving into the region in the late nineteenth century. Epp observed that historically the "wall between Mennonites, German Baptists and Russian Baptists was not high." In the early Soviet period they established joint bible courses, held *Sängerfests* and cooperated together in various ways. By 1929 restrictions on religious activity stiffened and in 1937-38 all the meeting houses were closed, "but the churches in our souls survived." In the same years 25,000 in the Omsk district were accused of anti-Soviet activity, 15,000 were shot. Epp noted "many of them were our brothers."

The Awakening period ironically began  
(cont'd on p. 4)



"100 years under the cover of the Almighty" (in Russian): A large banner at the Omsk Celebration, 29 July 2007. Photo credit: Paul Toews.

# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp



Mennonite Genealogy Inc. (MGI) operated from Autumn House at 790 Wellington Avenue in Winnipeg since 1981. On August 23, 2007 a coffee hour was held to show appreciation to everyone in the home for their friendship and support. Board members, former and present managers, volunteers who assisted with the genealogy work and Autumn House residents were invited to this afternoon event. Special thanks were expressed to some of the volunteers who spent many hours writing cards, typing, making indexes, and translating. The MGI records have now been moved to the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Back row (l-r): Hanna Rempel (MGI president), Marlene Neustaedter, Christine Schroeder, Janice Klassen, John Friesen, Marilyn Winter. Front row: Margaret Kroeker (MGI Director and secretary), Nettie Neufeld, Hedy Janzen, John Rempel. Photo: Courtesy of Hanna Rempel.

David G. Enns was born in 1847. As various documents were discovered and donated to the Mennonite Heritage Centre for long-term preservation, largely facilitated by the Elfrieda Schroeder, more and more research as done on the family history and genealogy. The project culminated with a family reunion and the publication of this research in Winnipeg on August 18, 2007. Contact: Elfriede Schroeder at eorlsch@mts.net.

## Queries

**Martens** – Looking for information on Peter Martens, born in Russia, Einlage, January 13, 1886. Married Katherine Doerksen in 1906. Nine children were born to this union, four of which died in Russia and the following five came to Canada: Tina, Anna, Aganetha and Sarah. Peter Martens was a school teacher, worked in the *Forestei* medical unit during the war, later went back to teaching and serving as town clerk. He was murdered by the bolsheviks on June 9, 1919. Please forward any information to: Mathilda Klassen, 15 Greensview Lane, Morden, Manitoba, R6M 2E9 or E-mail: lmklass@mts.net.

**Neufeld/Ens** – Looking for descendants of Johann Neufeld (b. 13 Nov. 1886) and Helena Ens (b. 1 Apr. 1896). Johann Neufeld most likely migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1890s and settled in Saskatchewan. Contact: F. Dyck, 10-200 Ronald St., Winnipeg, MB R3J 3J3 or P: 1-204-897-1031.

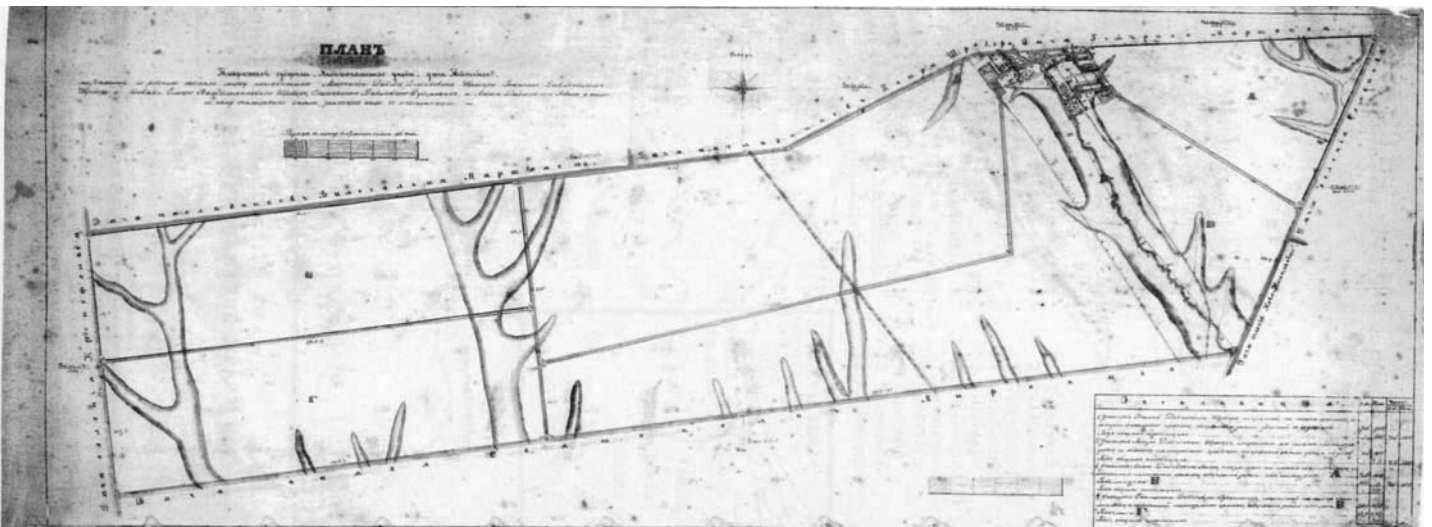
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## Recent Book

Elfriede (Quiring) Schroeder, compiler and author, with Vivian Quiring. *David Gerhard Enns 1847-1926 and Katharina Schroeder 1852-1927 and their Descendants and Ancestors* (Winnipeg, MB: Private Publication, 2007) 287 pp.

This compilation is organized into three sections – one which traces the descendants of David G. Enns (1847-1926)

and his wife Katharina Schroeder (1852-1927), a second which traces the Enns and Schroeder ancestors, and a final section which consists of maps, supplementary notes and a bibliography. The project began as a result of the preservation of several family artifacts which more and more of the descendants became interested in preserving, namely the survey maps and related documents concerning the Neuteich estate, Taschtchenak, Taurida, South Russia, where



Map of Estate Neuteich, ca. 1880. Size: 162 x 67 cm. Hand drawn on silk and protected with a coating (possibly varnish). The estate consisted of 3,063 dessiatines (8270 acres). This drawing was brought to Canada in 1924 by David G. Enns (1847-1926), passed on to his son, David D. Enns (1886-1973), who passed it on to his daughter Barbara Banman (1918- ), who allowed Elfriede Schroeder of Winnipeg to donate it to the Mennonite Heritage Centre in 2005.

## Omsk Bruderschaft

(cont'd from p. 2)

as believers found each other in the *Trudarmia*, the civilian labor force of the Second World War. It was a “chaotic awakening.” There were virtually no ministers, no organization, just “believers finding each other” and meeting at night in homes. More arrests followed. After Stalin’s death in 1953 and the subsequent amnesty for political and religious prisoners the situation eased somewhat and it was possible to begin a more formal association. In 1957 in Isil’kul’, Siberia (toward the western edge of the Mennonite settlements) German Baptists and Mennonites, meeting together and speaking German renewed the association established in 1907. Jacob Heide, a Baptist minister, christened it the Evangelical Christian Baptist Association. Throughout the Soviet period congregations were to register with the state and by doing so gained certain minimal rights if they would abide by Soviet laws on religious cults. All the congregations of the Omsk association refused because of restrictions which those laws also imposed. Hence scores of associational leaders, teachers and youth workers were imprisoned for religious activity between 1955 and 1984 when the last arrest occurred. The uncompromising stance of refusing to register lest they in any way cooperate with the state seemed, to this outside observer, as one of the hallmarks of the association. The story of this period was punctuated by personal testimonies of deprivation and imprisonment. It is a story of heroic resistance against all forms of accommodation with the Soviets.

The period of freedom which began under Gorbachev lifted virtually all restrictions on religious activity. Today the association has thirty-three congregations and twenty-one small affiliate groups. They are scattered across the Omsk region. Many of the Baptist congregations of the earlier 1907 association by opting for registration with the state also moved into differing networks. The large out-migration to Germany since 1988 also resulted in the closing of more congregations of Baptist origin than Mennonite. Today ninety-percent of the congregations in the *Bruderschaft* have Mennonite roots. The membership is ethnically diverse with peoples of Mennonite, Russian, Tartar, Kazkh and other origins. The common



**Festival Choir in the large tent at the Omsk Centenary Celebration in Mirolubovka, a small village some 115 kilometers west of Omsk, Siberia., July 29, 2007. Photo credit: Paul Toews.**

language is Russian and the celebratory services were conducted in Russian. The hymnody is drawn from the Russian evangelical tradition. Simultaneously one could hear lots of German and even more low-German. It was said that the street language of the children of Mirolubovka was still low-German.

The activism of the period of freedom of the small association, some 1350 baptized members following the out-migration, is striking. Since 1988 they have constructed fifteen new and rebuilt thirty-six buildings as meeting houses. Twenty-three mobile religious libraries provide Christian literature to congregants, religious books have been donated to over 800 civic and educational libraries in the Omsk region, and 150,000 New Testaments have been distributed under a program seeking to provide a “bible to every house in the Omsk district.” Since 1991 they have conducted annual summer camps for children. Thirty-one families have moved to differing villages to begin the affiliate congregations. Tent evangelistic services are conducted in these new villages.

Sidney Mead, an American church historian, long ago suggested the denominational system was distinguished by “purposive work.” The Omsk *Bruderschaft* might be described in denominational terms. They certainly are

engaged in purposive activity. But work aside what is much more impressive is the strong sense of community. They gathered on this anniversary day to celebrate and remember all parts of the story. There seems to be a solidarity forged by the repressions of the past and the continuity of generations. In the 1950s, as a child, I often traveled through the Russian Mennonite immigrant communities that came to Canada in the 1920s and 1940s. Elements of the day in Mirolubovka were similar and exchangeable with those communities.

The Omsk *Bruderschaft* gathered to embrace their past. They survived the oppressions of a state bent on eradicating religious faith. Now they worry not about persecution but about the seductions of freedom. They worry that the future may also be corrosive to the maintenance of their Christian community.

*Paul Toews is Professor of History and the Director of Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno Pacific University.*

## Rev. Gerhard Wiebe 1847–1934: The First Resident Minister of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada

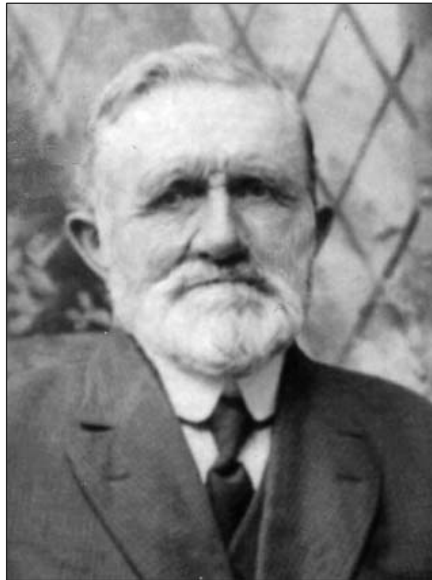
by Larry Friesen

Gerhard Wiebe was born in the village of Waldorf, West Prussia (Germany) on March 2, 1847, descendant of Johann Wiebe and Sarah nee Martens Wiebe. This family consisted of two sons and three daughters. Gerhard grew up under severe hardship. He lost his father at the age of four and lived with foster parents till fourteen years of age. He received a thorough education and was gifted with a keen memory. After age fourteen he worked as an apprentice in different trades including carpentry and baking. In 1871, at 25 years of age, he, his wife, and son Gerhard moved to Russia where he lived for sixteen years.

In Russia, he found salvation, was baptized upon confession of his faith, was accepted into the Einlage Mennonite Brethren Church, and was ordained into the ministry. He believed the Bible was a book that condemned sin and was also a book of God's grace and forgiveness. He held firmly to his religious convictions in the face of opposition. For six years he served as church leader in two villages, one of them being Ebenfeld.

Gerhard Wiebe's mother and sisters moved from Russia to Canada in 1876, and his intention was to follow them. He had been in correspondence with Brother Heinrich Voth, an itinerant minister to southern Manitoba. Heinrich Voth's pastoral work had laid the foundation for a small group of baptized believers in the Burwalde district. Voth, seeing the need for a Mennonite Brethren minister, invited Rev. Gerhard Wiebe of Ebenfeld, Russia to come to minister to the young Mennonite Brethren Church in Burwalde. Gerhard Wiebe (age 41) accepted the invitation and arrived in April, 1888 with his wife and five children, and a small group of Mennonite Brethren immigrants from Russia. He took over the leadership of the church in 1888, and the Burwalde group was formally chartered in 1888 as the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada as a congregation with sixteen members.

With enthusiasm the early members proceeded "to encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11). The early members were active in witnessing to others, and many neighbors were attracted by the happy and joyous life of the new converts. Their love and cheerful



Rev. Gerhard Wiebe (1847-1934)

singing induced many to attend their worship services and bible study sessions. The greatest attraction was their joyous assurance of salvation. Over the next few years Heinrich Voth came occasionally to encourage, counsel, and help them with any special problems. In 1889 a meetinghouse was erected in Burwalde on land donated by Jacob Banman, beside the Dead Horse Creek about one mile east of Highway 3.

Writing about the origin of the MB Church in Manitoba, Arnie Neufeld writes: "Gerhard Wiebe's sincerity and dedication to the church cannot be questioned." He knew the meaning of confession, forgiveness and God's grace. During his years of service Wiebe made a very significant contribution to the life of his church and community. He faithfully served as his church's leader during its most crucial time. The membership grew from sixteen to eighty-four under Wiebe's leadership. Gerhard Wiebe reported in the September, 1894 *Zionsbote* that he had baptized 21 people aged 16 to 60, and in the same month another 13."

He was actively involved in the annual conferences. New programs of outreach were launched in Saskatchewan and Manitoba's East Reserve. Many individuals in the community had been personally contacted and brought into the church, and many services in schools and homes had also been conducted.

Gerhard Wiebe ministered in this church until the summer of 1895 when Elder David Dyck came to assume the leadership. Rev. Wiebe remained an active participant in church affairs. He served as a conference delegate; he served on a committee making preparations for the church's annual thanksgiving festival and he served on a committee given the responsibility of relocating the Burwalde church to Winkler. He also served as church secretary, trustee, and as a delegate to the 1907 conference in Minnesota.

In 1889 Gerhard Wiebe moved to Winkler and opened a lumber business in which trade he remained until 1912. In the village of Winkler his industry was rewarded when fellow citizens chose him as school trustee, school secretary-treasurer, and as mayor in 1910. He was a public-minded citizen and tried to make worthy improvements.

In 1916 he engaged in pioneer farming in a Mennonite settlement in Littlefield, Texas for a period of eight years. He lived for a time in Hillsboro Kansas, and after his wife passed away, he and his daughter visited family and church friends in California, Oregon and Saskatchewan and did some sight-seeing.

In 1931 Rev. Wiebe moved back to Winkler to live with his oldest son Gerhard G. Wiebe on the farm he had himself acquired in 1888. In 1932, his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with a good number of his descendants present. On July 12, 1934 at the age of 87, Rev. Wiebe became ill and died. His remains were laid to rest in the Winkler cemetery.

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*Larry Friesen of Winnipeg is a great great grandson of Gerhard Wiebe.*





## Elmon Lichti's "CO Boots"

In early 2007 Ruth Jutizi donated her father, Elmon Lichti's, work boots that he wore as a conscientious objector (CO) during the Second World War. The Heritage Centre was happy to accept these artifacts as very few such artifacts are known to exist. If you are aware of other such items please contact Conrad Stoesz at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Elmon Lichti (1921-2005) was one of the thousands of young men who challenged the societal norm and claimed conscientious objector (CO) status in 1944 rather than taking up arms in the global conflict centered in Europe. On December 16, 1942 he left for Sault Ste. Marie on the shores of Lake Superior for the alternative service camp at Montreal River, Ontario. According to a January 1943 list of men at the camp, Elmon was one of the 204 men working there. They came from various church backgrounds including Amish, Old Order, Mennonite Brethren, United Mennonite, United Church of Canada, Pentecostal, Gospel Hall, Mennonite Church, Plymouth Brethren, Christadelphian, Anglican, Russian Evangelical, Salvation Army, and Baptist.

The camp was started in 1941 in an abandoned logging camp. One of their central projects was to extend the Trans Canada Highway through the Canadian Shield. Paul L. Storms wrote in the *Northern Beacon*, January 1942 p. 2-3.:

At the present time the highway from the Soo ends at the camp. It follows a most picturesque route, keeping close to Lake Superior. Scenery in this part of Northern Ontario is perhaps unparalleled for beauty and grandeur. The land is quite hilly and rocky, frequently rising to great heights, thickly covered with trees and undergrowth.

The men worked at road building all year round even in the dead of winter with axe, pick, shovel and horse. They surveyed, blasted, drilled, and shoveled stones and gravel onto a dump truck by hand. Trees also had to be felled and hauled away. From 1941 to 1946 the Canadian COs built 881 km of roads in various locations.



**These work boots were donated to MHC by Ruth Jantzi, daughter of Elmon Lichti and represent a handful of known artifacts from the CO experience. Included with the boots were some photographs and documents, a sock drying rack, and a bag of metal tacks which were driven into the soles of the boots when extra traction was needed. Elmon Lichti (left) is pictured standing with a friend at Montreal River alternative service camp ca. 1943.** Photos courtesy of Ken and Ruth Jantzi

At Montreal River they lived in tents or crude log huts. Mail from friends and family at home were very important. It came to Montreal River once or twice a week during the winter. From June to November 1941, 2,604 letters and 349 parcels were delivered to the COs in Montreal River.

Montreal River was one of the first camps and it was at this camp that the paper *Northern Beacon* was born. Its first issue was January 3, 1942 and the editor was Wesley Brown. According to volume 4 issue 1, its purpose was:

First, to furnish a worthwhile enterprise for the Conchie [CO] boys, whereby their leisure time may be spent profitably; second, for the convenience of the Conchie boys mailing a newsletter home or to some friends; third, to enlighten the outside world with the activities of Camp Montreal River; fourth, to help the boys of the camp to become acquainted with one another; fifth, to deepen the spirit of friendship already manifest in the camp; sixth, to promote enthusiasm for new projects through which the camp may benefit; and seventh, to meet the demand by interested parties concerned in the camp.

Later the paper became known as the *Beacon* and published out of British Columbia with John L. Fretz as editor. By 1943 the circulation was 1250 and subscription rate had doubled to ten cents. Contributions came from men in various camps. They would write a short article, often a humorous one, telling what had happened in the past month. The COs wrote, edited, and printed the paper in their spare time because they found it enjoyable and rewarding. For the friends and families of COs, the newspaper was a good way of staying in touch.

In 1944 Elmon Lichti was transferred to

one of the seventeen camps on Vancouver Island. Here he was involved with the planting of trees. In 1938 the Sayward forest fire destroyed 75,000 acres of forest north of Campbell River. The COs were to replant this and other areas. First the snags or charred remaining trunks were taken down. Gordon Dyck recalls that:

Snagging was a completely new experience for us prairie fellows. We always worked in teams of two. Our tools were a six or seven foot crosscut saw and a flask of diesel fuel to lubricate the saw if there was a problem with pitch [sap]. Each of us had a falling axe which was kept razor sharp.

Once an area had been cleared the men were divided into crews; Each tree planting crew consisted of about 15 men spaced about 6 feet [1.8 m] apart. The area had been surveyed and so the end men had to keep a sharp lookout for the stakes and the rest of us in the line just kept about 2 paces from our neighbour. The seedlings were strategically placed in beds ahead of time, and we never seemed to run out. We were always able to re-supply our burlap shoulder bags in time. The trees we planted were all Douglas Fir and came in bundles of 100, about 12 inches [30 cm] long. Each of us had a mattock (a heavy tool similar to a hoe) with a 4 foot [1.2 m] handle. (*Alternative Service for Peace*, p. 60-61.)

Up to 1000 seedling could be planted by each man each day. A total of 17 million trees were planted during those years. Today these trees are worth an estimated 1.7 billion dollars to the economy.

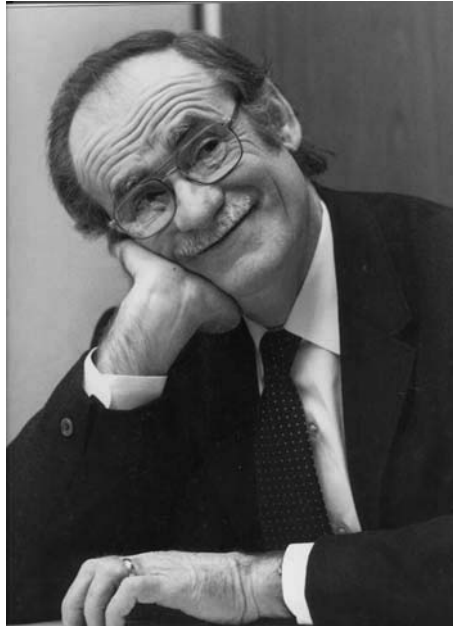
Many COs greatly appreciated their time in the alternative service camps. For Elmon Lichti and many others, it expanded the depth of their world and new and lasting friendships were formed.

For more information on the CO experience visit [www.alternativeservice.ca](http://www.alternativeservice.ca).

## Guesses can be wrong

Months ago when we looked at the many boxes of letters from the former Soviet Union in response to ministry of Victor Hamm via the former Gospel Light Hour (see article on page 5, December, 2006) we conservatively estimated some 6,000 letters. Volunteers have helped sort and properly file these letters. In the process we did an actual count. We were wrong. There are over 18,000 letters.

Aileen Friesen who helped read and sort these letters has now completed her work with us. She will enter doctoral studies at the University of Alberta this fall in the area of "Russian Imperial History". We look forward to her historical contributions in the future.



KR **Ben Horch (1907-1992)** Photo: Courtesy of Peter Letkemann.

## Foreign visitors at the Centre for MB Studies

Summer time at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies is when we get many people from out of province visiting us as a part of their holidays. One such visitor was Jane Friesen of Fresno, California who dropped in at the end of August. Jane has been president of the California Mennonite Historical Society and now volunteers three days a week at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno. Her recent focus has been to add information from obituaries into the Mennonite genealogical database known as GRANDMA. Jane also visited the Mennonite Heritage Centre and was impressed by some of the genealogical

collections in that archives. She plans to enjoy the drive to the Canadian west coast before heading home.

Another visitor was Gerhard Ratzlaff from Paraguay. Gerhard is well-known to many people who have an interest in Mennonite History—particularly in Paraguay. He has taught at the Bible Institute in Asuncion and also served as archivist at the Archivo de historia Menonita in Paraguay. He currently is working with a number of other scholars to complete the Paraguayan Mennonite Encyclopedia in preparation for the Mennonite World Conference that will be in Asuncion in 2009.

KR



On a warm August 4 afternoon, some 200 persons gathered to dedicate a cairn erected to honor Reverend Gerhard Wiebe, the first resident pastor of the first Mennonite Brethren church in Canada. The cairn, established by Wiebe's descendents with support from the Canadian and Manitoba MB Conferences, stands at the site of that first church, in front of a grove of maple and oak trees edging the Dead Horse Creek where believers would have entered the waters for baptism. That early congregation known as the Burwalde MB Church later moved to Winkler.



## Invitation to Horch book launch

Everyone is invited to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies for the launch of *The Ben Horch Story*.

This biography has been written by Dr. Peter Letkemann of Winnipeg.

Ben Horch was one of the most influential leaders of Mennonite music-making in Canada. He was born in Freidorf, Russia, of Lutheran Pietist parents. The Horch family moved to Winnipeg, Canada, in 1909. They worshiped in the North End Mennonite Brethren Church where Benjamin became a member in 1926. The Horch family was a musical family and two of his brothers became professional musicians in Winnipeg. In 1932 he married Esther Hiebert—daughter of Rev. C.N. Hiebert.

He began his teaching career as choral director and teacher of music theory at Winnipeg Bible Institute. In 1934 he began a long career as "Kurseleiter" (choral clinician) for Mennonite churches in Canada. He became well known for introducing new music to choirs and encouraging young musicians. For four years he studied at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA). He returned to Manitoba where he was a significant part of the music departments at Winkler Bible Institute (1943-1945) and Mennonite Brethren Bible College (1945-1954), now merged into Canadian Mennonite University. During this time he founded and conducted the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra, and was an editor of the Mennonite Brethren *Gesangbuch* (1952). In the mid-1950s he began working as a broadcaster in California and Manitoba, before becoming a music producer and consultant for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Winnipeg. During this time he commissioned the well-known *Mennonite Piano Concerto*.

The book launch will take place in the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies on November 19, 2007 at 7:30 PM. The general public is invited to attend.

KR

## Letter to the Editor

I would like to respond to the interesting and helpful article by Ed Lenzmann in *Mennonite Historian* for March, 2007, page 5. I have had occasion to do some research on Mennonite Brethren persons who had great difficulty accepting the practice among the General Conference congregations of baptising their young people, all of them, if possible, usually around the age of 18 to 20. It may be helpful to comment on what I have learned from observation and reading since I began to write for the Mennonite press about fifty years ago.

The MB church strove for a pure church and believed they had persons who could discern who was ready for baptism and who was not. They wanted nothing to do with the premise of the tares among the wheat thereby letting God decide ultimately who was saved and who was not. To this day many in that church think they can judge who is a Christian and who is not. The other side has often called that arrogance.

When it was statistically shown in the 1970s that up to 50 or 55 percent of children born into Mennonite homes never joined a Mennonite church, it is not clear to me whether this applied more heavily to those from the GC than from the MB. What was clear to me was that membership growth in the MB conference in those years never exceeded three percent even when they wanted to 'double membership in a decade.'

Once I started researching Mennonite history in the mid-eighties, and leaving the Molotschna behind in favour of Sagra-dowka, the upper reaches of the Volga, and Siberia, I have learned that perhaps those who were called *Kirchliche* (and later identified with the GC of North America) may have been more responsible. In Sagra-dowka, for example, as shown in Gerhard Lohrenz' little Echo Verlag book, 1949, the different approaches were distinct. In the revival of 1907 when a new church was formed in Orloff, alongside the continuing MB church in Tiege, and the *Kirchliche* in Nicolaifeld, many families and individuals felt excluded. The ministers of the Nicolaifeld church, Voth, Warkentin, and others, however, felt responsible for all the youth and adults and families who came to their village on a Sunday or special occasions. They did their best to prepare all their youth through teaching the catechism and preparation for church membership and potential marriage within the Mennonite church. They left the final judgment to God.

When Gerhard Fast in his *In den Steppen Sibiriens* compared the general Mennonite church with the Mennonite Brethren, he wrote of the latter on page 75: "regrettably, there was no preparation for baptism."

And so it still was about 1940 in Vineland, Ontario, when the two Mennonite congregations worshipped across the street from each other. In the summer we could hear the other church singing much the same hymns and choir songs! I was not tested until I was expected to visit the leader of the church alone and express my desire, having been converted at age 14, to be baptised at age 16. Was I as well prepared as those across the street? Perhaps some of my close friends from across the street have served God more faithfully and fruitfully than I have.

*Peter Penner, Calgary, April 1, 2007*

## Call for Papers

In 2010 Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) will mark 90 years of service in the name of Christ. With this milestone approaching, MCC seeks to gather a wide variety of academics and others to reflect on different dimensions of the questions: "What is MCC? What has MCC been? What is MCC becoming?" MCC therefore invites persons from a wide variety of disciplines—including but not limited to historians, theologians, economists, anthropologists, conflict transformation theorists and practitioners, sociologists, communications studies scholars, cultural theorists, development studies scholars and practitioners, and missiologists—to submit one-to-two page proposals for papers addressing these broad questions for possible inclusion in a book of essays to commemorate this landmark. Limited funds are available to cover select research expenses. The deadline for proposal submissions is February 1, 2008. All proposals will be reviewed by a project coordinating committee, led by Alain Epp Weaver (eppweaver@uchicago.edu). Authors of accepted proposals will commit themselves to completing their essays by February 1, 2009, for inclusion in an edited publication to appear by 2010. MCC is also beginning to plan a consultation at which authors of accepted proposals and others will gather to reflect on MCC's identity from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

Proposals should address particular dimensions of the broad question of MCC's historical, contemporary, and

future identity, such as:

1. How has MCC shaped and been shaped by North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ identities? How has volunteer experience (through PAX, TAP, SALT, and other programs) shaped the North American churches? What are contemporary and future challenges regarding recruitment and placement of volunteer service workers? For example, desire among supporting churches for shorter-term assignments; trends towards professionalism; recruitment of service workers representing the full diversity of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations in North America; relationship of service workers and "locally-appointed workers." What has MCC's role been in inter-Mennonite relationships, in "Mennonite ecumenism," in Canada and the United States? How has MCC understood its relationship with Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Canada and the United States? How have those churches understood the relationship? How has MCC responded to and been shaped by the growing diversity of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America? Historical, sociological, and theological studies of these questions are especially solicited.
2. How has MCC related to the global Anabaptist-Mennonite communion? Historical and contemporary perspectives on MCC's relationship with Mennonite World Conference and with particular Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in specific countries or regions are welcome.
3. How is MCC comparable to mission agencies? Essays engaging the scholarly literature of missiology that also discuss MCC's historical and contemporary practice, including relationship with Mennonite mission agencies, are especially welcome, along with explorations of MCC's explicit and implicit missiologies.
4. How is MCC comparable to non-governmental organizations, or NGOs (both "faith-based" and "secular")? To what extent is MCC part of the "humanitarian industry"? Essays will engage scholarly literature on NGOs and humanitarianism, while also discussing MCC's historical and contemporary practice.
5. What does it mean for MCC to call itself a "peacebuilding" agency? What are MCC's historical and contemporary



involvements with the relatively new field of conflict resolution / conflict transformation / peacebuilding (e.g. the history and impact of Mennonite Conciliation Services)? Studies of MCC's relationship with conflict transformation / peacebuilding institutes at Mennonite colleges and universities are welcome, along with explorations of MCC's connection with Christian Peacemaker Teams. How has MCC practice shaped and been shaped by changing Mennonite and Brethren in Christ peace theologies? How has MCC understood "advocacy" as part of its mandate? What tensions—practical and theological—have marked and continue to mark MCC's peacebuilding engagements?

6. Sociological / anthropological / economic / cultural and media studies / rhetorical analyses of particular MCC-related practices / institutions. How does MCC mobilize support (e.g., fundraising strategies; appeals for material aid—school kits, relief buckets; thrift stores; relief sales)? How have those appeals for support shaped and been shaped by North American Mennonite identities and by other cultural dynamics? How has MCC communicated with supporters in Canada and the United States? What impact have particular MCC ventures, such as the *More-with-Less* cookbook and its descendants, had on the Mennonite/Brethren in Christ world and beyond? Historical and contemporary economic and cultural studies analyses of Ten Thousand Villages and its relationship to the "fair trade" industry are encouraged, along with historical and contemporary examinations of MCC communications material (posters, videos, books, news pieces, etc.).

Proposals tackling other questions from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives are welcome as long as they relate to the overall question of MCC's identity.

Proposals should clearly specify the question or questions the author will address; the resources she or he plans to consult and investigate; and the methodological assumptions and approach he or she will bring to the project. Proposals should be no longer than two single-spaced pages in length and should be submitted by February 1, 2008. Limited funds are available to support certain expenses such as travel to relevant archives and photocopying; to apply for these funds, authors should attach a budget detailing anticipated expenses to the proposal.

## Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

*Moulding the Brotherhood: Johann Wieler (1839–1889) and the Communities of the Early Evangelicals in Russia* is the title of Johannes Dyck's M. Th. Dissertation at the University of Wales (2007). While Dyck suggests that "Wieler is undeservedly forgotten by both Mennonites and Baptists," his aim is less that of "correcting this condition" than it is to develop the idea of brotherhood in the Russian Baptist church. Nevertheless, his historical theology approach incorporates significant new materials of Wieler discovered recently. Dyck's "clean" writing style allows him to make a significant contribution to our understanding, not only of Russian Baptists but also of Mennonites during and after the turbulent 1860s in a slim (109 pages) volume.

Anniversary booklets are sometimes dismissed as soft-core advertising, windows designed to show readers only those aspects of an institution which its managers want the public to see. Yet they usually contain significant historical information and sometimes identify significant involvements which even those close to the subject have forgotten.

*CFAM Radio 950: 50 Years (1957-2007) Community Service Radio* is such a booklet. It tells the modest success story of the small station that began broad-casting in Altona in 1957 and grew into the Golden West network of 24 radio stations across western Canada and well beyond its original focus on farming and music.

*Columbia Contact: Celebrating 70 Years (1936–2006)* is essentially a "view book" for the year 2006 with a brief "walk through the decades" and an introduction to current and new program emphases.

*Legacy Recovered: The Polish Mennonite Friendship Association* (2004, 12 pages) celebrates 15 years of North American and European Mennonites working with Polish counterparts in recovering (and in some cases restoring) aspects of the former Mennonite settlements in the Vistula and Nogat delta areas in Poland. Peter J. Klassen (Fresno, California), one of the founders of the Association, has produced this informative and attractive booklet.

Cascadia Publishing House (formerly Pandora Press U.S.) publishes on a variety of Mennonite-related subjects. Recent releases include the following three. Leonard Gross and Jan Gleysteen's *Colonial Germantown*

*Mennonites* (2007, 79 pages) gives a brief historical background of the oldest Mennonite settlement in North America, a pictorial overview, and a tour guide.

In *Nurturing the Spirit Through Song*, editors Rebecca Slough and Shirley Sprunger King bring together contributions from an international cast of writers, each adding a perspective on *The Life of Mary K. Oyer*. The last third of the book (125 of 272 pages) contains selected writings by Oyer and a bibliography of her works.

*Telling our Stories* is a collection of *Personal Accounts of Engagement with Scripture* compiled and edited by Ray Gingerich and Earl Zimmerman (2007, 287 pages). While most of the 23 contributors are scholars, pastors or other church and para-church professionals, this book should be of interest to a broader readership of those interested in growth in "understandings of Scripture, spiritual life, and self." This book is identified as volume 1 of an anticipated *Journeys with Scripture Series*.

Herta Vogel, compiler and editor, *Fundstücke am Rande der Zeit: 100 Gedichte aus der Verbannung*. Münster: Edition Octopus, 2006 (pp154, pb.) is a collection of a hundred poems compiled from handwritten notebooks of women in exile in Kazakhstan from the years 1941 to 1966. The compiler and publisher, Herta (Neufeld) Vogel, was born in Waldheim, Zaporozhe, spent time in Kazakhstan and moved to Germany in 1980 as part of a family reunification program. The anonymous authors, all women, were not accomplished poets but mothers who wrote to preserve faith and identity, their children's and their own, during the bitter years of Soviet persecution when Bibles, hymn books and other Christian literature were not available. What the poems may lack in polish, they make up for in deeply moving passages, profound wisdom and an amazing *Gelassenheit*, trusting faith in God in horrendous circumstances.

In connection with a very successful centennial celebration on the Canada Day weekend, the Reunion Committee released *Haskett Centennial History* written and compiled by Peter Dyck and Peter Letkeman. (Brandon: Peter Letkeman, 2007), pb 8½ x 11, 240 pp, \$18.75. Dyck (1918-1980) taught at Haskett 1944-1948 and wrote the first part of the history as a university term paper. Letkeman, a retired university professor, compiled a variety of shorter pieces by various authors and supplemented the story with new research. Since the town

came into being as a railroad centre and port of entry near the USA border and since the nearby Mennonite villages of Grünfeld and Kronsfield dissolved at about the same time, the Mennonite community around Haskett developed a unique character. This book, put together in far too much of a hurry, brings together an enormous amount of information about what happened “on the fringe” of the large Manitoba Mennonite West Reserve.

Much has been written and published about the Mennonite settlements founded in the Paraguayan Chaco during the 1920s by Mennonites from Canada. By comparison the story of the two colonies in East Paraguay, settled by a second Canadian movement after World War II, has received relatively little attention. *Sommerfeld 1948–1998: Geschichtsbildband zum 50jährigen Bestehen der Kolonie Sommerfeld*, compiled and written by “some brethren of the Evangelical Mennonite Gemeinde” and published in 1998 provides a good overview of one of them. The relatively sparse text in its 94 pages belies the amount of information the book actually contains in the large number of photographs used (colour as well as black and white) and the data tables. Perhaps there will soon be something comparable on Berghthal Colony, or at least a substantial piece on Sommerfeld in English.

Art Huebert, *The Life of Gerhard David Huebert: Living the Word* (Winnipeg: by the author, 2006), hdc 8½ x 11, 158 pp, is more than a biography of the author’s father. Gerhard D. Huebert (1906–1981) was an important leader in the Mennonite Brethren Church, especially as an educator. He taught for five or six years each at Bible schools in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as a 5-year stint at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. Since the author attempts to provide a context for the work of his father in these schools, readers will find significant institutional history in those chapters. Huebert studied at Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, Toronto Baptist Seminary, and the (Baptist-run) Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis. His biography will also be of interest to those who seek to understand possible “outside” theological influences on the MB Church. The assessment of Huebert is balanced, perhaps too “objective” for some, and the book is well documented and written in an attractive style.

A recent doctoral dissertation has been deposited on CD ROM at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. John Henry Dyck, “The

Language of Community: An Analysis of the Concept and Practice of Wehrlosigkeit Amongst Russian-Canadian Mennonites Between 1870 and 1930” (Oxford, St. Antony’s College, 2006) argues that “the pressures of accommodation and assimilation” on the Mennonite communities during this time period have resulted in the “removal, conflation or diminution” of the doctrine of nonresistance (*Wehrlosigkeit*) and its concomitant communal practice of freedom from military service (*Wehrfreiheit*). Dyck teaches at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC.

Gerhard Roosen’s *Conversation on Saving Faith for the Young in Questions and Answers* (hdc, 10 x 15 cm, pp. 301) has recently (2002) been reprinted by Ezra Z. Weaver of East End, PA. The German original, *Christliches Gemüths-Gespräch*, was first published in America by the Ephrata Society in 1769 and became a widely popular Mennonite catechism, reprinted a dozen times. The first English edition came out in 1857 using Benjamin Eby’s translation. The current edition is the 12<sup>th</sup> reprint. When Roosen’s book was published in Hamburg-Altona (Germany) in 1702 it became the first complete Mennonite catechism in German in existence. The current English edition includes, in addition to the catechism proper, the 1632 Dortrecht Confession of Faith and a variety of instructional and liturgical aids.

## Book Reviews

(cont’d from p. 12)

farming changes in 1955–1964; 5) changes in population and economic developments in 1964–1988; and 6) developments in more modern times from 1988–2000.

The role of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of God is given attention, as is the surrounding area with its villages that make up the region. A number of maps and a significant number of photos are also included. Especially noteworthy is the detailed and changing collective portrait of individual family groups which resided in the village from period to period.

One cannot quite comprehend how the author succeeded in amassing the amount of data he has brought together given the way in which information would have been widely scattered, and likely much available only orally without written documentation. The book is an admirable monument to the incredibly dedicated

effort of a person who felt very strongly that the impressive but often tragic story of Chaldeeveka’s Mennonite families and their lives was worth whatever it took to get this record together and preserved.

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Raylene Hinz-Penner, *Searching for Sacred Ground: The Journey of Chief Lawrence Hart, Mennonite*. Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House (co-published with Herald Press), 2007. pb 205 pp.

Reviewed by Adolf Ens, Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite University

In 1891 the Swiss couple, Rodolphe and Marie (Gerber) Petter, began missionary work among the Cheyenne and Arapahoe in Oklahoma under the General Conference Mennonite mission board. At that time a strong indigenous, inter-tribal “messianic” movement created great openness to the Christian Gospel. Seeing that no missionary spoke either of these languages and that only a few small portions of the Bible had been translated into them, Petter learned Cheyenne, created a Cheyenne orthography and produced an English-Cheyenne dictionary and eventually translated all of the New Testament into Cheyenne. The emerging new church in Oklahoma and Montana was thus able to retain much of its indigenous culture.

When European Mennonite immigrants settled in Kansas and Oklahoma in the 1870s they became neighbours to this emerging Cheyenne church. But bridges between the two groups were built only very slowly. Hinz-Penner’s fascinating account of Peace Chief Hart explores that bridge-building and in the process discovers many more parallels and connecting points between the two groups than most (on both sides) have ever considered.

Hart studied at Bethel College (Mennonite) in Kansas before Hinz-Penner did. He went on to seminary studies at Elkhart and was ordained as a Mennonite minister. In keeping with Cheyenne warrior tradition and in fulfillment of a personal dream, Hart became possibly the first full-blooded Native-American to become a fighter pilot in the US Marines. His call to become a peace chief involved a “conversion” in which both his Cheyenne peace tradition and his Mennonite non-resistance training played significant roles.

Although Hart spent much of his career as minister in the Cheyenne Mennonite

church and community in Oklahoma, his vision for peace, restorative justice and a positive sense of identity for his people led to a much larger stage for his work. The Cheyenne Cultural Centre at Clinton, Oklahoma, founded through Hart's initiative, shows the breadth of Hart's vision. It began as a Community Centre and Hall, but soon added an Elderly Nutritional Center, and Emergency Medical Unit, an office for a social worker, and a child development center.

Hart is a widely respected tribal elder, sought out by Native-American groups throughout the American west as well as by government authorities for advice on a range of issues. At the same time he is widely recognized in the Mennonite church for his warm pastoral ministry and his provocative theological thinking.

Why is this book relevant for Canadian Mennonite readers? The obvious connection is that various groups of Mennonites have been in some kind of mission relationship with First Nations groups in Canada for generations, wrestling with many of the issues that have occupied US Mennonites and indigenous church leaders. But biographical (or autobiographical) accounts of Canadian Mennonites dealing in cross-cultural "Native" Ministries have to date been only from the "white" side. Hinz-Penner's account gives a voice to a Cheyenne representative, and moreover to one who is articulate in "western/European" theological thought and well versed in Biblical studies. That is, Hart reads Scripture and is able to "see" things in the Jesus narratives from a perspective much closer to that of first century Palestine than the perspective of western Christians, including Mennonite missionaries. That gives him, and us, new ways of helping the process of God coming through Jesus to all people.

Beyond that, Hart's experience in mediating between governments and First Nations, even though it is in a somewhat different political context than the Canadian one, also offers us new insights into that complex process. Thus, for example, Hart's understanding of "sacred ground" and his work in facilitating the proper burial of ancestral bones held in American museums can help us understand a bit better the current effort of Batoche First Nations people to "bring home" the remains of their Chief One Arrow to Saskatchewan.

Above all, this book is a fascinating read. The author, who teaches English at university and in prison, writes well. The

book integrates the story of two peoples: Cheyenne and Mennonite; of two cultures: American Aboriginal and white European; of two faiths: Cheyenne and Christian, while gently calling both to return to their innate peacableness and their concern for Creation.

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Martin Sawatzky, *A Journey of Faith: The Memoir of Martin Sawatzky*, Winnipeg, 2005; *The Gospel of Hope: A Collection of Sermons*, Winnipeg, 2005 and *A Theology of Peace: Faith and Progress in Western Society*, Winnipeg, 2005.

*Reviewed by David Schroeder, Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite University*

One of the values of this trilogy is that the biographical information about the author's journey of faith is supported not only by sermons from the different periods in his life but also by a well worked out theology that he has arrived at through his many experiences.

*A Journey of Faith* takes the reader from his ancestral roots to his baptism and high school education. It is here that his "little world" collapses, and he devotes himself to search for meaning in seminary education (Montevideo, Buenos Aires, University of Winnipeg, and Union Theological Seminary in New York in which he received an MTS and entered the Ph.D. program). As could be expected, there is a clear call to ministry and to inviting people to Christian life as viewed from an Anabaptist perspective. The call to ministry is carried out first of all in a number of years of campus ministries in Ontario and at University of Western Ontario. This is followed by pastoral ministries at Sargent Ave. Mennonite Church, Winnipeg; the Homewood Mennonite Church and the Wingham Mennonite Church in Manitoba. After listing and commenting on a whole list of special events, he gives what might be considered his final comments on his life and quest.

Sawatzky's *Journey of Faith* will be of special interest to those who would like to know what it is like to move from a very conservative, sheltered church and be challenged by a world that has not yet been incorporated into the world-view of that community. It also has value for those of us who have made this same journey of faith. It is a journey that even those from less conservative churches have to make in one sense or another.

It is interesting to note that much of this journey is triggered by Sawatzky's vision of preaching the gospel to the native people of the Chaco. What bothered him most in that encounter was the poverty of the people and the social injustice that it indicated. His concern for the poor kept his quest for further knowledge and understanding alive and was the subject of his master's and doctoral studies. It was this concern also that provided the base for his theology of peace and his sermons of hope.

Throughout the journey he struggled with relating the received theology of the Anabaptist tradition with the world he was encountering. Even though he lost faith in "our modern culture" and in higher education (p. 121) he did not lose faith in Christ as experienced in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Rather, he sought to make this peace theology more explicit in his volume on *A Theology of Peace*.

The first 20 sermons in his volume *The Gospel of Hope* are related to the Christian calendar from Advent to Easter. The rest are organized according to themes: Christian faith (8), pastoral care (6), life of discipleship (5), Christian education (1), marriage and family life (2), congregational life (3), prayer (3) and life of Christ (3). There is a general tendency to favor the sermons of his later years as more insightful and meaningful.

Sawatzky does not shy away from difficult situations or difficult events. He mentions his struggles to come to terms with his home church and his Colony experiences. His statements of the facts, as he saw them, were not always appreciated by the people according to Sawatzky. He does not hesitate to speak of his mid-life crises, or the year of discontent in the Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church and even the time when his wife left him after what was a happy and fulfilled marriage. The reader, however, wishes for a little more information so as to see these events also from the other people or person's perspective. This is not done because he seems to want to avoid putting his interpretation over against others. He simply wants to tell his own story.

The list of people in the church and in academia that have influenced his life and thought is impressive. He has read widely and has sought to integrate what he has gained and expressed it in his sermons and his theology. His theology of peace deserves a further review.

## Book Reviews

Alexander Rempel and Amalie Enns, *Hope Is Our Deliverance: Aeltester Jakob Aron Rempel: The Tragic Experience of a Mennonite Leader and His Family in Stalin's Russia* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2005) 321 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, former MHC Historian/Archivist.

This book marks the completion of a highly valued project begun by the late Alexander Rempel a number of years ago, and completed by his sister Eleonore and his niece Amalie Janzen Enns. It provides a much clearer view of the central place which *Aeltester* Rempel had among Mennonites of Russia in the early Soviet period, and how he sacrificed his life for serving the church and the larger community, in the Stalin years.

In just over 180 pages the reader finds an excellent compact biography of *Aeltester* Rempel depicted in twelve chapters with significant photos not published before. Then, in the following 140 pages appears an English translation of 115 letters written by *Aeltester* Rempel to his family and friends, supplemented by a brief bibliography and notes for the story and the letters. The last letter was written in 1941. In that year *Aeltester* Rempel was sentenced to death by shooting, by the Military Council of the Supreme Council of the USSR on 8 September, and executed three days later, on 11 September. He was then 58 years old. He was officially rehabilitated in 1989. Most of the family members were able to emigrate to Canada in due time.

Reading about the difficult childhood years, an educational experience which did not come to him easily, his time of great exertion in completing finally, two graduate degrees, with a university teaching appointment, and then an incredible schedule of church-related activity, not to mention concern about his wife Maria and the family during all this time prior to his first arrest and exile, is exciting and most inspiring. It is also really distressing if one imagines the untiring and dedicated effort it must have taken to pursue the path his life led him along for all those years. The suffering and torture of his trials, and of exile and separation from his second wife, Maria's sister Sonja, and the family, is something equally hard to comprehend and fully appreciate. Rempel's faith in God and

readiness to give what it took to be a worthy servant of the church in his day is exemplary in every respect.

The story is simply a must-read. It is a story that a person cannot begin to retell properly in a brief review. Pandora Press has done a fine printing job, the writing and editing have been excellent, and the product stands as a beautiful and powerful tribute to a man whose family, above all a most supportive son, Alexander, had once pledged to have the story told to all, and now has done just that – and done it marvelously well.

The very extensive archival collection of Alexander Rempel, which included the published and unpublished materials of his father Jakob, and a great deal of other significant data on Mennonite history and other topics, is now located at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Andrei Ivanovich Savin, *Emokonfessia v sovyetskom gosudarstve: Mennonity Sibiri v 1920–1980-e gody: Annotirovany p-rechen archivnyx dokumentov i matei-alov. Izbrannye dokumenty (Ethno-confessions in the Soviet State: Mennonites in Siberia, 1920-1980: An Annotated Listing of Archival Documents: and Materials. Selected Documents)* (Novo-sibirsk Sankt-Peterburg, Posokh, 2006) 496 pp. Samuel Unruh, *Chaldeej: Die Geschichte meines Dorfes 1900–2000* (Dueren, BRD: Im Selbstverlag, 2000), 325 pp.

Dr. Andrei Savin, a trained historical researcher and author of 30 historical works (essays and books) in Novosibirsk, Siberia, was invited to prepare an inventory of Russian archival files related to the Mennonites of Siberia. The volume is the first of several planned as the Siberian Mennonite Research Project based at the Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California. Dr. Savin's work was made possible with financial support from the Peter and Anna Dick family of Ontario. This book was published in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The title fully describes the contents in general. One thousand files are listed. The work also includes 103 documents related to emigration, agricultural life, alternative service, religious developments, repressions and other themes, and a dozen photos. A photo of men in alternative service is featured on the cover. A helpful 60-page introduction is drawn, one may assume, from another recently-published work which Savin co-authored with Dr.

Dieter Brandeis, *Die Sibiriendeutschen im Sowjetstaat 1919-1938*.

The Fresno Center anticipates an English-language edition to be published in 2008 or even earlier. Perhaps it will include an index and some maps which are needed in a work like this. The introduction would benefit as well from a more fulsome summary of the Siberian Mennonite experience in tsarist times ( in this case the two decades 1897-1917). Perhaps a bibliography will be considered also. Several volumes of more documents are on the drawing board as well.

Clearly these studies will lay a most crucial foundation for major studies on Siberian Mennonites needing to be undertaken. The Center, with Dr. Paul Toews heading up the work, and the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Savin, the editors of this volume, and others assisting the project must be warmly thanked for what has been done in this project to date, as well as creative planning which is being done for publications still to come.

Samuel Unruh provides a detailed look at how the story of the Savin documents might be reflected by a local community in the course of 100 years. Chaldeej was not a well-known Mennonite village in the total kalaidese of communities in western Siberia.. It lay about 25 miles northeast of Omsk, with one William Unruh family leading the way to get it going – much land was available there.

Author Unruh takes the reader right back to medieval times in sketching the background, for the Chaldejvkan settlers. The tsars' occupation of Siberia is not omitted, and the early Mennonite settlements in south Russia (later Ukraine) are set in the story also. He provides twenty pages to give us some details about the flora and fauna of the Omsk region – quite interesting and usually omitted in histories of Russian Mennonite communities. Sections V – XII then give readers the narrative about the beginning, growth and final years up to where he terminates his story in the year 2000.

An impressive body of detailed facts about the village and its residents in all the phases of a century of existence has been gathered for the story in six periods: 1) beginnings and early years, 1904–1929; 2) the period 1929-1942 which includes the time of collectivization and repressions; 3) the war and the *Trudearmee* (labour army) with their aftermath from 1942–1959; 4) family and

(cont'd on p. 10)