

Mennonite Historian

The History and Diversity of the Mennonite Brethren Church (1860-2010)

By Abe Dueck

Mennonite Brethren may have struggled more with their diversity and identity throughout their history than any other Mennonite group.¹ The question of identity appears very early in their history and has continued to emerge and plague MBs for most of their 150-year history. It is not surprising that the forthcoming consultation at the celebration in Langley, BC in July 2010 is entitled, "Renewing Identity and Mission." The diversity of the MB Church is rooted in its complex origins as well as in the multiple social, cultural, and religious influences that have shaped its pilgrimage over the last 150 years. The term "identity crisis," has been used to describe the MB experience at many junctures in its history.

At the time of the birth of the MB Church, two major streams of influence in addition to the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage impacted the formation of a distinct and conflicted identity. The first was that of pietism, which itself took many forms. Pietism influenced the entire Mennonite community in Russia, beginning early in the nineteenth century with individuals such as Tobias Voth, the first teacher at the *Vereinsschule* established in 1820. The Gnadenfeld Church, which immigrated to Russia in 1835 and had a strong pietist heritage going back to their sojourn in Prussia, became the focal point of the struggle which birthed the MB movement. More particularly, Pastor Eduard Wuest, a Lutheran pietist pastor in a nearby village, was a major influence in the birth of the MB movement. Mennonite Brethren historians and theologians have been ambivalent about their assessment of the pietist contribution. The pietist heritage of the MB Church has also become an issue leading to heated debate in the broader Mennonite community and is often seen as completely antithetical to Anabaptism.²

(cont'd on p. 2)

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



1860 is a significant year in the history of both our sponsoring bodies. Early influences on the MBs include (l-r) Eduard Wuest, Abram Unger (top) J.G. Oncken (lower) and first Heinrich Huebert. Early GC leaders included John Oberholtzer, David Toews (top right) and Daniel Hoch, shown with his wife (lower rt).

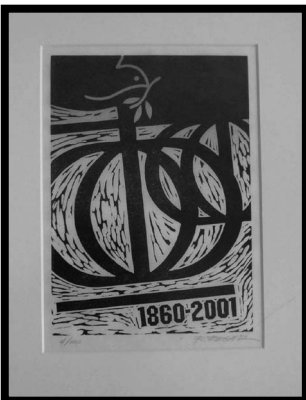
The Beginning and End of the General Conference Mennonite Church, with Special Attention to the Canadian Connection

By Helmut Harder

The General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC) traces its beginning to Pentecost weekend, May 28-29, 1860. That was a century and a half ago, which makes 2010 the 150th anniversary of the founding of the GCMC. But the history of the GCMC came to an end some ten years short of a century and a half. The decision, made in the summer of 1991, to integrate the GCMC with Mennonite

in the formation of two Mennonite Church bodies: Mennonite Church Canada (2000) and Mennonite Church USA (2002). The legacy of the GCMC and of MCNA lives on in these two national bodies. In Canada the integration also brought the history of the Conference of Mennonites to a close. In the spirit of thanksgiving to God, we offer a brief overview of the origin, development, and closure of the GCMC, with particular attention to the role Canadian Mennonites have had

(cont'd on p. 4)



This composite drawing of the General Conference logo (globe and cross) giving way to the dove and olive branch, was created by Robert Regier, long-time art teacher, Bethel College, Newton, Kansas. This framed print hangs in the Mennonite Church Canada head offices in Winnipeg.



150th Anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren logo for Celebration 2010.

History and Diversity of MBs

(cont'd from p. 1)

A second related stream of influence was that of the Baptists, particularly the German Baptists. This influence basically came after the separation had taken place. Johann Gerhard Oncken, the founder of the German Baptists (1834), ordained Abram Unger as Elder in 1869, and August Liebig, an itinerant evangelist, helped the fledgling church in Khortitza become established and organized. It was Liebig who was instrumental in the organization of the Mennonite Brethren General Conference in 1872. The immersionist mode of baptism was clearly a practice that stemmed from the Baptists. Carl Benzien, Anne Judson, and other Baptists also influenced the MBs. The first Confession of Faith to be adopted by some MBs was the Hamburg Confession of 1849, slightly modified to include the reference to nonresistance. Only in 1902 did the Mennonite Brethren adopt a truly independent Confession of Faith which became the basis for later confessions.

The issue of Baptist connections as well as connections with Russian Stundism was especially critical in questions of identity in the Russian period. Relations with Russian Baptists carried forward in a number of ways. In 1882 a joint Baptist/Mennonite Brethren conference was held in Rueckenau. MBs and Baptists

continued working together on many fronts in subsequent decades and a number of leaders studied at the Baptist seminary in Hamburg. Abraham Friesen, the first MB missionary to India, studied in Hamburg and subsequently worked under the Baptists in India. Evangelistic work in Russia itself was often pursued jointly by MBs and Baptists. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Mennonite communities as well as the Russian authorities were often confused about their true identity. In an article entitled, "Mennonites or Baptists," published in the *Friedensstimme* in 1910, H. J. Braun writes:

Repeatedly the question [Mennonites or Baptists?] has emerged during the first fifty years of the existence of the Mennonite Brethren Church here in Russia. Every time it has been answered correctly by the government and by the church: the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church are Mennonites.³

The question of identity was inextricably tied to the question of Mennonite privileges granted by the Russian government when they immigrated and the general suspicion of sectarian movements. Other Mennonites often felt that MBs were only concerned about retaining special privileges, such as exemption from military service, and that MBs were an obstacle in maintaining a good relationship with the government. MBs, on the other hand, often felt that fellow Mennonites were using the issue to retaliate against the Mennonite Brethren for their actions in separating from the mother church.

Formally, Mennonite Brethren clearly affirmed their allegiance to their Anabaptist/Mennonite faith in the Document of Secession of 1860 and in subsequent formal documents, including the 1902 Confession of Faith. During the years leading to World War I the two major Mennonite groups worked toward creating a common confession or constitution which could clarify and solidify relations to the government. With the Bolshevik Revolution, civil war, famine, and migration, these issues were set aside and more pressing issues arose, resulting in close cooperation between the Mennonite groups to cope with the severe circumstances.

When MBs came to North America, issues of identity remained in the background as long as most lived in sheltered rural communities and retained German as the primary language of

discourse. But, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, forces of acculturation and exposure to divergent religious movements created new ambiguities about MB identity. Mennonite Brethren often worked more closely with fundamentalist and evangelical groups than with the other major Mennonite bodies. Many Mennonite Brethren strongly supported and attended evangelical schools such as Prairie Bible School, BIOLA, Wheaton College, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Briercrest Bible School, and many others. Most MBs strongly supported Billy Graham and other revivalist preachers. In the United States, MBs joined the National Association of Evangelicals, and in Canada they joined the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. In recent years many MB churches have worked closely with the Willow Creek Association. Many other organizations that are essentially evangelical or fundamentalist could be mentioned.

Forces such as the above led to what has been referred to as a crisis of identity in mid-twentieth century America. At the convention in 1951 the Board of Reference and Counsel referred to "revolutionary changes" that had taken place with the cultural and social changes of the previous decades. The unity and coherence of the MB Church was threatened. One of the responses was the commissioning of a new history, which was subsequently written by A. H. Unruh and entitled, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde, 1860-1954*. But this work did not really provide a rallying point in the quest for identity, both because of conceptual limitations as well as because it was in German when the transition to English was already well under way. It was not until John A. Toews wrote his *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers*, that the issue of identity was really addressed for a new generation of Mennonite Brethren. Toews took much of his inspiration from the work of Harold Bender and his associates at Goshen who called the Mennonite Church to a "recovery of the Anabaptist vision." Most of the MB institutions, including the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, where Toews taught, and the MB Seminary in Fresno, identified strongly with the Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage as mediated through the Goshen historians.

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

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

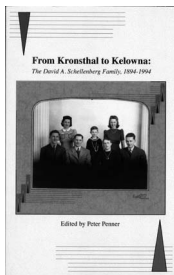
Recent Books

Marietje E. Kuipers, *Wilhelmina Baier-Nikkel, 1895-1984* (Reprint from: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* Vol. 28 (2002), pp. 211-260) [in Dutch].

This is the story of Wilhelmina Nikkel (1895-1984), daughter of Gerhard Nikkel (1861-1932) and Anna Carolina Kuipers (1865-1899). She was born in Pakantan (Sumatra), a mission station of the Dutch Mission Society. In 1900 she went with her family to Gnadenfeld, South Russia, from where her father originated. Wilhelmina Nikkel first married Wilhelm Warkentin (1890-1922) and then Bernhard Baier (1900-1944). Wilhelmina immigrated to Canada from Germany with her two sons Bernhard (1924) and Gerhard (1936) in 1948. This booklet was received compliments of Wilhelmina's niece, Marietje E. Potjewijd-Kuipers, Boulevard St-Martin 29, 1800 Vevey, Switzerland.

Peter Penner, ed., *From Kronsthal to Kelowna: The David A. Schellenberg Family, 1894-1994* (Calgary, AB: David and Erwin Schellenberg, 2009) 95 pp.

Part 1 of this booklet contains the reflections of David Schellenberg (1894-1994) as recorded in 1972. They include details about life in Russia as well as an account of his 1912 trip (emigration) to America. Part 2 entitled "The Schellenberg Sons in Canada" traces their activities, entrepreneurship, and business practices in developing the OK Economy Grocery chain in Saskatchewan. Of special interest is the description of the 1939 social, religious and political climate that helped trigger the decision of three of the brothers to change their names, legally, to Shelly. Several pages are devoted to listing and charting the family genealogy. This booklet was received compliments of Peter Penner, 20 Randlelawn Close NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 4A5.



Queries

Weber - Looking for information on Rosemarie Weber (b. 1930) in Berlin; adopted in 1937 by Harry Konrad and his wife Clara Fastmann, living in Gumbinnen, Germany. Rosemarie had a half sister Uta Regina Weber who remained in Germany. It is believed that Rosemarie immigrated to North or South America, and may have adopted the Konrad last name. Please contact Conrad Stoesz, CMBS, 1310 Taylor, Winnipeg R3M 3Z6 or MHC, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, R3P 0M4 or e-mail to: cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca.



Family and Local History Day Sat. April 24, 2010 9:30-4:00

Mennonite Heritage Village
Steinbach, Manitoba

9:30 Displays and Demonstrations

1:00 Presentations

Ron Friesen, "Pioneers of Cheese"

Ernest Braun & Henry Fast, "Maps"

2:00 Featured guest speaker

Dr. Glenn Penner

"Low-German Mennonite DNA Project"

Admission: voluntary donation

Sponsored by:

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

EastMenn Historical Committee

Genealogy & Family History Committee

and

Mennonite Heritage Village

Contact: Evelyn Friesen 204-326-2719 or

Alf Redekopp 204-888-6781 ext. 193



Can you help identify any of these family portraits? Please contact MHC, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail Alf Redekopp at aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca.

GCMC Beginning and End

(cont'd from p. 1)

in the formation and eventual closure of the GC story.

The GCMC had its beginning in the context of the (old) Mennonite Church. The earliest Mennonites arrived on American soil from Switzerland and South Germany in the colonial period. Their church life tended to be conservative, with an emphasis on separation from the world. Later Mennonite immigrants, arriving in the first half of the 19th century, introduced progressive ideas with them in such areas as mission, education, ecumenical relations, and accommodation to modern culture. With these notions they challenged (old) Mennonite church and culture.

The GCMC was spawned by leaders of this widely dispersed progressive movement. Several regional conference groupings of progressively minded congregations pre-dated the formation of the GCMC in 1860. In 1847 a group of sixteen congregations in the Franconia Conference in Pennsylvania, formed the East Pennsylvania Conference. The new conference attracted about one quarter of the Franconia Conference membership. The group favoured a more open approach to faith and life. Only what was specifically commanded in Scripture was to be considered foundational. Other matters were to be left to the discretion of the local congregation or the individual.

In 1853 two Iowa congregations, at West Point and Franklin Center, formed a regional union which they named the "German Evangelical Mennonite Congregation." Finding themselves on the American frontier, these congregations recognized the need for mutual support and for a focus on home missions. In 1855 the congregation at Wadsworth, Ohio, led by Ephraim Hunsberger, formed a conference relationship with a congregation of Mennonites in Lincoln County (Vineland), Ontario, led by Daniel Hoch (High). Again, the main purpose of the Ohio-Ontario association was to advance the cause of missions. At the same time several congregations in Illinois and Iowa were exploring an association with each other.

It was in late 1859 that the two Iowa congregations decided to send an open invitation to all Mennonite congregations in USA and in Canada to attend their forthcoming conference session at West

Point on May 28-29, 1860. The purpose was to explore a wider association of like-minded Mennonite groups. The invitation was announced through the *Religiöser Botschafter* ("Religious Messenger"), a bi-weekly church newspaper begun in 1852 by John H. Oberholtzer, spiritual leader of the East Pennsylvania Conference. In announcing the meeting, Oberholtzer spoke of the need to form a wider conference association to advance the cause of home missions.

Response to the invitation was modest. Only the two sponsoring congregations, Franklin and West Point, sent representatives. Four visitors came from afar: John Oberholtzer and Enos Loux of Pennsylvania, S.B. Bauman of Ontario, and Joseph Schroeder of Polk City, Iowa. But the decision-makers were not deterred. They believed their vision would bear fruit. The first day, Pentecost Sunday, was set aside for preaching, communion and fellowship. By the end of the day a committee had been named that should work out a proposal for the envisioned conference, and present it the very next day.

On the second day, Easter Monday, the group convened again. A basic plan for a wider church union was presented and accepted. The proposal had five points: 1) The ministers of the denomination shall accept each other without prejudice. 2) A general council shall be convened in the near future to strengthen fraternal relations and identify needs. 3) A council should be appointed to formulate a common confession of faith. 4) The confession of faith shall be publicized widely. 5) All those who accept this confession in a spirit of unity shall be considered the real Mennonite denomination.

The new conference was given the title: *Allgemeine Mennoniten-Gemeinschaft in Nord Amerika* (General Mennonite Community of North America). There should be agreement in essentials and freedom in nonessentials. No one should be excluded who holds to the foundation as understood by Menno Simons (1 Cor 3:11). An invitation to join the association was to be sent to all Mennonite churches in North America. John Oberholtzer was appointed as conference chairman, and Christian Schowalter as secretary. With this the seed was planted and the direction was set for what became the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Four conference sessions were held in the first decade. They testify to modest growth. In 1861 eight congregations were

represented by seventeen delegates. At that conference Daniel Hege of Summerfield, Illinois was appointed as *Reiseprediger* (itinerant minister) to stir up interest in the new venture. In his six months of travels he sought to unify interested congregations, to speak for missions, to promote church publications, and to collect funds for a pastoral training institute. In 1863 nineteen churches were represented. The 1866 sessions report eighteen delegates in attendance. The 1869 sessions had about 50 voting delegates. But no Canadian group was present after the 1860 meeting, even though some Mennonites from Ontario participated in some programs of the new organization. In time the Hoch group allied with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, which eventually became the Missionary Church.

From 1860 until the mid-1870s all congregations of the fledgling GCMC had Swiss-South German roots. 'Russian Mennonites' had nothing to do with the founding of the GCMC, since they only began to arrive in North America in 1874. Many of the 10,000 Mennonite immigrants who came to mid-West USA from Prussia and Russia in 1874 and later, joined the GCMC. They found the GCs appealing and geographically accessible. By 1900 about half of the total membership of the GCMC was comprised of these recent immigrants to the USA. While some 8000 Mennonites came to Central Canada in the same wave of immigration, none joined the GCMC until well into the 20th century.

By 1900 the General Conference was already organized into five district conferences, all in the USA: the Eastern, Middle (later, Central), Western, Northern and Pacific Districts. Canadian Mennonites never organized themselves as 'districts' of the GCMC. In 1902 Mennonites who had immigrated to Canada from Russia in the 1870s and from Prussia a few years later formed the Conference of Mennonites in (Middle) Canada (CMC). With the spread of new immigrants westward and eastward, the CMC eventually organized itself into five area conferences along provincial lines: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

The GCMC leaders always took an active interest in their Canadian counterparts. At the initial meeting of the CMC in 1902, one of the eight persons present was J.E. Sprunger of Berne, Indiana. He represented the Board of Home Missions

of the GCMC. A year later, at the first annual conference sessions of the CMC, two GCMC representatives from the USA were in attendance. On that occasion the new Canadian Conference held an offering to support the work of GC home mission worker J.E. Sprunger. That was the beginning of a long standing cooperative relationship in home missions between the GCMC and the CMC. For much of the first half of the twentieth century, CMC chairman David Toews sat on the home mission board of the GCMC. Here he solicited financial and other assistance from the GC mission board for building up the church on the Canadian frontier.

While supportive relationships between the GCMC and the Canadian constituency developed early, formal membership of Canadian churches in the GCMC came later. The GCMC was a conference of congregational units. Gradually CMC congregations added GCMC membership status to their conference affiliation. By 1920 six Canadian congregations had joined the GCMC. By 1935 the number had risen to forty-one. By 1970 the number had grown to 130. At that time the GCMC, including Canadian churches, numbered about 350 congregations. Over the years the Canadian churches cooperated with their American counterparts in such areas as overseas and home missions, curriculum development and seminary education. The relationship produced much 'good fruit', both for the inner life of the church and for its witness in the world.

By the late 1970s changes were taking place that would lead eventually to a radical transformation of the GCMC. Here and there throughout the USA dual membership congregations were forming; that is, congregations that held member-

This signified an eventual coming together of what had become separated in 1860. Then in the 1980s the Ontario Conference of the CMC/GCMC and two MCNA conferences in Eastern Canada (Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec and Western Ontario Mennonite Conference) decided to amalgamate, forming the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada (MCEC).

While these grassroots initiatives were welcomed as indicators that old divisions were being overcome and that a new era had begun, the changes put pressure on both local congregations and conference entities. In 1989 an Integration Exploration Committee was appointed to formulate a proposal for integrating the GCMC and the MCNA, along with the CMC and the various regions, districts, area conferences, and their institutions and programs. The CMC was integrally involved in these discussions. The historic decision to form a new integrated Mennonite Church took place in July, 1999.

But the decision included what some considered a wrinkle, and others saw as a necessity. First the GCMC and the MCNA integrated to form the new bi-national Mennonite Church. But then the new Mennonite Church divided to form two church bodies: Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. The decision to form separate self-governing and parallel churches, one within each country, came largely at the urging of the CMC. The Canadians feared that a Mennonite Church with a centralized bi-national structure would inevitably involve the Canadian congregations in the complexities of three levels of authority (area conference, national, bi-national).

As it stands, the two country-wide churches continue to retain mutual

Biblical Seminary and of Mennonite Publishing Network. A mutual coordinated working arrangement has been struck for programs of international mission. Furthermore, the two churches resource each other in such areas as ministry among native peoples, ministerial services, congregational education, higher education, aboriginal ministries and ethnic ministries.

With these recent developments the history of the GCMC, begun 150 years ago, has come to a close. Its legacy lives on in the newly integrated churches: Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. While the closure of the GCMC has come with some regret, the emergence of new opportunities for ministry through MC Canada and MC USA has been welcomed by many.

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- Pannabecker, Samuel Floyd. *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church*. Newton KS: Faith and Life Press, 1975.
- Helmut Harder, *Winnipeg, CMU Emeritus Professor of Theology since 1999 has served as theology teacher at CMBC (1962-90), CMC General Secretary (1990-99), co-chair of the GC-MC Confession of Faith Committee (1987-95), and CMC staff for the GC-MC integration process (1989-99). He authored David Toews Was Here 1870-1947 (CMU Press, 2002).*



General Conference Mennonite Church of North America, July 31-August 7, 1938, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Photo: MHC Coll. 470.56.



**Mennonite
Heritage
Centre**

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2009 Acquisitions (selected list)

1. Siegfried Janzen papers from work in Germany 1948-1952. (Received from MCC.)
2. Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference Records covering 1959-2006.
3. Whitewater Mennonite Church (Gemeinde) (Boissevain, MB) records (1927-1973). Donated by Art Hildebrandt, Crystal City.
4. Kay Friesen's MCC Indonesia Reports from 1959-1968. From Rudy Friesen.
5. Manitoba Hochfeld Waisenamt Records plus miscellaneous items predominantly from 1875-1925 photographed by Bruce Wiebe in Mexico. -- 18 DVDs.
6. Rosenort village papers including Old Colony church materials authored by Isaak Mueller and Franz Froese. -- 1875-1925. Donated by Darlene Peters.
7. Martin Klaassen works of art consisting of a painting of Tiegenhagen (W. Prussia), the ancestral home and a drawing of the Yushanlee experimental farm of Johann Cornies near the village of Ohrloff, South Russia. Donated by Walter Klaassen.
8. Peter G. Epp's unpublished fictional manuscripts read by Clara K. Dyck on 52 audio cassettes. Donated by Peter Pauls.
9. Sermons by Heinrich H. Penner (1948-1974). Donated by Margaretha Sawatzky.
10. Heinrich Jacob Friesen (1900-1985) memoirs written in 1974. 346 pages. Donated by Rudy Friesen, Winnipeg.
11. Peters and Bergen letter collection (1928-1948). Donated by Margaret Bergen.
12. Helena F. Reimer (1905-1993) papers.
13. Fehr family materials and funeral announcements. Donated by Esther Lenz.
14. *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten* (1926-1942) (5 reels of microfilm) and *Deutsches Leben in Russland* (Vol. 1-13). (2 reels of microfilm). Courtesy of Peter Letkemann.
15. Helen Kornelsen Research files on missionary Johann F. and Susanna (Showalter) Kroeker.
16. Niverville Mennonite Church records (1924-2008).
17. Jakob Guenther's diary (1945-1947) 47 pp. [photocopy] Jakob Guenther was a teacher in Hochfeld, USSR from 1941-1943, who was separated from his family during the war. From 1946 till the end of the war, he was a Russian prisoner of war in Romania. (Courtesy of James Urry)
18. Passenger list of Canadian Mennonites that left for Paraguay on the Volendam in 1948.
19. 1905 composite photograph consisting of 167 individual portraits of Mennonite men that served in the Russian Czarist Forestry service at Razin. From Ike Warkentin.

A.R.



Christie Anne McCullough entering data; also, seen between the monitor and computer, is the recently acquired Scanpro 2000 Microfilm Scanner (see article below). Photo credit: Alf Redekopp.

MHC continues to be a place of learning and growth

The second semester of the Canadian Mennonite University school year saw another CMU student choose the Mennonite Heritage Centre as their preferred practicum placement. Christie Anne McCullough, from Outlook, Saskatchewan, joins Erika Enns Rodine. Together they are learning about Mennonites and archival practices through assigned readings, discussions with MHC staff, and hands-on archival projects.

McCullough, a history student, has been working on data entry and processing the David Rempel fonds.

Nearing completion is an index to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization family immigration cards from the post Second World War era. The index includes the names of each immigrant, date of birth, date of arrival in Canada and their initial destination.

Archivist Conrad Stoesz has been working at a survey of the sound and moving images collection at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. This is part of a larger project of the Association for Manitoba Archives that will survey the sound and moving image collections from major archives across the province. This information will then be used in a business plan in the hopes of funding the preservation of the most important and most at risk materials.

The Heritage Centre has machine readable items dating back to 1915 on a variety of mediums including vinyl

records, wire recordings, film of various kinds, VHS, reel to reel tapes, and cassette tapes. These are some of the rarest, most at risk, and most costly items to preserve.

The MHC survey included 488 vinyl records, 3406 cassette tapes, 1057 reel to reel tapes, 455 magnetic video tapes (such as VHS), and 94 acetate based films. The materials that stuck out for me include the 343 audio interviews, recordings of church services dating back to the 1940s, recordings related to Native Ministry activities, and film footage taken in Europe, shortly after the end of the Second World War.

There is a growing demand on archives to provide archival materials in electronic format including photographs, audio recordings, and paper documents. While the ability to provide materials digitally increases access to materials, it also increases the work load for staff.

Executive staff of Mennonite Church Canada recently allocated funds and approved the purchase of a new microfilm reader/scanner. Thanks to this support, we now have a machine which allows the viewing of microfilm on a computer screen with the option of saving the image as a pdf or jpg file. In some cases, this will remove the wear and tear on fragile paper copies. With this hardware, new projects can be imagined with new opportunities for volunteers.

CS



I.P. Asheervadam, Executive Secretary of the India M.B. Historical Commission and Archives. In February, I had the privilege of visiting the Mennonite Brethren Centenary Bible College in Shamshabad, India and I.P. Asheervadam gave me a delightful tour of the Archives. —DH. Photo credit: Doug Heidebrecht

Study Conference Papers/ *The Voice* Available Online

In an attempt to make more of its resources available to churches and individuals, the Centre hired Janelle Hume in the spring of 2009 to scan papers presented at Mennonite Brethren study conferences. Beginning in 1956 these study conferences were held regularly, though sometimes sporadically, and sought to address both doctrinal and ethical issues that arose within church life. This collection of papers represents Mennonite Brethren thinking on a wide variety of topics, and as such continues to be a resource that informs the belief and practice of churches today. The CMBS website (under Theological Resources) lists all the papers from these study

conferences, and we are continuing to contact authors or family members for permission to post papers. Please contact the Centre if you would like a copy of a study paper that is listed but not posted.

Hume also scanned all the back issues of *The Voice*, a publication of Mennonite Brethren Bible College from 1952-1971 and one of the precursors to *Direction*. This significant collection of articles, in both German and English, is now available on the CMBS website.

These projects were made possible by the financial support of the Government of Canada through Library and Archives Canada, and administered by the Canadian Council of Archives. DH

CENTRE FOR Mennonite Brethren Studies IN CANADA

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New Technology Brings New Possibilities

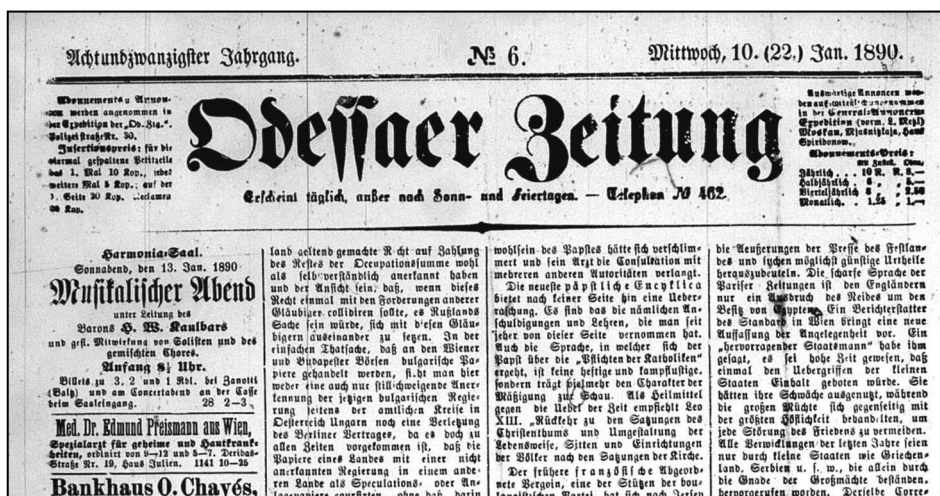
In a further quest to provide better access to our holdings the Centre has posted indices to the *Mennonite Mirror*, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, and *Festival Quarterly*. Recently we posted an index to the *Odessaer Zeitung*.

The *Odessaer Zeitung* was founded in the Russian city of Odessa in 1861. Each issue begins with international news, then national reports are followed by excerpts from the Russian press. There is local news of the city of Odessa and commercial news, reviews of books and theater notices. Illustrated advertisements of farm machinery, household goods adorn the rear pages while obituaries, notices of business opportunities, schools, doctors or job vacancies appear in smaller boxes on the front and back pages.

Of special interest to Mennonites is the section "Koloniales" which is devoted to news, views and opinions of the German-speaking foreign colonists settled in New Russia (today Ukraine). Reports also come from the Volga region, Russian Poland and the Caucasus. As the sons and daughters of the New Russian colonists emigrated to other areas of Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there are reports from Central Asia, the Urals and Siberia.

This index of Mennonite related materials is courtesy of James Urry. Efforts have been made to correct errors that entered into the listing, but a number remain in the transcript of the German, the English explanations and translations and format.

Also, thanks to the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, a new microfilm reader/scanner was purchased. The old reader was about 15 years old and was expensive to operate and repair. A special deal with arranged with our supplier since the Centre and the Mennonite Heritage Centre each bought a machine. With these capabilities microfilm can be viewed and the images digitally enhanced and saved as electronic files. This makes access to the Centre's microfilm collection much easier. CS



This is an example of a page from the *Odessaer Zeitung* using the new microfilm scanner to create a 600 dpi jpg format image.

History and Diversity of MBs

(cont'd from p. 2)

Therefore, although MBs were closely allied with evangelicals during the twentieth century, they also worked with fellow Mennonite churches and organizations and continued to affirm their Anabaptist identity. The latest MB Confession of Faith is strongly Anabaptist in affirming a commitment to discipleship, peace, and reconciliation. MBs have given strong support to MCC, MDS, MWC, as well as other social welfare agencies.

Several Mennonite schools have become interdenominational, with support and sponsorship by several Mennonite denominations. While some MB churches have deleted a reference to "Mennonite" in their official name or have virtually hidden their MB identity, voices calling for a movement away from a general Mennonite identity have not taken a strong hold.

Globally, Mennonite Brethren have a strong presence in many countries, especially in India, Africa, Paraguay, and Germany. Mennonite Brethren are the only major Mennonite denomination that has a strong global organization tying the various conferences together. The International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) was established in 1990. The character of the respective groups that constitute this global reality has developed in various ways, depending on a number of factors. Pioneer missionaries often put a distinctive stamp on the nature of the emerging church. Often the distinctive Anabaptist beliefs were considered secondary and were not emphasized. Hence the church developed with little awareness of these issues. Another factor was the context in which the church emerged. Primitive groups in Panama, Paraguay, or Africa dealt with very different issues than those in places other times to more emphasis on development, education and on a more holistic Anabaptist understanding of the church. In recent times the churches in countries such as Colombia have discovered or become more aware of their like Japan or Germany. Still another factor was the self-understanding of the mission board and administration at particular times in history, which sometimes led to more emphasis on evangelism and church planting and at Anabaptist heritage and applied it to situations of political and social unrest and poverty. They have seen the



ICOMB in Kinshasa, Congo June 2007: (l-r): Oscar Peralta (Paraguay Spanish), Ray Harms-Wiebe (MBMSI), Agustin Membora (Panama), Randy Friesen (MBMSI), Sequeiro Luzembo (Angola), Hisashi Hattori (Japan), Lloyd Letkeman (MBMSI), Theodore Unruh (Paraguay German), Jose Prada (Peru), Jose Arrais Velez (Portugal), Ernesto Wiens (Brazil and ICOMB Chair), Victor Wall (General Secretary), Cesar Garcia (Colombia), David Wiebe, Nettie Janzen (MBMSI) Photo credit: David Wiebe

limitations of some of the mission efforts of non-Mennonite organizations and the implications of using North American church models in very different environments. The overall result is that diversity appears to be increasing and that there is a greater need than ever for dialogue to arrive at a better understanding of what it means to be faithful in different contexts.

Endnotes

1. The best example of a denomination that has experienced an identity crisis which led to a change of name and abandonment of the Anabaptist heritage was the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren denomination, now known as the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches. See Calvin Redekop, *From Evangelical Mennonite Brethren to Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998).
2. Issues of *Preservings* have carried on a long debate about Mennonite Brethren and their pietist heritage, starting with the founding editor, Delbert Plett, and continuing with the current editors.
3. See Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity, 1872-1922*. (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 1997), 117.

Dr. Abe Dueck, Winnipeg is the Interim Executive Secretary of the MB Historical Commission, and former CMBS director.

Book Notes

by Peter Letkemann

Since their arrival in Germany from the 1970s onward, dozens of Mennonite *Umsiedler* - both men and women - have undertaken to write and publish memoirs of their often life in the Soviet Union. Among the earliest published accounts were those of Johann Toews (*Erinnerungen*, n.d.), Peter Epp (*Ob tausend fallen*, Weichs: Memra Verlag, 1988), Georg Hildebrandt (*Wieso lebst du noch?* Stuttgart: Bernhard Abend Verlag, 1990), Dr. Heinrich Klassen (*Weg von der Scholle*, Koblenz, 1996), Walter Dürksen (*Die Lebensgeschichte der Familie Dürksen*, Paderborn, 1998) and Aron Warkentin (*Ein Leben aus Gottes Gnade*, Lage: Logos, 1999). For every published account there may be as many as ten or a dozen unpublished accounts that I have located in various archives and personal collections.

For this book note report I would like to highlight a selection of memoirs published since the year 2000.

As with the earlier publications, most of these memoirs appeared as self-published books (*Selbstverlag*), with little or no professional editing or layout and no scholarly apparatus (footnotes,

bibliography, etc.). Yet all of these memoirs are of great value to scholars, since together they provide an intimate and accurate insight in the history of the Mennonite experience in the Soviet Union.

(1) Johann Epp, *Und nun, Herr Doktor*, Lage: Logos Verlag, 2000. Johann Jakob Epp was born in the village of Ivanovka (Epp-Chutor) in the Omsk Settlement on 14 October 1920. From 1939 to 1949 he studied medicine in Omsk. His studies were interrupted in 1941 when he was arrested and spent 5 years in various GULag labour camps. After his release in 1946 he completed his medical training and worked as a doctor in various Siberian communities until emigrating to Germany in 1983.

(2) Peter Janzen, *Meine Erinnerungen, Lebensbericht eines Russlanddeutschen*. Münster: Agenda Verlag, 2002. Peter Janzen was born on 18 January 1915 in Mikhailovka (Memrik Settlement). He was arrested in December 1937 and spent 10 years in various labour camps. After his release he settled in Timirtau (near Karaganda), where he became a band director until his retirement in 1983. The family emigrated to Germany in 1994.

(3) Heinrich Mantler, *Flucht in die Falle. Schicksale junger Volksdeutscher in der Sowjetunion während des 2. Weltkrieges. Erlebnisbericht eines Überlebenden*. Bielefeld, 2002. Heinrich Mantler was born and raised in the Mennonite village Zentral (Voronezh District) in Central Russia. In the fall of 1941 the village residents were all deported to eastern Kazakhstan. From here Heinrich was conscripted into the *Trudarmia* (Forced Labour Army). The book tells the gripping account of his life in the labour camps and his attempted escape in 1943.

Three years later, Heinrich Mantler published the story of his mother's family: *Familie Rempel, Eine Familienchronik*. Bielefeld, 2005. It tells the story of the 13 children of the Aron Rempel family. The best known member of this family was the eldest son, Aeltester Jakob Aron Rempel (1883-1941). Mantler focuses especially on the life of his mother, Helena Rempel, who trained as a mid-wife in Riga, and later moved to the Mennonite village Zentral, where she met and married Lehrer Abram Mantler.

Late last year (2009), Heinrich Mantler published a third book: *Fahrt*

ins Ungewisse, Erlebnisbericht eines Russlanddeutschen (1934-1941), Bielefeld: Selbstverlag, 2009, which tells his own life story from 1934 until the deportation from Zentral in 1941.

(4) Rudolf Penner, *Der Heimat beraubt. Die Mennoniten in der Ukraine während der Wirren am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Rudolf Peter Penner was the grandson of the well-known teacher Peter Penner of the *Zentralschule* in Chortitza. Rudolf was born on 9 June 1927 in Jakovlevo (northwest of Chortitza on the left bank of the Dnepr River). His memoirs begin with the story of the Penner – Epp – Klassen – Koop family in the first two decades of the 20th century. The bulk of the book relates his life in Chortitza in the 1930s, the Trek to Germany in 1943, his experiences during the war and his capture and eventual betrayal by British soldiers, who handed him over to Soviet authorities in 1945.

In his second book, *Im Banne der Taiga. Das Leben eines Verbannten in den Wäldern Sibiriens*. Frankfurt: Fouqué Literaturverlag, 2002, Rudolf Penner relates his experiences in Siberian exile in the 1950s.

(5) Abraham Dück, *Das Leben zu bestehen ist mehr als übers Feld zu gehen – Erinnerungen eines Russlanddeutschen*, Neustadt: Verlag Dr. Faustus, 2005. Abraham Dück was born in Sparrau (Molochna) in 1921. Part One of his 3-part memoir tells the story of life in Sparrau and Hierschau in the 1920s and early 1930s; the arrest and execution of his father Abram Johann Dück; and the flight of their “dekulakized” family to Kasbek in the Caucasus in 1932. Part Two details Abraham's difficult years of service in the Red Army, then in the *Trudarmia*; his arrest in 1941 and exile, first to Siblag in Mariinsk (Siberia) and later to Kolyma; and his eventual release in 1956. Part III relates his life as a “free” man, first in Magadan, then in Schachtinsk (near Karaganda), finally in Tokmak (Kirgizien), and then the emigration to Germany in 1989.

(6) Abram Teichrib, *Der Weg zur Heimat. Erinnerungen meiner Mutter*. Detmold, 2005. This book contains the moving memoirs of his mother Elisabeth Pätkau Teichrib (1915-1997). She was born in the village Kamenka (Orenburg) – daughter of David and Maria Pätkau. Her father was arrested in 1929 and the family was exiled from the village in

1933. Elisabeth married Abram Teichrib in October 1933 and returned to Susanovka (Orenburg), where Abram worked as a teacher. Their married life lasted only 3 years and 4 months – on 2 February 1937 Abram was arrested and never heard from again [now we know that up to 95% of Mennonites arrested in the Orenburg Region in 1937-1938 were shot within 6 weeks of their arrest; Abram was probably among these]. Elisabeth went to live with her in-laws in the Molochna Settlement in 1938; experienced the German occupation, the Trek to Germany in 1943 and “repatriation” to Siberia in 1945. She and her children eventually moved back to Kamenka (Orenburg), where they lived until their emigration to Germany in 1989. Elisabeth died in Lage in 1997.

(7) Waldemar A. Giesbrecht, *Einblicke. Einsichten und Erkenntnisse einer russlanddeutschen Familie im Kampf ums Überleben – 1925 bis 1956*. Regensburg: Waldemar Giesbrecht, 2007. Giesbrecht, a civil engineer by training, relates the story of his youth in Lesnoje (Slavgorod Settlement, Siberia), Engels (Volga Republic), and later in Poltavka (Kirghizia); his conscription into the *Trudarmia* and exile to labour camps in Cheliabinsk in 1942, followed by several years (1946-1948) in the construction of the Soviet Union's first nuclear facility in Osorsk. Following the move to Glasov (Udmurt ASSR) and later Kirghizia, Giesbrecht's account ends in 1956, when German “Sondersiedler” (special settlers) were finally released from the conditions of the *Kommendatura*.

(8) Last summer, Walter Wiebe of Petershagen (Berlin) gave me a copy of Hans Janzen, *Erinnerungen von Hans Janzen (1923-2008)*. Petershagen (bei Berlin): Walter Wiebe, 2009. Hans Janzen was the grandson of the well-known Mennonite teacher in the Ohrloff *Zentralschule*, Johannes Heinrich Janzen (brother to Aeltester Jakob H. Janzen; author of *Das Märchen vom Weihnachtsmann*, CMBC Publications, 1975; edited by his grand-nephew Waldemar Janzen). Hans' father, Johann Johann Janzen (1893-1967) was also a teacher, writer and painter.

Peter Letkemann, historian, author and organist lives in Winnipeg. He is the author of The Ben Horch Story (2007) and has done extensive research on the Soviet period of Mennonite History.

Letter to the editor

Dear Friends,

Please renew my subscription for another two years.

I always rejoice when the *Mennonite Historian* arrives at my home, and that I can still read it without my eyeglasses, considering that I am over 90 years old. Praise and thanks be to God.

I am the last survivor of my Janzen family of nine siblings and only last year did I discover while reading Helmut T. Huebert's *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia* that my great grandfather established the Petersdorf Estate, that another five related Peters families live there, and that Peter Neustädters lived there as well.

My maternal grandmother was Anna Peters, daughter of Daniel Daniel Peters (1794-1879)...

With heart-felt greetings,

Maria Naeser

[German letter dated 10 Nov 2009, translated by Alf Redekopp]

MHSC Award of Excellence

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was pleased to present its 2010 Award of Excellence to Lorraine Roth for her life-long advancement of Canadian Mennonite History as a meticulous researcher, careful historian, and consummate genealogist of the European Amish Mennonite families who settled in Canada beginning in the 1820s. The announcement was made 23 January 2010 in Steinbach, Manitoba at its AGM.



MHSC president Sam Steiner presenting the certificate to Lorraine Roth.

Book Notes

By Adolf Ens

Volume 45 of the *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* series is Theron F. Schlabach's biography of a key member of the "Bender school" of Mennonite-Anabaptist studies. *War, Peace and Social Conscience: Guy F. Hershberger and Mennonite Ethics* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2009) at 723 pages is a hefty book. But Schlabach, editor of the 4-volume *The Mennonite Experience in America* series, is a meticulous historian who writes with clarity and an engaging style. And subject is fascinating and important. Hershberger's writings (*War, Peace and Nonresistance* [1944] and *The Way of the Cross in Human Relations* [1958]) became a basis for American Mennonite ethics for a generation. As a member of (Old) Mennonite Committee on Industrial Relations and its successors, Hershberger was at the centre of shaping how Mennonites relate to the larger society in a manner consistent with its basic nonresistant stance.

Many Canadians who visited Paraguay last year for Assembly 15 of Mennonite World Conference probably visited Km 81 as part of their itinerary. The 50th anniversary of the Mennonite hospital published in German in 2001, is now available in English. Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Mennonite Hospital Km 81: Love Active in Deed*. Translated by Cornelius J. Dyck (Filadelfia, Paraguay: Asociación Evangélica Mennonita del Paraguay, 2009) is an attractive booklet (123 pages) telling the story of this ministry to sufferers from Hansen's Disease (leprosy).

The Schoenbrunn Chronicles: 75 Years in the Paraguayan Chaco compiled by Agnes Balzer and Lieselotte Dueck / translated by Henry and Esther Regehr (Waterloo, ON: Sweetwater Books, 2009) 363 pages was commissioned by the village of Schoenbrunn, No. 8, Fernheim Colony, Paraguay, in May 2005. It contains the stories, both humorous and tragic experiences, of the multi-faceted life of the Dutch-German refugees from Russia who arrived in the "green hell" of western Paraguay in 1930.

From Kronsthal to Kelowna: The David A. Schellenberg Family, 1894-1994, edited by Peter A. Penner (Kelowna: David and Erwin Schellenberg, 2009), is a

slim (95-page) booklet combining David's translated memoir of the family's life in Ostervick, Russia (to 1912) and material about the Canadian years gathered by the editor. Saskatchewan readers may recognize the Schellenberg-Shelly family from its business venture, the OK Economy Grocery chain. Some genealogical tables and numerous photos make this an informative and interesting family history (see p. 3 for more details).

Lydia (Suderman) Deer, *A Difficult Journey: Memories of Soviet Russia* (Edmonton: Victor P. Suderman, 2009) is a moving first person account of the author's experiences during and after the Stalinist period. Born in the early 1930s, the author survived the terror of the Stalinist purges, World War II, including the German "liberation" of her area, the trek to Poland in 1943, forcible "repatriation" to Kazakhstan in 1945 (taking some 40 – 50 days by train), the anxiety of not knowing where father and brothers were. In 1989 she and her family were able to move to Germany. The faith of Lydia's mother sustained her family through many horrific experiences. A partial genealogy and some photos enhance the account.

Von der Autonomiegründung zur Verbannung und Entrechtung. Die Jahre 1918 und 1941 bis 1948 in der Geschichte der Deutschen in Russland is a *Sonderband* in the series "*Heimatbücher der Landmannschaft der Deutschen in Russland*." Published in Stuttgart 2008 by Alfred Eisfeld with editorial work by Hans Kampen, this volume (287 pages) has a number of articles of special interest to Mennonites. In section I (1918) these include two chapters on the self-defense units (*Selbstschutz*) among Mennonites and other Germans, as well as Peter Wiebe's account of the German colonies in Siberia. Section II deals with exile and stripping of rights, forced labour, special settlements, etc. during 1941-1948. In part III Johann Kampen's personal account of the final years of German settlements on the Dniepr is of particular interest. An index of persons and another one of places makes for relatively easy checking for information of interest during these time periods.

Adolf Ens, *Winnipeg, taught history and theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (now CMU).*

GAMEO bolstered by New Content

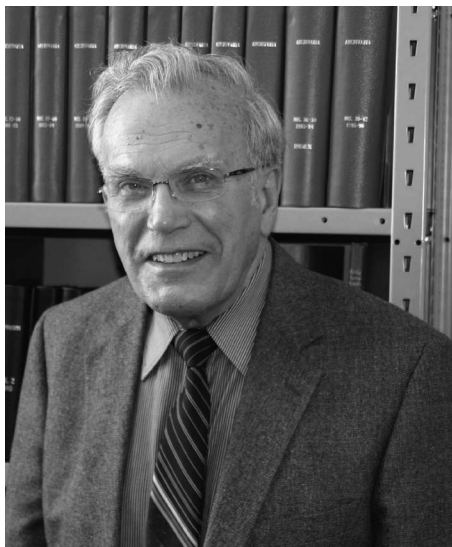
By Conrad Stoesz

Researcher, author, and historian Dr. Helmut T. Huebert has donated his Russian Mennonite research to the growing Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (GAMEO). Dr. Huebert is the author of nine books, and is co-author of the bestselling book *Mennonite Historical Atlas* with William Schroeder. Huebert's books documenting settlements, individuals, and estates contain a gold mine of biographical information of influential Mennonites. In his research Huebert consults rare newspapers, family genealogies, and other archival documents that detail the Russian Mennonite experience. Often his published work has become the best – sometimes only – major resource on the individual, which is why GAMEO was so interested in Huebert's research.

Huebert is thankful that GAMEO was interested in his research. His aim has always been to "help people gain a better understanding of Mennonite history and in many cases their own family history. The partnering with GAMEO will help make that happen" said Huebert in a phone interview.

GAMEO's management board is equally grateful for this open access to this significant body of research. "It is actually quite remarkable to be offered such a wonderful resource" says GAMEO's managing editor Sam Steiner, based in Waterloo, Ontario. "We hope this will prompt other compilers of biographical and congregational data to consider a similar donation," Steiner went on to say. Huebert's materials will be edited according to the GAMEO editorial guidelines and uploaded over the next year.

Huebert's next project is to document Mennonite involvement in health care in Russia. He has already started his research, uncovering names of trained doctors, nurses, midwives, and other medical personnel. One valuable source of information is what he calls "parking lot" research. Connecting with people one-on-one in informal settings such as the church parking lot is a great source of information. "It is surprising what comes out of the wood work" he exclaimed. When not in the archives or at his computer writing, Dr. Huebert is busy



Dr. Helmut Huebert Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz

stamping out disease from his Winnipeg orthopaedic clinic.

GAMEO had its origins with the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada in 1996. The print version of the five-volume Mennonite *Encyclopedia* was entered and edited into the searchable on line version. The project has outgrown its Canadian roots and in 2005 became a project of Mennonite historical societies in Canada and the United States, as well as Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite World Conference. The work continues to be done by the volunteer editorial boards and writers. It is freely available at www.gameo.org. There are now over 1,800 contributors and 14,500 articles in GAMEO which seeks to provide "... Reliable information on Anabaptist-related (Amish, Mennonite, Hutterite, Brethren in Christ) topics..." The encyclopedia hopes to make available multi-lingual entries in the future. If you would like donate information or funds to the GAMEO project please contact Sam Steiner at admin@gameo.org.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 12)

Mennonites whose names can be found among those arrested in 1937 and very often simply never seen again. That comes to just under 2000 persons on 156 pages with as much data as could be readily located. Twenty nine mini biographies, in many cases including photos, highlight further the human dimension of persons appearing in this directory of pathos and astounding sample of what went on during that fateful year alone.

In his usual wide-ranging consultation of relevant sources the author brings one kind of focus to the deathly fallout of the Stalin period in terms of human cost to one community of many which were affected in similar ways. The book is meant to be a memorial, a monument if you will, to these folks, along with hundreds, indeed, thousands of others whose names must remain on other lists, if they have come to be recorded at all.

An extensive introduction to the "perpetrators" and brief history of the period of the purges helps to set the stage for the story which remains a sketch, one could say because to detail such a saga fully would take untold volumes – and there are those still at work in the former Soviet Union who have taken up that bigger task in the work of **Memorial** (persecuted even yet) which goes on to this day.

One must take time to peruse this work, not in a rushed manner, to get the full impact of what is presented here. It needs to be stressed that many should undertake this perusal – the memorial must be added to as much as possible as the years go on. These people must be remembered, and the world at large warned once more, that "it must not happen again".

John Horsch Mennonite History Essay Contest

The Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee invites student scholars at the high school, college and university, and graduate school and seminary levels to submit research papers on topics related to Mennonite and Anabaptist history.

Deadline – June 15, 2010

For further details available at: W: www.mennoniteusa.org/history

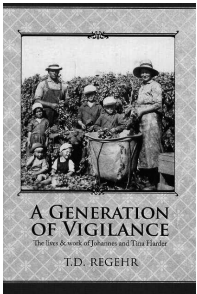
MC USA Historical Committee
1700 S. Main St., Goshen, IN 46526

Toll-free: 866-866-2872 x 23080
E-mail: history@mennoniteusa.org

Book Reviews

T.D. Regehr, *A Generation of Vigilance: The lives and work of Johannes and Tina Harder* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2009) 334 pp.

*Reviewed by Esther Epp-Tiessen,
Winnipeg.*



Ted Regehr's latest book is a fascinating exploration of the lives of twentieth-century MB leaders Johannes and Tina Harder of Yarrow BC. But it is much more than a biographical account. It is also an insightful analysis of the faith and church life of a particular community of Russian Mennonite immigrants and how they sought to begin anew in Canada.

Johannes Harder and Tina Rempel met when she came to be a matron at the orphanage run by Johannes' parents in Grossweide, Molotschna. They married in 1922 and two years later emigrated to Canada. Beginning in Ontario, they moved westward, province by province, until they found a home in Yarrow BC in 1930. These years were extremely difficult, as the Harders lost infant twins, and struggled to find work. In Yarrow they finally settled into a life of dairy farming to pay the bills, while devoting themselves to the work of the church.

Johannes was soon called as leader of the young Mennonite Brethren congregation. Tina served the church in informal ways, while supporting Johannes and his ministry. The church grew rapidly under their leadership, becoming one of the largest MB congregations in North America. Johannes' gifts of preaching, teaching, counseling and organizing drew him into sustained involvement with MB home and foreign missions and other conference initiatives. The Harders served briefly at Black Creek MB Church before retiring to Clearbrook in the 1960s. Johannes died in 1967 at the age of 64; Tina lived until 1991 and reached the age of 100.

The central reality in Johannes and Tina's lives was their devotion to Christ and to the MB church. This faith expressed itself in a profound trust in God, a fervent prayer life, and a level of sacrificial living that later generations would find incomprehensible. Regehr argues that the Harders' faith shaped

many people for the good, but it also turned some people away from the church. Sadly, the Harders believed that the ways of the MB church were the only true way. They insisted that all believers undergo radical conversion experiences and be baptized by immersion (Tina requested re-baptism for this reason). The Harders eschewed cooperation with other Christians, even other Mennonites, in educational or mission efforts.

Both Johannes and Tina also demanded a church "without spot or wrinkle" and they were vigilant in ensuring the "saved" were kept from sin. Wearing make-up, attending theatres, watching television, reading novels or comics, swimming at public beaches, as well as a whole host of other temptations were deemed "of the world" and therefore strictly off-limits. Regehr notes that Johannes mellowed in his views later in life; Tina evidently did not. The Harders' perfectionist expectations of themselves and others created barriers with younger generations, including their own children, and eventually worked against the mission of the church.

Regehr makes sure to portray the positive contribution of the Harders' leadership. But he is clearly critical of the kind of rigid vigilance that they practised. He claims that the Harders confused the essence of the Christian faith with the old world values and ideals, and that they tried too hard to replicate Russian MB traditions on Canadian soil. There is much to commend this argument. However, it doesn't adequately address some of the distorted notions that the Harders held, for instance, about sexuality and the body, or the crippling sense of guilt that plagued Tina's life.

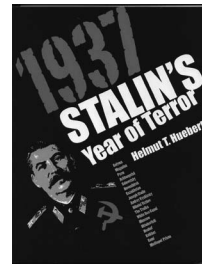
Moreover, Regehr fails to acknowledge something which the Harders likely understood but did not articulate very helpfully – namely, that the church is called to a life of nonconformity to the values of individualist capitalist society ("the world"). He doesn't ask whether the Harders and their MB church might have continued to nurture some of the strengths of their tradition – community, mutual accountability, simplicity of lifestyle – without resorting to the legalism that turned so many away. Could the church have embodied and proclaimed Jesus' call to radical discipleship and nonconformity in a more life-giving and inviting way?

Regehr has done an excellent job of placing the story of Johannes and Tina Harder into the larger context of an

immigrant people building a new life after significant trauma and upheaval. The book has a number of minor irritants: the photographs are too small and the section on mission rather long (a full quarter of the book). Nevertheless, *A Generation of Vigilance* is well researched and carefully written and it makes a very important contribution to understanding the Canadian MB church of the twentieth century.

Helmut T. Huebert, *1937: Stalin's Year of Terror* (Winnipeg, MB: Springfield Publishers, 2009), pb., 282 pp (8 1/2 x 11 format).

*Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein,
former director, Mennonite Heritage
Centre.*



The years of terror (there were more than one) directed by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union form an episode of horror hardly duplicated elsewhere in history.

In a sense the story is well-known. But when it comes to degrees of suffering, the sweep of destruction of innocent persons, and the scope in numbers of those who died, there will always remain an untold dimension to the story. It seemed to leave hardly a family untouched, and no group within the larger population spared.

Mennonites by the thousands fell victim also to the purges and almost genocidal ferocity of the imprisonments, tortures and killings that marked the year singled out here for research, and the depredations of the Soviet populace during the 25 years of Stalin's dictatorship from the late 1920s on to the time of his death in 1953. The author's effort to pinpoint the Mennonite experience by naming names, and depicting representative lives grimly terminated, gives the picture a sense of reality which sweepingly huge numbers in the millions cannot quite accomplish.

In the Mennonite community, as the author has put it, "being a member of a religious group, being a part of a racial minority, being hard working and therefore not the poorest, being a member of a group where education was valued was enough to be condemned as 'enemy of the people' by the greatest enemy the Russian people ever had."

The volume includes a master list of all
(cont'd on p. 11)