

Mennonite Historian



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Photo: courtesy of W. J. Kehler, Altona, Manitoba.

The Hochstadt Bergthaler church building was constructed in 1897-8, and served as such till it became a schoolhouse of the Kleinstadt school district around 1912. A cairn recalling the 1903 Conference was erected at this site in July this year.

The Hochstadt Conference of 1903

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada belongs to the frontier and church growth story of the western prairies. Immigrant Mennonites of the 1870's brought a concern for spiritual nurture and fellowship to their new communities in this region. The acquisition of "reserved" lands had definitely aided the development of contiguous settlements, but the continued westward dispersion of families in search of more land made the question of "firming up" congregational groupings an important issue at that time.

The decision of the Manitoba **Bergthaler Gemeinde** to send two ministers, Johann M. Friesen and Benjamin Ewert, to Rosthern in July, 1902, resulted from this concern. Wilhelm Rempel, a correspondent for **Mennonitische Rundschau**, noted the arrival of Ewert and Friesen on July 11. He also mentioned their preaching activities on Sunday two days later, and the plan to preach at Rosthern. The men gave much time to

visiting Bergthaler members who had moved to Saskatchewan from southern Manitoba during the past decade or so.

On Friday, July 18, at Tiefengrund, the Manitoba delegates met with seven or eight representatives of the Rosenorter Gemeinde to discuss relationships between the Manitoba Bergthaler and the local Saskatchewan Mennonite congregations. James E. Sprunger, present at this gathering held in Aeltester Peter Regier's garden, called this "the first Mennonite ministers' conference in western Canada". Historian Johann G. Rempel later described the occasion as "the laying of foundations for the Conference of Mennonites in Canada".

Specifically the visitors hoped to promote good rapport between the two churches in order to ease the transfer of Manitoba Mennonites to Saskatchewan Rosenorter congregations. Christian education, particularly the need for Mennonite **Fortbildungsschulen** (i.e. high schools) was discussed as well.

In closing, the participants agreed to meet again the following year. Those would be the first general sessions of a new church community, named **Die Konferenz der Mennoniten im mittleren Kanada**, and bringing together the nine worshipping groups of the Bergthaler Mennonites in Manitoba with the six congregations of the **Rosenorter Mennoniten Gemeinde** of Saskatchewan. A Bergthaler "Filial" (affiliate) at Herbert, Saskatchewan, made immediate contacts with the Conference as well.

The projected conference materialized on July 20-21, 1903, at the Bergthaler church of Hochstadt, a rural Mennonite community located about three miles northeast of Altona, Manitoba. Initially, settlers had come to this area from the East Reserve around 1876. The first church of this community was erected twenty-two years later when the Bergthaler **Lehrdienst** decided to build a new church in or closer to Altona. For a time Hochstadt was one of the **Hauptversammlungen** (main congregations) of the Bergthaler people.

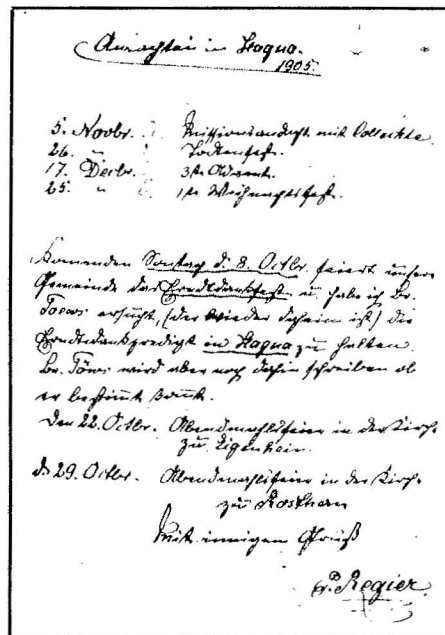
Fifteen to twenty persons attended this conference session. With a few exceptions these were ministers from the two participating churches. Aeltester Peter Regier of the Saskatchewan Rosenorter Gemeinde, just back from a trip to Europe, was apparently unable to attend. There is also no reference in the minutes to Johann Funk, the aging Aeltester of the Bergthaler church, who had, however, himself visited Saskatchewan Mennonite communities a decade earlier. Gerhard Epp, a minister from the Rosenorter group was there, and Rev. James E. Sprunger, a General Conference Home Missions worker from Berne, Indiana, who had recently spent time in Saskatchewan Mennonite churches, attended also. Visitors included a representative from the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church of Manitoba, and Rev. J.W. Kliever from Wadsworth, Ohio. The newly-appointed Bergthaler assistant Aeltester, Jakob Hoepfner, of Winkler, Manitoba, was appointed chairman, and Benjamin Ewert, of Gretna, served as the first secretary.

Most of the time was given to the presentation and discussion of papers on Christian discipleship and spiritual growth. Heinrich Ewert, principal at the Mennonite Educational Institute in Gretna, began with a statement on the purposes and uses of a Conference. He noted the benefits of nurturing mutual love, the fostering of togetherness, mutual edification, and improved possibilities to do God's work with greater effect. After singing a hymn, the group discussed this presentation, and heard another paper prepared by David Toews of Rosthern and read by Sprunger in the absence of its author. In writing on "How can we offer a spiritual ministry to our scattered members more fruitfully?", Toews recommended the building of churches even for small congregations, suggesting that frequently this did not happen soon enough. Someone called "exemplary" the Ontario Mennonites who had sent a minister with members moving to Alberta several years ago. The helpful functions of itinerant ministers, and a church paper, were underscored as well.

Resolutions to set up a church publication committee and to support the Saskatchewan ministry of James Sprunger through local collections resulted from these deliberations.

Tuesday morning business began with Benjamin Ewert's paper on "The Value of Printed Congregational Regulations", a point of view positively endorsed by the delegates; they agreed to recommend it to their local congregations. Jacob Hoepfner took on a more difficult, but very practical issue, "Is it contrary to Scriptures, and our conscience to accept public offices, and to vote?" He admitted finding few Scriptures to oppose political involvement, but remained convinced that both forms of participation should be strongly discouraged. An exception could be made, he felt, with participation in local municipal politics, especially when this was entirely in Mennonite hands, with little direct interference from the state.

There was, wrote Ewert in his minutes, no unanimity on the subject. "Both sides of the question had vigorous proponents," he observed. For Manitoba Mennonites the question in fact had immediate relevance. In recent Conservative-Liberal debates on the school issue, two Mennonite teachers, Heinrich Ewert and John M. Friesen, found themselves deeply implicated on opposite sides of the political fence. The discussion was not extended beyond the morning, but all congregations were counselled to give the matter more serious thought. On the whole it was felt that voting needed to be left to the individual conscience; the public office issue would remain unresolved.



The day's sessions closed with two other papers. Rev. Gerhard Epp's on "Should members of our fellowship take each other to court?" and one by Rev. John M. Friesen entitled "What is our position on worldly amusements such as frequenting taverns, dancing and gambling, etc.?" To Epp's question the Conference responded with a decisive "No". It also expressed strong opposition to involvement in worldly amusements described in Friesen's paper.

Among the nine closing resolutions were the following: 1) the presented papers (Referate) shall be published in the

Andachtsliste

für die Bergthal Gemeinde, Manitoba.

Datum	Frederick	Gretna	Gretna	Frederick	Altona	W. Friesen	Wm. G. Gies	Robert	John Friesen
1906.									
Nov. 4.	9	6	1	8	5	2			
" 11.	1	6		5	2	8			9
" 18.	2	9	5	1	8	6			
" 25.	5	6		2	9	1			8
Dec. 2.	9	1	6	5	2	8			
" 9.	9	6		1	8	5			2
" 16.	1	6	9	8	2	5			
" 23.	6	9		1	8	2			5
" 25.		6	1	5	2	8			
" 26.	9		6	1	8				2
" 30.		6	1	5	9	2	8		
1907.									
Jan. 1.	9	6	1	5	2				8

1—Junt; 2—Hoepfner; 5—Friesen; 6—B. Ewert; 8—Hildebrand; 9—Hoepfner.

Bundesbote, a General Conference periodical 2), the congregations shall be urged to take up an offering to assist in building a church at Rosthern, 3), a committee shall be appointed to prepare a proposal regarding the way in which the conference should continue to operate (really a constitution committee), 4) the elected officers, Hoepfner and Ewert, shall remain in office till the next sessions, 5) the Conference shall meet again the following year at Eigenheim, Saskatchewan, and 6) a special "Thank-you" shall go to the hosts at Hochstadt, as well as the persons presenting papers. Greetings of the Conference were sent with non-delegates returning to their home congregations.

The constitution committee included Aeltester Peter Regier, Gerhard Epp, both of the Rosenorter Gemeinde, together with Heinrich Ewert, John M. Friesen and Franz Sawatzky of the Bergthaler Gemeinde. The first Conference publications committee, also appointed at these sessions, included David Toews, Saskatchewan, along with Heinrich Ewert and John M. Friesen, both of Manitoba.

In looking back fifty years later, Conference historian Johann G. Rempel reflected positively on the nature and outcome of the 1903 meetings. "We do note," he pointed out, "the practical dimension of everything that was done. A committee was asked to prepare a constitution (accepted the following year) which has remained in effect essentially to the present day. The Conference was originally formed to nurture the spiritual fellowship of several Mennonite groups, helping them to work courageously in the service of God." Clear goals were set, the congregational emphasis was underlined in the constitution, a firm base was laid for home missions, and a strong stand was taken against those worldly influences which would weaken Christian love to one another.

This summer at Gretna, the Conference commemorates its founding seventy-five years ago. It will be fitting to thank God especially for persons with vision and energy, all those who helped chart a program which the Conference of Mennonites in Canada can still support today.

Lawrence Klippenstein

Sources:

The 1903 minutes of **Die Konferenz der Mennoniten im mittleren Kanada**; J. E. Sprunger report in **Christlicher Bundesbote**, Aug. 14, 1902, p. 6; Wm. Rempel report in **Mennonitische Rundschau**, July 30, 1902, p. 3; Johann G. Rempel **Fuenfzig Jahre Konferenzbestrebungen 1902-1952, Erster Teil**, Konferenz der Mennoniten in Kanada, 1952, CMC archives document collections.



Peter J. Wiens and his wife, Justina Janzen Wiens, with their children: (clockwise, from far left) Justina and Abram Wiens, Cornie and Katharina (Born) Wiens, Peter and Elizabeth (Warkentine) Wiens, John and Helena (Fast) Wiens, twin daughters, Mary and Katharina. Katharina married the late J. J. Hildebrand, of Winnipeg, Man. Missing from the picture is Peter J. Wiens' oldest daughter, Helena, who married Jacob Johann Wiens of Omsk, and became part of the Petersbrueder Church. In 1897, Peter J. Wiens moved to Omsk, Siberia, where he set up an International Harvester machinery dealership as well as a general store. According to J. J. Hildebrand, Peter J. Wiens was the first Mennonite to settle in Siberia. Materials about the Wiens family have recently been published by Irene Friesen Petkau. Her two studies are entitled "Genealogy of Wiens" (1978) and a term paper "The Wiens Family of Omsk" (1978). Both are available at the CMC archives.

Photo: courtesy of Irene Petkau.

Dennis Stoesz and Les Derksen have almost completely indexed the 6000 item photo and slide collection at the CMC Archives. A number of other Mennonite photo collections have been indexed as well.

Recent researchers at the archives included Ruth Vogt, Winnipeg, for Mennonite Art and Music Festival display materials; Gary Franz and Carlyle Groves, Newton, Kansas, shooting some footage for a new Mennonite film being produced by the General Conference Heritage Commission; Dr. Adam Giesinger, Winnipeg, working on Germans in Russia history; Doreen Klassen, Winnipeg, for an MA paper related to Low German songs; Joe Penner, Steinbach, for material on the Kliever family; Bill Janzen, Ottawa, on church state relations for a Ph.D. dissertation; Marianne Janzen, on the Heinrichs family in Russia; Lois Barrett, Wichita, Kansas, working on a history of the Commission of Home Missions in the General Conference Mennonite Church, and Dr. Bernard Klassen of the University of Manitoba researching a book on Mennonites of Manitoba.

A list of surplus books and periodicals for sale at the archives is available upon request.

New Acquisitions At CMC Archives

Johann Poettcker memoirs. Courtesy of Dr. Henry Poettcker, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Two handwritten notebooks of 1905-1914 period in south Russia. Duplicates.

Norah Lambert diaries of trip to south Russia, 1912. Courtesy of Robert Kreider, North Newton, Kansas. Duplicate.

K. H. Neufeld correspondence in Manitoba Mennonite Youth Organization papers. Courtesy of Gerhard Ens, Winnipeg, Man. Two folders.

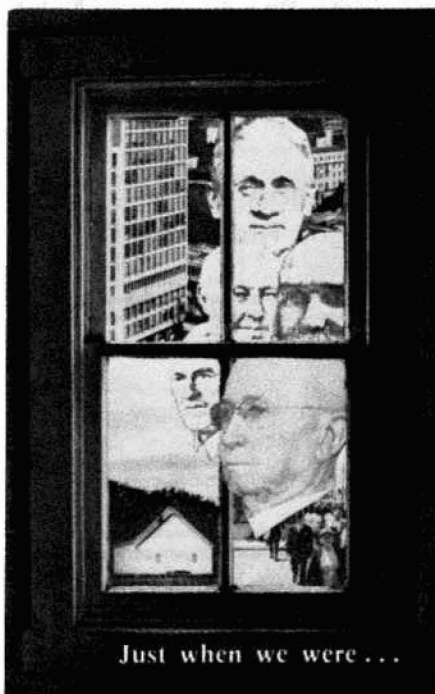
Microfilm copy of the entire series of **Der Mitarbeiter**, 1906-1934. Negative. One roll.

Reel tape record of C. P. Toews descendants reunion at Kleefeld, Aug. 5, 1973. Courtesy of Joe Penner, Steinbach, Man.

Cornelius J. Enns memoirs from Fuerstenland, south Russia. Courtesy of Agatha Ratzlaff, Clearbrook, B.C. Typed copy. One page.

E. Wuest. **Drei Weihnachtspredigten** Berdjansk, South Russia, 1953, and **Zehn Passionspredigten**. Berdjansk, south Russia. 1853. Courtesy of Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas. Duplicates.

Mattias Schmidt, ed. **Schulblatt fuer die deutschen Kolonien in Russland**. Oct., 1912 - Mar., 1913. Monthly. Originals. Courtesy of John P. Dyck, Springstein, Man.



Just When We Were... is a 75th anniversary Conference souvenir album published by the History-archives Committee. In paperback it graphically depicts the Conference story in 60 pages of photos, minute excerpts, comments, and interpretation. Write to **Mennonite Historian**, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man. for your copy. Cost is \$6.00.

Archives Activities

The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization papers form one of the largest manuscript collections at the CMC Archives. They have recently been catalogued and accessioned by Marg Franz, librarian at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. A detailed inventory is available upon request.

The first deposit of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) records, dated 1964-1970, is being microfilmed by Esther Epp. Completion is scheduled for July.

PIONEER DAYS

August 4-7
MENNONITE
VILLAGE
MUSEUM

1½ miles north
of Steinbach

Friday, August 4

**Pancake Breakfast sponsored
by Lions Club** 7:00 a.m.

**Parade down Steinbach's
Main Street** 9:30 a.m.

Opening Ceremonies
1:00 p.m. at the Museum

RCMP Musical Ride 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 5

Old Fashioned Hog Slaughtering
(weather permitting), 10:00 a.m.

Antique Car Parade and Show
11:30 a.m.
beginning downtown Steinbach and ending up at the museum.

Quilt Auction
2:00 p.m.

Sunday, August 6

Family Friendship Day

Pioneer Costume Parade 2:00 p.m.
- prizes given for the best Pioneer costume in three categories
ladies, couples and families.
- anyone dressed in pioneer fashion admitted free

**Church Service with Asian
Mennonite Choir** 10:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Monday, August 7

Giant Auction Sale
with quilts, antiques and new donated items 1:00 p.m.

Horseshoe Championship
Saturday and Sunday

●
Crokinole Tournament
Saturday, Sunday and Monday

●
Steam Club Demonstrations
Threshing and Log Sawing
Blacksmithing
Bread-baking, Butter churning,
Spinning, Weaving and others

All Days except Sunday

●
Mennonite Food
Mennonite Art Show
All Days

●
Free Ox and
Horse Wagon Rides
All days

ADMISSION

ADULTS	\$2.00
STUDENTS	\$1.00
PENSIONERS	\$1.00
CHILDREN	
UNDER 12	FREE

The Museum Committee is not responsible for
accidents on grounds.

The material on this page is provided
by the Mennonite Village Museum at
Steinbach, Manitoba.



Two recent Mennonite publications are titled **The Fateful Years, 1913-1923** and **Wenn der Farmer Schriftleiter Wird**. The first depicts the Mennonite experience in Russia during the wars of that period, and the second is a series of editorials first published by the author as the long-time editor of **Der Bote**. The books cost \$4.50 and \$7.00 respectively. Order from the authors, Gerhard Lohrenz, at 261 Renfrew, Winnipeg, Man., and Peter B. Wiens, 1640-9th Ave. N., Saskatoon, Sask. S7K 3A1.

Crystal City Reunion

by Irene Friesen Petkau

Over 200 persons met at Crystal City, June 17, in order to remember the decade of 1924-1934 when their families settled in the Crystal City area.

The reunion, organized by a group of local persons, was attended by representatives of each of the Mennonite families who moved to the area in the decade following 1924. The morning and afternoon program included worship, and reminiscences by Rev. Gerhard Bock, Anna Friesen and other first generation Canadians.

In November, 1924, six families, recently emigrated from Russia, purchased the McKittrick farm south of Crystal City. They were the Gerhard Bock, Gerhard and Sara Friesen, Cornelius and Anna Friesen, William Peters, Peter and Katherine Falk and Frank Janzen families. Each family was allotted a ½ section of land. That first winter was lived communally in the large McKittrick house, and the following spring, separate homes were established.

In 1928 the group was joined by the Hildebrand and Klassen families, and in the 30's by the Vogts, Loewens, Siemens, Funks and Neustaedters.

The Depression years saw a dispersion from the Rosebud district nucleus as farms were purchased from English farmers in the Clearwater, Snowflake and Purves districts. Dan Neustaedter, Clearwater farmer retired

in Winkler, recalled that day he helped his parents move onto the McLaren farm at Clearwater in 1930. As the new family was unloading its wagonload of possessions, a buggy, occupied by a man and his young son, pulled into the yard. The buggy stopped beside the house and the visitor, turning to the son beside him, asked, "Froag moal auf de Mennoniten send." The Neustaedters were delighted to be welcomed by someone who spoke their language.

From the beginning, the Mennonite families demonstrated a willingness to send their children to the public school. Local school trustees, expecting the Mennonites to establish a private school, were unprepared when student enrollment doubled overnight. In 1925 a new school had to be built at Rosebud.

Rev. William Peters, who had been a teacher and preacher in Russia, continued to serve the Crystal City group in these capacities. He is credited for initiating the Sunday School and Jugendverein, as well as for giving leadership to congregational singing and the church choir.

No church was built until 1948. Up to that time worship services were held in different homes. "Having the worship at our farm," recalled George Friesen, Crystal City, "meant special cleaning up. Saw horses and planks were set up in the house as pews." In the winter visiting evangelists such as A. G. Neufeld, Ohm Franz Enns and Franz

Sawatzky held meetings in the homes. "But faith was lived, rarely spoken." These stoic farm people from the Chortitza colony in Russia were reticent to speak of personal religious experiences.

Neil Maxwell, long-time local businessman, acknowledged his appreciation for the richness of the Mennonite faith and life. Commenting on the early years of Mennonite settlement in the Crystal City area, he said, "You were at the bottom of the ladder financially, but at the top of the ladder in religious terms."

The prosperity of the present Mennonite farming community at Crystal City is a witness to many years of thriftiness and hard work. One participant at the reunion voiced a caution to the youth that they not be like Esau, willing to sell a birthright (roots), for the sake of something that smells good. The contemporary Mennonite witness is dependent on continued sensitivity to the physical needs of fellow human beings, and to spiritual faithfulness demonstrated by a life of simple Christ-likeness.

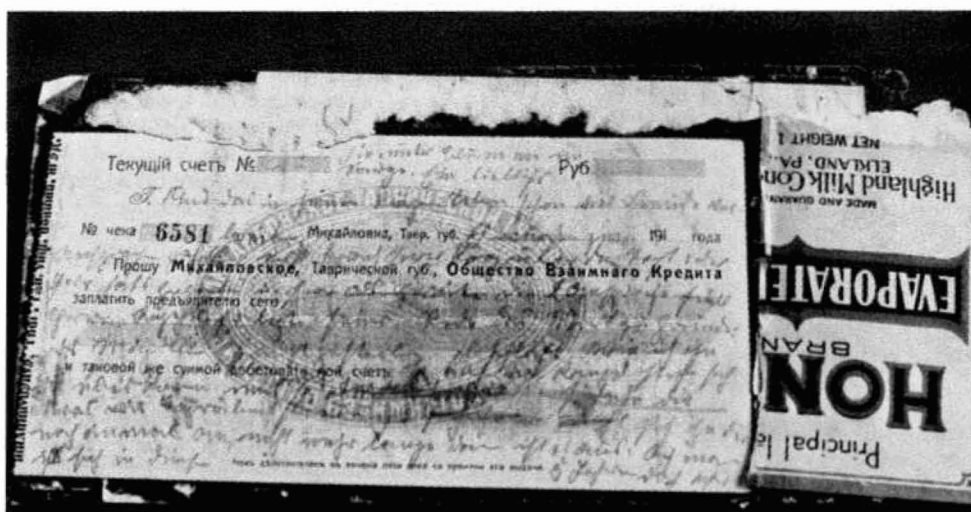
Forsteier - CO Reunion



Photo: courtesy of Gerhard Ens, Winnipeg, Man.

These three one-time **Forsteiers** from south Russia, now living in Canada, met at a recent reunion of Mennonite alternative service men who worked in forestry camps and hospitals during the two World Wars. Seen here at Camp Assiniboia, Winnipeg, are (l-r) G. G. Dueck, Springstein, Man., J. J. Braun, Ste. Elizabeth, Man., and P. Neufeld, Bois-sevain, Man.

A graphic portrayal of the Mennonite CO experience in Canada during World War II is being prepared for publication in fall. Pre-publication orders may be sent to David J. Braun, Steinbach, Man. Cost is \$6.00. for a 120-page paperback in several colors. Enclose to order.



This is a sample of the pages that make up Anna Baerg's diary in its original form. The milk was sent by American Mennonite Relief. A similar diary from the same period was kept by Gerhard P. Schroeder, now of Lodi, California. It was utilized to publish his book, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment*, dealing with experiences of the Russian Revolution and subsequent years.

Photo: courtesy of Lydia Penner, MCC (Can.)

When The Dead Speak. . .

by Clara K. Dyck

How is it that a little known, hunchbacked maiden lady can suddenly share herself with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of her spiritual descendants, years after her own death?

Writing on scraps of paper, discarded cheque blanks and peeled off Mennonite Central Committee milk can labels a snatch of Mennonite history of terror and of God's omnipotent control emerged from the stubby pencil and creative mind of Anna Baerg during the turbulent years of the Russian revolution. Through it all, the author's courage, faith and sense of humor prevailed:

His majesty, King Winter, has proclaimed his nine-month truce to the world and has mobilized his troops. At 9 a.m. the "White Army" under the leadership of Commandant von Frost, crossed the borders of Domain Earth and stationed his troops at all strategic points. . .

The Anarchists threw bombs into a cellar where about 30 men were hiding, they tore them all to bits. These monsters had also planned a bloodbath for last night, but that's when God took over and they didn't escape their just retribution. . .

Outside cannons are thundering and inside Heinz is sick with convulsions. (Typhus is everywhere. ckd). . . Ten souls were baptized in the river yesterday. Why are there so many opinions and splits in this respect? Why can't we agree?

Our colony is almost cleared of Bolsheviks now. Gross Tokmak was taken by 300 Mennonites and 200 Kossacks with two tanks. . . The war has shattered our non-resistance. And now there is no turning back. . .

Amid the d-r-r-r-oning of the planes circling overhead, came the sudden crash of the bombs. . . Many killed and wounded. Three

of one family killed instantly. And all this in error for. . . the ("White") bombers had been misinformed and thought they were destroying the "Reds" . . . Suddenly we heard . . . a fearful bellowing on the street. The cowherd, forsaken by its herdsman, came storming home, seeking shelter. . . Will this vicious cycle of Red and White occupation in our village ever end?

Many, even in our village, have no bread or flour left. . . Yes, hunger hurts. And one need not be surprised that some resort to desperate means. . . Hunger has pressed its seal on many a face. Some places they are already eating cats and dogs. . . Everywhere there is only one theme: eating has become the focal point of life. Remarkable what an influence food has on the entire being of a person. Lord, let us not despair!

What a jubilation! (Food had arrived, i.e. American Mennonite Relief). Just like at Christmas. We had dumplings for dinner. Not fine noodles made with milk, no, fat water dumplings with a bit of milk-gravy and vinegar on top and a tiny piece of black bread besides and it tasted like the finest of delicatessen. . .

Anna Baerg's relatives have granted MCC (Canada) permission to use her writings, "to the glory of God", in accordance with her own fervent desire. We are grateful for their consent.

The diary has now been transposed from Gothic into modern German script of 582 single-spaced pages. A similar volume of Anna Baerg's poetry is being collected.

Editors of *Der Bote* and *Die Mennonitische Post* have recently begun publishing serialized excerpts from the Anna Baerg diary.

New Publications

Augsburger, Myron. *Pilgrim Aflame*. Kitchener, Ont. and Scottsdale, Pa., 1978. \$2.45. Paperback reprint of the 1967 edition. Tells the story, in historical novel form, of an early Anabaptist leader, Michael Sattler.

Dyck, C.J. and Maynard Shelly, eds. *Mennonite History and Mennonite Writings*. Book suggestions for church libraries, Newton, Kansas, 1978. Pamphlet. Contains about 200 titles. Order from Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 67114 for 35¢ a copy.

Klaassen, Walter and William Klassen, eds. *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*. Scottsdale, Pa., 1978. 612 pp. Hardcover. \$27.45. The second volume in the series, "Classics of the Reformation."

Klaassen, Walter. *Michael Gaismair. Revolutionary and Reformer*. Leiden, The Netherlands. 1978. 156 pp. Vol. XXIII in the series "Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought", ed. by Heiko Oberman.

Wenger, John C. *How Mennonites Came To Be; What Mennonites Believe; The Way to a New Life; The Way of Peace; Disciples of Jesus*. Scottsdale, Pa. 1977. About 70 pp. each. Paperbound. 80¢ each.

Willms, Albert, ed. *Welcome Inn - VS Inner City Ministry*. Hamilton, Ontario, 1977. Paperback. 84 pp. \$4.00. Order from Welcome Inn, 132 Wood St. East, Hamilton, Ont. L8L 3Y9.

Notes

Mrs. Marianne Janzen is willing to do research on Manitoba Heinrichs families for those interested. Contact: Box 2, Grp. 7, S.S. 1, Winnipeg, Man. R2P 0G5.

Note: Research on the Heinrichs family is being carried out also by Viola Heinrichs Siemens Andreas, R.R. 1, Fall River, Kansas 67047.

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A full-time or part-time position is available to a person able to serve as archivist of the Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania Historical Library and Archives. The latter is located at the Christopher Dock Mennonite High School campus near Lansdale, Pa.

Persons wishing further information may write to:

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East Petersburg, PA 17520
Home phone: (717) 569-3460