

# Mennonite Historian



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*Peter J. Hamm, of Hochstadt, Manitoba (left), and Ken Funk, Winnipeg, Manitoba (right) unveiled the Conference cairn at Hochstadt, Manitoba in July. Hamm, aged ninety now, has been a resident of the area all his life, and Ken is a direct descendant of Aeltester Peter Regier who founded the Rosenorter Mennonite Church near Rosthern, Saskatchewan, around 1896. The plaque recalls the coming of the first settlers to the Hochstadt area in about 1876, and the first sessions of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1903.*

## The Conference Experience - 75 years

By Dr. Rodney Sawatzky

When Peter confessed that Jesus was indeed the Christ, Jesus said to him:

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the power of death shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18)

On this very same rock the Conference of Mennonites in Canada was founded in 1903 and the power of death, we pray, shall not prevail against it.

This rock which commemorates the faithfulness and foresight of the founders of the Conference in 1903 calls us to remember the church throughout the ages - to the very beginnings - to the bedrock - to Peter and his kin.

This rock reminds us of Peter, Paul, Justin Martyr, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory the Great, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Conrad Grebel, Menno Simons, William Amer, John Smythe, George Fox, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Bernhard Warkentin and many thousands - millions more, both renowned and little known.

These are our people, and these were the people who stood upon the rock together with those pioneers of 1903 - they stood with Jacob Hoepfner, John M. Friesen, Benjamin Ewert, Henry H. Ewert, John Funk, Peter Regier, David Toews, Gerhard G. Epp, Frank Sawatzky, Henry Hildebrand, J. E. Sprunger, J. W. Kliever and several others.

This rock points us to the great tradition which stood behind that first conference of 1903. That conference, however, was the product of a very particular context. A context of a new world - the Canadian prairies - and the attempt of a migrant and migrating Christian people to come to terms with that new world.

It was in 1874 that a company of brave Mennonites set sail from far off Russia to seek settlement in the mosquito-infested, rocky soil of the East Reserve in Manitoba. The risks and uncertainties were not greater than the fear of losing the faith if they stayed in Russia.

By 1876 the West Reserve - an area largely west of this rock - became the home of later immigrants from Russia and of those unhappy with conditions east of the Red River. If the East Reserve was more rocky, the West Reserve was much more barren. Hardly a tree marked the landscape from the Red to the Pembina Hills near Morden. Yet the Mennonite pioneers of Manitoba began the arduous task of creating a new home out of this wilderness.

These Mennonite pioneers who successfully battled the unbroken prairies, were successful in maintaining unity, in maintaining a common face towards the world around them. Even among the most conservative of Russian Mennonites were more progressive and more conservative wings. Those more progressive in their advocacy of education and in their willingness to adapt to North American political, economic and even religious styles took the name Bergthaler. This small minority group led by Bishop Johann Funk found itself separated from the Chortitzer church of the East Reserve, and the Sommerfelder and Reinlaender (Old Colony) groups of the West Reserve.

Near the end of the century as land became less available and more expensive in Manitoba, the Northwest Territories opened up particularly with the help of the CPR. Some Bergthaler people together with Old Colony brethren found their way to the Rosthern area. Here they settled near the site where only ten years earlier Louis Riel and his forces were defeated at Batoche.

These Manitobans were not alone in the  
(cont. on p. 2)

Mennonite settlement of the Territories. Just one year after arriving from Prussia Bishop Peter Regier in 1894 led in the formation of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church. This new church brought together recently arrived immigrants from Prussia, Russia, as well as U.S.A., who had settled in the Tiefengrund-Eigenheim-Rosthern area.

Manitoba Bergthaler leaders encouraged their people now in the North-West Territories to join this Rosenorter church. Some seemingly were willing to comply only if their ties with their Bergthaler brethren were not entirely cut. It was this need to accommodate and to minister to the scattered Mennonite settlers on the Canadian prairies which initially inspired the creation of the Conference of Mennonites of Middle Canada. That first conference brought together the Bergthalers of Manitoba and Rosenorters of what was to be Saskatchewan in a common mission.

The meeting in 1902 in Peter Regier's Tiefengrund garden set the agenda, and in 1903 here in the Bergthaler Church at Hochstadt the first conference took place.

If serving the scattered tribes of the household of Menno was the initial impetus for this Conference, the issues dealt with from the beginning were much more varied. True, at the first Canadian Conference Jacob Hoepfner and David Toews spoke of the need for a conference, but Jacob Hoepfner also addressed the question of Mennonites voting and seeking political office. Beyond that Benjamin Ewert endorsed a written church constitution, Gerhard Epp wondered about the legitimacy of going to court before seeking redress in the congregation, and John M. Friesen warned against worldly pleasures such as drinking, dancing, and gambling.

These Mennonites newly arrived on the Canadian frontier were grappling with the meaning of discipleship in their new homeland. The potential of participating in a democratic society was obviously particularly alluring, and they sought common counsel and guidance from history and Scripture for their task.

They were in conversation - a conversation between their rock and the new day. They knew their testing stone but new issues challenged them to new discernment.

The Conference gathered in 1903 both to assist in ministering to the scattered house of Menno, and to seek common direction as Christians - Mennonite Christians - in Canada.

The vast relatively open prairies of 1903 are no more. The dozen and a half, all male, mostly ordained, delegates, no longer arrive on horse-drawn buggies. Saskatchewan and Alberta now are provinces, and British Columbia and Ontario have stretched the Conference - at least a little - beyond



*Esther Andres Peters, a daughter of John Andres, a pioneer farmer at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, rings the early church bell of the Rosthern Mennonite Church which celebrated its 75th anniversary in July this past summer.*

"Middle" Canada.

We are now rich, educated, sophisticated - we are in every avenue of Canadian life. This means incredible responsibility as we seek to be the Mennonite Church in Canada. The differences 75 years later are incredible - yet the commonalities are much more basic.

The society changes, the issues change, our word to the world changes, but the rock abides forever.

We thank God for inspiring those leaders of 1903. We thank God for 75 years of unrelenting guidance and we pray God for inspiration and guidance in the future.

This rock points to the past - to that basic rock 2000 years ago. This rock points to the particular events of 1903. This rock points to the future. It symbolizes strength and

perseverance. But it does not symbolize the static. It calls for the dynamic.

It calls for the dynamic of ever anew looking to the rock for strength and guidance and ever anew allowing that rock to address the whole man, in our whole society, with the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the ongoing task of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada - as with our eyes on the past we face the future.

And Jesus said to Peter: "On this rock I will build my church, and the power of death shall not prevail against it." Amen.

*Rodney Sawatzky, formerly of Altona, Man., is a Professor of Religious Studies at Conrod Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. This talk was given at the cairn unveiling ceremony.*



*Persons like Rev. Stephen and Sally Lee (left) of the Chinese Mennonite Church in Vancouver, B.C. and Jeremiah Ross (right) leader at the Pauingassi Mennonite Church in Manitoba, are a part of the emerging new dimensions of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada today.*

## Mennonite Heritage Centre Opens

The long-awaited move to the new archives facilities of the Mennonite Heritage Centre has been completed. It climaxes a longer 45 year story of archives development in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and the more intensive aspects of that program since the Canadian Mennonite Centennial celebrations took place four years ago.

Mennonite Historical publications are located with the regular library of Canadian Mennonite Bible College in the basement of the Centre. The Conference archives are found on the main floor, with a display area attached to the latter in the public meeting sector of the building.

An important new facet of the archives as a whole is the addition of Mennonite Genealogy, Inc. material from Steinbach, Manitoba. This large collection of genealogy and family study materials was originally begun by A. A. Vogt, of Steinbach, and has been developed extensively in recent years by members of the corporation. Margaret Kroeker, executive director of Mennonite Genealogy, Inc. is expected to continue working with the materials at the new Centre.

The public is invited to an official opening on Archives Day scheduled for November 15 this fall. This day is being set aside by the Association of Canadian Archivists for emphasizing the importance of archives work throughout Canada. Special displays, films, and possibly lectures as well as other features are being scheduled for Archives Day at the Centre. Further announcements will be forthcoming.

It is hoped that the archives offices and materials will be open to public use by the end of October. Interested persons may call 1-204-888-6781, or write to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P 0M4.



This Sunday School class at Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon, Sask., recently spent a quarter studying the book **Twelve Becoming**. After reading about C.F. Klassen, the class met in an old tent in a backyard dressed in old clothes and without breakfast to try and understand what it was like to be a refugee. Their teacher, Renata Klassen, is reading the book, **Henry's Red Sea**.

A special Children's Corner in the Mennonite Heritage Centre on the campus of Canadian Mennonite Bible College will offer other opportunities to learn more about our story. The May activity on the S.S. Project Calendar helped to equip this facility.

## New Acquisitions

Diaries of Michael Klaassen, with family register of **Martin Klaassen** (Koeppenthal, South Russia) descendants. Duplicate. Courtesy of Esther Klaassen Bergen, Herbert, Sask. Also part of Michael Klaassen memoirs. Trans. by E. K. Bergen.

Diary of **Anna Baerg**, typed copy of transliteration prepared by Clara K. Dyck under MCC (Canada) auspices.

**Petter Penner** memoirs, 1 ledger. Courtesy of Mrs. Al Goossen, Regina, Sask.

Diary of **Abraham R. Friesen**, two volumes, German script. Origin: South Russia. Duplicate. Courtesy of Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Man.

Two sermons by **Aeltester Johann Funk** of Altbergthal, Southern Manitoba. Duplicates. Courtesy of Mary Dueck Jeffrey, Winnipeg, Man.

Government records re: **Metis trails** in Mennonite areas. Duplicates. Courtesy of Leonard Doell, Winnipeg, Man.

Diary of **Peter G. Friesen**, CO prisoner in Canada during WW II. Duplicate. Courtesy of P.G. Friesen, Grossisle, Man.

Photo of group of **Gutsbesitzer** in South Russia. Courtesy of Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg, Man.

Several dozen volumes of back numbers of **Manitoba Courier**. Courtesy of University of Manitoba. Some bound.

Back numbers of **Unterhaltungsblatt** (Germans in South Russia). Duplicates. Courtesy of Dr. D.G. Rempel, Menlo Park, Calif.

Collection of letters (1875-1926) related to the **John Buhr family** in southern Manitoba. Courtesy of Helen Buhr Regier, Newton, Kansas.

Back numbers of **Mennonitische Rundschau**, **Der Bote**, **Christian Living**, **Mennonitische Welt**, etc. Courtesy of Katie Peters, Winnipeg, and Rev. D.D. Klassen, Carman, Man.

Tapes on the anniversary program of the **Bergthal Mennonite Church**, Didsbury, Alta., and the Hochstadt cairn unveiling, July 8, 1978.

Photos on Mennonites in **South Russia**. Courtesy of Robert V. Peters, Winnipeg, Man.

**School registers** of Garden Valley School Division. Re schools no longer in operation. An addition to registers of Rhineland and Hanover divisions received earlier.

A film (ten minutes) related to the activities of the July sessions at Gretna, particularly the cairn unveiling. Prepared and donated by Henry Ens of Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. The program of the unveiling ceremony is also available on tape.

Several dozen books on Prussian Mennonites have recently been secured in photoduplicate through the efforts of Dr. John Friesen who spent a year researching on the subject in West Germany. A list will be made available upon request.



## The Morris - Walhalla Metis Trail

In a conversation with the late Jacob J. Guenther of Gretna, Man., I learned several years ago that the Morris-Walhalla Metis Trail crossed his father's land. It had very deep ruts where one had to drive carefully with a grass mower, and there were markers along this road. He described one as a mound with four holes (in four directions) surrounding the mound. These holes too were quite deep and had to be watched when driving over the spot. One could break a wheel or other parts of machinery used on this land.

A minute-book of the Municipality of Douglas (later part of the R.M. of Rhineland) contains the following entry from a meeting held on November 19, 1889.

*"Moved by Councillor Peter Reimer and seconded by Councillor Heinrich Dueck*

*That upon the reading of the letter from the Minister of Public Works directed to Enoch Winkler, Esq., M.P.P. dated 23 of August, 1889, the council resolve that the half-breed trail from Morris to Walhalla might be closed as the same is no longer required and in the case of travel on same it*

*would cause a great deal of damage and therefore be it resolved that the at. Enoch Winkler, Esq. be requested to send a copy of this resolution to the Minister of Public Works. Carried."*

What happened next ought to be a topic for further research.

Not long ago, I received additional information from a Rosenfeld farmer who said that the deed he presently holds to his land has a reference to a Metis trail running through the area designated on the document. *Lawrence Klippenstein*

## Research in Progress

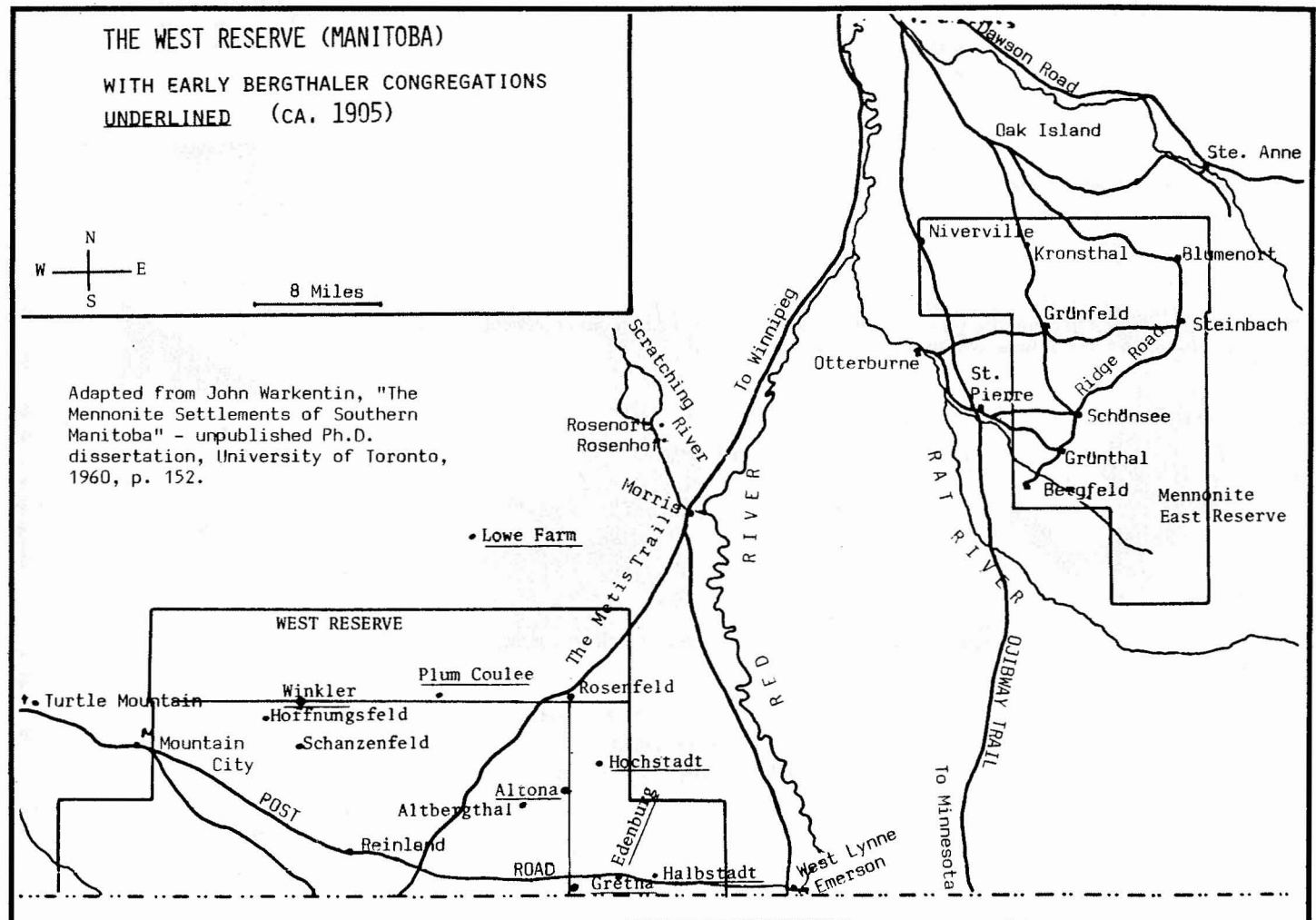
Leonard Doell, of Warman Saskatchewan, and long-time associate of Native Ministries, has consented to undertake a 3-4 month study of the history of Mennonite and Indian settlements in Manitoba. His particular focus will be the Mennonites of the West Reserve and the nature of their contacts with the native peo-

ple in and around the area.

(Totemak, July-August, 1978, p. 14.)



**Totemak** is a regular monthly publication of the Native Ministries board of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Editors are Isaac Froese and Carol Wiebe.



## The latest good books to buy and read



**A RUSSIAN DANCE OF DEATH** (Revolution and civil war in the Ukraine) — DIETRICH NEUFELD — Translated by and edited by Al Reimer

This is a story of terror and brutality, of murder, plunder, and suffering. The events and experiences described in this book belong to one of the most violent and chaotic periods in modern world history. The Mennonites were among the first to feel the daggers of revolution and counterrevolution. This is the story of Mennonite Martyrs who now have no other headstones or monuments to their memories than such accounts as these. \$6.95 paper

**THE WANDERERS** (The Saga of Three Women Who Survived) — INGRID RIMLAND

There were Katya, daughter of the staunch Mennonite Leader, Johann Klassen . . . an indomitable matriarch determined to preserve her people's heritage against all odds,

Sara, Katya's illegitimate daughter resulting from Nestor Razin's rape . . . the weak victim of her own and her oppressors' passion,

Karin, Sara's gifted, rebellious daughter, who must choose between the self-imposed isolation of her zealous people and her need to breathe freely.

Drawn from vivid personal experience and historical research, **THE WANDERERS** takes the reader into the grinding jaws of a modern struggle between those who want to only live and work in peace and those who will not let them. \$10.75 cloth



**A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SEXUALITY** — JOHN W. MILLER

Under question today are the norms that shall counsel persons in fashioning a sexual life worthy to be called human. Out of the rising chorus of "experts" a consensus is beginning to emerge. Many of the sexual standards of the past are being abandoned in favor of greater sexual freedom. Where can Christians turn for guidance in the sexual wilderness? To the founder of Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth. \$1.95 paper

**PEER COUNSELING IN THE CHURCH** — PAUL M. MILLER ✓

"For too long Christians have stolen away to a secular therapist to buy listening love for \$25 to \$40 an hour," says Paul M. Miller. "Church fellowship has suffered because they did not trust nor care for one another enough to want to give and receive help by counseling each other in Christian love."

In this book Miller carefully describes the attitudes and skills laymen in the church will need to assist one another in growth type counseling, especially as it related to vocations, preparation for marriage, and problems within marriage. \$5.45 paper



**THE MENNONITE BROTHERHOOD IN RUSSIA (1789 - 1910)** — P. M. FRIESEN

The most comprehensive history of the Mennonite people in Russia, recently translated into English by leading scholars. A wealth of Mennonite history and documents included in this 1100 page book. \$29.95 cloth

Available from the newly renovated and enlarged premises of

**Fellowship Bookcenter**  
302 Kennedy St.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3B 2M6

## Organizing Records

The 1923-1963 Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records (cf. *Archives Bulletin*, June, pp. 27-28) have now been completely accessioned and cataloged. They are available to researchers at the archives location. A detailed index of file titles in the collection can be obtained by writing to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Another important Canadian organization, Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), has also deposited its earliest records (1964-1970) at the CMC archives. The complete collection has now been microfilmed and copies may be obtained by writing to the address above. The material is on twelve 16 mm reels, and includes all the items except a few more helpfully used in other collections. An index to this collection may be had also. The indexes cost \$1.00 each.

In addition to this, the archives has recently microfilmed two western Canadian Mennonite periodicals, both in the German language. One is the first monthly publication of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, *Der Mitarbeiter* (The Co-worker), published at Gretna, Manitoba from 1906-1934 under the editor, Heinrich H. Ewert. The other, *Gruess Gott* (God be with you), is a newsletter of a large Mennonite church group in Manitoba known originally as the Schoenwieser Mennoniten Gemeinde. It was published from 1940-1974. A third similar publication, *Das Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, published monthly by the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba from 1936 to 1972, is being prepared for microfilming also.

## Historical Notes

\* Half a dozen Mennonite genealogists attended the annual seminar of the Manitoba Genealogical seminar held at the Gordon Bell School in Winnipeg, Man. on Sept. 29-30. The Society, begun several years ago, already has over 300 members.

\* An important Mennonite genealogical project underway is a book on the life and family of Johann Funk, first Aeltester of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba, edited by Mary Dueck Jefferey of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

\* A special meeting of Mennonite historians and genealogists was held at the Mennonite World Conference, in Wichita, Kansas, USA. A list of names and addresses of persons present may be obtained from Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas, 67117.

\* *De Mennist* is a Mennonite newsletter published in Australia under the editorship of Foppe Brouwer. He and his wife, Alice, are pastoring an emerging Mennonite congrega-

tion, the first one in Australia. The Brouwers visited the USA and Canada during World Conference time to acquaint North Americans with the story of the Mennonites of Australia. Persons interested in getting the newsletter may write to Foppe Brouwer at: 9 Brougham Ave., Fennel Bay, New South Wales, Australia 2283.

\* The B.C. Mennonite Historical Society set up an information and literature distribution booth at the MCC Relief Sale held in the Fraser Valley in September. A similar project was undertaken by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in providing book sale booths at five summer community festivals: Morden, Winkler, Altona, Morris, and Steinbach's Pioneer Days celebration. Don Stoesz was in charge of the booths. He was also active as a volunteer researcher and assistant in the CMC archives during the summer months.

\* Plans for the publication of a four-volume historical work on Mennonites in the USA were announced recently. The editorial committee includes Dr. Theron F. Schla-bach, Goshen, Ind., project editor, Dr. John A. Lapp, Goshen, Dr. C. J. Dyck, Elkhart, Ind., Dr. Peter J. Klassen, Fresno Calif., and Dr. Robert Kreider, chairman, at North Newton, Kansas.

\* Upcoming anniversary celebrations include a 50th at Concordia Hospital of Winnipeg, Manitoba on October 22, and a 75th at Hague Mennonite Church, Hague Saskatchewan, on October 7 and 8. Concordia plans to release a 40-page book by Dr. Abe J. Dueck titled *Concordia Hospital, 1928-1978*.

\* *Mennonite Mirror* recently announced a change of editors. Dr. Roy Vogt, editor since the Winnipeg-based literary magazine began seven years ago, will be retiring from that task. Replacing him is Dr. Al Reimer, professor of English at the University of

Winnipeg. Reimer is translator of the book *A Russian Dance of Death*, and also completed translating a soon-to-be-published novel by Hans Harder, a Mennonite writer from Germany.

## New Publications

Recently-published books in the areas of anniversary commemoratives, and family or community history include the following titles:

Abram B. Gaede Committee, *The Abraham B. Gaede Family, 1786-1977*. Fresno, Calif. 1977. For copies write to: 295 West Stanley Ave., Reedley, Calif. 93654. Hardcover.

Berg, Baldie, ed. *Our 1-6 Heritage*. Morden, Man. 1976. Deals with an area of settlement (Mennonite and Anglo-Saxon) just south of Morden, Manitoba. Hardcover.

Friesen, Helene, ed. *A Genealogy of Peter P. and Agatha Friesen, 1770-1978*. Grunthal, Man. (?), 1978. Write to Derksen Printers, Steinbach, Manitoba for copies. Paperback.

Fast, Karl and C. G. Unruh, eds. *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Mennonite Settlement in North Kildonan. 1928-1978*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978. Write to: Karl Fast, 340 Cheriton, Winnipeg, Man. Paperback, \$5.00.

Also, Rev. H. P. Isaak of Dinuba, California, authored an autobiographical work titled *Our Life Story and Escape. From Russia to China, to Japan and to America*. Trans. by Reuben M. Baerg. Dinuba, Calif. 1977. Paperback, \$4.25. Write to: Mr. H. P. Isaak, 8778 Ave. 428, Dinuba Calif., 93168.

Back numbers of the June 1978 issue of *Mennonite Life*, featuring the story of the Mennonite World Conference in photos, may be obtained free of charge from the Heritage Centre.



Recent winners of the Heritage essay writing contest of the General Conference Mennonite Heritage Commission include Connie Braun, Altona, Man. (left), Jenny von Gunten, Riverton, Man. (centre) and Charlotte Rempel, Winnipeg, Man. (right). Jenny received first prize (\$50) in the Grade 7-8 class for her theme, "My Bernese Swiss Heritage", and Charlotte won first prize (\$50) in the Grade 10-12 class for her paper "The Life of Diedrich Wiebe" of South Russia. Connie won third (\$20) in the same class for her study on K. H. Neufeld, a well-known choral conductor of southern Manitoba. The contest will be run again in 1978-1979. Interested persons are invited to write to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba for information.