

Mennonite Historian



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This is thought to be the group of ministers and delegates who attended the 1909 Conference of Mennonites in Canada sessions at Edenburg, east of Gretna, Manitoba. The photo was donated to the archives by Mr. and Mrs. Henry J. Siemens of Victoria, B.C. They had received it from the Abram Klassens of Gretna.

Anyone able to identify the place and date of this gathering with more certainty is asked to write to: The Archives, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4.

Milestones of First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon

By Esther Patkau

"Big oaks from little acorns grow." That can also be said about First Mennonite Church. Fifty-eight years ago a seed was planted; it sprouted a shoot that developed into a trunk from which branches, bigger and smaller, began stretching in all directions. Leaves covered the branches, and as they grew weary they were transplanted into eternity.

Other leaves were blown into far away provinces and lands but still more leaves came to replace them. Fruit, like little acorns, dropped into developing areas of the city and began new congregations. The roots of that oak are founded in the Word of God and have held strong, even though the leaves have kept changing.

In 1923 when Mennonite immigrants came from Russia to seek new homes in Canada, they first found work on farms. But because they had a transportation debt to repay, the cash resources were few, and many of them looked for places of employment where ready cash was available.

That same fall ten girls came to Saskatoon to find work as domestic helpers in the city.

Salaries were \$8 to \$10 a month. The girls met for fellowship on the river bank, but had no place for worship.

The newly organized Nordheimer Mennoniten Gemeinde, also comprised of immigrant families, was concerned that the young women not be lost to the world. In August, 1925, Rev. Isaac Epp of Dundurn was sent to contact them. Then Rev. J.J. Klassen of Dundurn held worship services with them, and in the spring of 1926 seventeen persons were baptized. More families and individuals moved to the city.

On January 22, 1928, more than 100 Mennonites living in the city met with Rev. David Toews of Rosthern and Rev. J.J. Klassen to discuss the needs of this increasing group. Visiting ministers would serve at their worship services. A provisional committee was elected to give guidance towards organization. In three years time \$310.00 had been given in donations, but most of it had been spent for paying the expenses of visiting ministers and for rent.

Benno Toews, then a student at the university, began holding Sunday School in

the Pleasant Hill district in 1928.

Visiting ministers could not meet all the needs, however, and so the Home Mission Board engaged J. J. Thiessen, then working with the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization in Rosthern, to spend his week-ends in Saskatoon serving with visitation and worship services. For six months he did this part-time, but in January, 1931, he and his family moved to Saskatoon to give his full time in ministry here. January 29, 1931, they opened their home as a Girls' Home, where the employed girls could come on Thursday evenings for fun, fellowship, and relaxation, study and sharing. In January, 1931, the Senior Women's aid, then called "Missionsverein," also was organized.

A year later on January 26, 1932, the brotherhood organized as a congregation and chose "First Mennonite Church of Saskatoon" as its name. Thirty-four persons signed as charter members, and a few months later on May 29, 1932, Jacob J. Thiessen was ordained as a minister.

For thirteen years the group had no meeting place of its own. At first the members met in private homes, but as their numbers grew, they gathered at the OK Economy store warehouse where they sat on boards, borrowed from the nearby lumber yard and placed on apple boxes, or met in a room at the YWCA. Then they rented classrooms and eventually the auditorium at Victoria School on Broadway. In October, 1936, the first church was completed and dedicated. It was located at 123 4th Avenue, just across from the police station.

That was a tremendous improvement for the total work. Church attendance increased; the work expanded. Sunday school grew. On May 28, 1938, Rev. J. J. Thiessen was ordained as an "Elder" and the church severed its ties to the Rosenorter Church of Rosthern, became independent and joined the General and Canadian Conferences, to participate in wider outreach and mission of the larger Mennonite body.

Though the 1930s were years of economic and financial difficulties, the congregation enjoyed spiritual blessings. It held annual Bible study series with invited speakers, song festivals with participation of other congregations and joined in sacrificial giving to help the needy in Russia as well as locally. Membership by transfers and through baptism grew in large numbers. (to be cont.)

Donor Acknowledgments

We are much indebted for support in recent months to several dozen persons who have remembered the Centre in their giving. Thank you very much!

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Calgary Seminar

"Our people are not very history-minded", someone remarked. But plans went ahead. When the group gathered on February 27 for a Mennonite seminar at Calgary, enthusiasm mounted quickly. Twenty-eight persons registered for involvement during the all-day sessions. The basement of First Mennonite Church accommodated the whole enterprise very well indeed.

A brief account of Mennonites coming to the city gave Irene Klassen a chance to share a bit about her family's extended experience with the congregation, as well as her good sense of history in its development to the present time. Rev. William Pauls had a fascinating account of the trials and triumphs of the early years in the Menno Bible Institute which he helped get underway.

Two fine presentations filled the afternoon. Wes Berg of the University of Alberta spoke about the life and work of K.H. Neufeld, a well-known Mennonite choir conductor in Western Canada; and John Bergen, also of Edmonton, led an animated panel discussion on the issues of private education. With Calgary Mennonites now planning to found a Mennonite private school, this seemed a timely topic indeed.

Local planners Jake Wiebe of First Mennonite, and John B. Toews of the South Calgary MB congregation, helped to make this a venture which may pave the way to similar endeavors in the months ahead. This seminar was sponsored by Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta-Saskatchewan.

KINDERBOTE Terminated

A well-known Mennonite periodical for children, *Der Kinderbote*, ceased publication "temporarily" late last year. It began to appear in 1887, and was edited by Carl van der Smitten for many years. After World War I KB started to include an English section which became larger and larger. In 1938 it was agreed that a separate paper was needed, so *Junior Messenger* appeared. For a time *Der Kinderbote* was published out of Rosthern, Saskatchewan where J.G. Rempel served as editor from 1940-1956. He was followed by Cornelia Lehn.

Since a growing proportion of readers came to be in South America the paper was moved to Curitiba, Brazil, around 1966. Here it continued to appear, as a supplement to *Bibel und Pflug*, till its final issue of December 31, 1981. A proposal to continue publication from a Paraguayan Mennonite location is under consideration. Editors of the paper in its South American phase were Melita Nikkel, Annie Dyck and Lisa Siemens.

Recent Acquisitions

Manuscripts

Autobiographical comments and genealogical materials, with newspaper clippings and articles about his work, 1981. Courtesy of H.J. Siemens, Victoria, B.C.

Memoirs of life on an estate in south Russia. German typescript, 5 pp., H. Schroeder, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Helen E. Regier, "My Grandmother and her Family", 1964, 36 pp. Courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives, Regina, Saskatchewan.

A Russian-language family register on the Plenerts. Ca. 65 pp. Courtesy of Ted Plenert, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Diaries of Peter I. Dyck (1888-1951). With English translation of originals. Courtesy of Jacob Zacharias, Hague, Saskatchewan via Dennis Stoesz, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Autobiography of the late Peter A. Mantler. Both English and German versions. Courtesy of Jacob Mantler, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Maps, cassettes, photos, etc.

Maps of: Ignatevo colony, Alexanderkron village, Gnadenfeld village, south Russia. Courtesy of Bill Schroeder and Gerhard Lohrenz, both Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Cassette (1) - Bible study session in Karaganda, summer, 1981. Courtesy of Menno Wiebe, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Cassettes (6) of music-choirs conducted by K.H. Neufeld. Courtesy of Wes Berg, Edmonton, Alberta.

Microfilm of *Friedensstimme*, 1917-1920 - existing issues in Winnipeg. Series not complete.

Sermons of Sommerfelder ministers in Herbert, Saskatchewan. Microfilm. Courtesy of materials brought by Jake Peters, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Notes on the family history of Susan Braun (Mrs. Peter) Klippenstein, Neubergthal. Courtesy of Mrs. Elsie Hildebrand.

Photos (23) related to the family of Jacob Braun, Waterloo, Ontario. Courtesy of Lucy Braun, New Hamburg, Ontario.

We thank all donors, and others who have helped preserve valuable documents and other records by placing them in archival facilities.

If you have similar material to deposit, bring it, or mail it first class to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4.

We are also available to check material to determine its value for deposit. Call 1-204-888-6781, and we will arrange for a visit.

Family Studies

The Story Of An Old Russian Manuscript

By Ted Plenert

One Sunday afternoon, not long ago, while looking at old family portraits at the home of an aunt, the widow of a late cousin of my father, I was asked if I would be interested in an old manuscript written in Russian. Tante Agnes said it had been left by her husband, and written by his grandfather years ago.

Of course I was interested. As soon as I saw the manuscript, I realized that it must be a family register. I cannot read or write Russian, but I could recognize names and dates which I had seen before. A Plenert genealogy had been compiled in the late 1950's in German. It had not been officially published, to my knowledge, although duplicated copies of it had been sent around to family members.

I could tell that it was a family register because it had been ruled into rows and columns, much like a church register might be. It was written in ink. In places colored ink had been used. The penmanship was neat. The pages were yellow with age. Parts were ready to crumble.

Tante Agnes let me borrow it but she stipulated that she wanted it back. When I brought it home I sandwiched the first page between sheets of handy-wrap to prevent it from falling apart when photo copying it. I made three photo copies of each page. The next day I returned it to Tante Agnes.

Stamped onto the front page of this document is a seal. The Russian letters have been retraced in blue ink, but translated they read as follows: Kronsweide Mennonite Church Register Seal. In the centre of the seal is a diagram of an open Bible with two Scripture references, I Chronicles 3:11 and II Timothy 2:19.

The manuscript was written long ago, much closer to the events recorded therein. My great grandfather personally knew those whose names and dates he listed. He lived in a different era and the documents to which he may have had access, no longer exist.

The society in which my great grandfather lived no longer exists either. That society is like a never-never land to us, much like the land of fairy-tales which parents read to their children at bed time.

This then, is an old story. It is also a new story. At least it is a new story to me. Stories like this one are new to every generation which becomes interested in family history.

They are stories which remain because the Lord God blesses marriage. He blesses it with children. He blesses their baptism. He calls them home to death. All these events are recorded in their place in the general register of the family.



The family of Heinrich Heinrich (1838-1910) and Helena (1842-1898) Plenert photographed ca. 1885 in Russia. The smaller children in front are Maria (1880-1919) and Kornelius (1877-1952). To the left of Mother Plenert are Helena (1865-1922), and (extreme left) Aganetha (1875-1945). Behind the parents (l-r) are Jakob (1867-1938), Heinrich (1863-1885), Peter (1869-1947), later minister at Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, and Johann (1872-1895). Photo - courtesy of Ted Plenert, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Research Request

I am looking for information on descendants of: **Peter Tieshen**, married to Anna Tieshen on June 8, 1892, born August 6, 1771, in Danzig. This family emigrated from West Prussia to Russia in 1818. A descendant of their son Cornelius, b. Jan. 12, 1806, or 1807, married to a Rempel is said to have lived in Pasadena, Calif. working as an engineer.

Gerhard Claassen, born, August 2, 1801, married to Helen Tieshen April 27, 1826, born August 7, 1807. Their children were Henriette Helene, b. Feb. 13, 1827, Luise Emile, b. June 17, 1929, Julianne Marie, b. Oct. 22, 1833, and Suguste, b. April 25, 1837.

Henri Kreienheder, born 1862, d. 1925, farmer in Hastings, Nebraska, married to Anna-Marie de Veer in November, 1899, born Nov. 25, 1868, in Danzig.

Brothers **George Heinrich Entz**, b. July 2, 1877, in Danzig, and **Artur Waldemar Entz**, b. April 1, 1879 in Danzig. They left Danzig around 1909 for the U.S.

If you can help write to **Hermann Thiessen**, Breslauer Str. 3,3167 Burgdorf, West Germany.

Family Research Helps

The Mennonite Heritage Centre archives has just received a copy of **German Family Research Made Simple**, 2nd Edition, by J. Konrad. The book was first published in 1974 with a view of helping genealogists interested in studying families with origins in Germany (East and West). Among other things the book includes two chapters on genealogical sources in the two Germanies, and suggestions on how to get in contact with these organizations and institutions. A number of very helpful maps aid the user in becoming better oriented to the history and geography of these areas. There are also simple suggestions for improving the genealogical research process for beginners.

This information-packed volume is one of a number dealing with other countries, also prepared by Mr. Konrad. A list can be obtained from Summit Publications, P.O. Box 222, Munroe Falls, Ohio 44262.

The **Plenert Family Heritage Book**, published by Beatrice Bayley, Inc. is a highly crafted compendium of family studies theory and technique along with some special information for members of the Plenert family. Published in 1981, it forms an excellent reference work for amateur as well as more professional genealogists. If interested in this study, write to Ted Plenert, 704 Valour Rd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 3A9, for further information.

Russo-Ukrainian Mennonite Studies

In Memoriam



Alvin J. Miller, recently of Grantsville, Maryland, died November 8, 1981 at the age of 97. Active for many years in higher education, Miller was probably best known in Mennonite circles for his efforts as MCC relief director in Russia from 1920-1926.

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The Secret Is Out

By Al Reimer

The following excerpt is from Al Reimer's soon-to-be completed novel about the Mennonites of Russia during the turbulent period from World War I to the exodus of the 1920s. The novel is slated for publication in the fall of 1982.

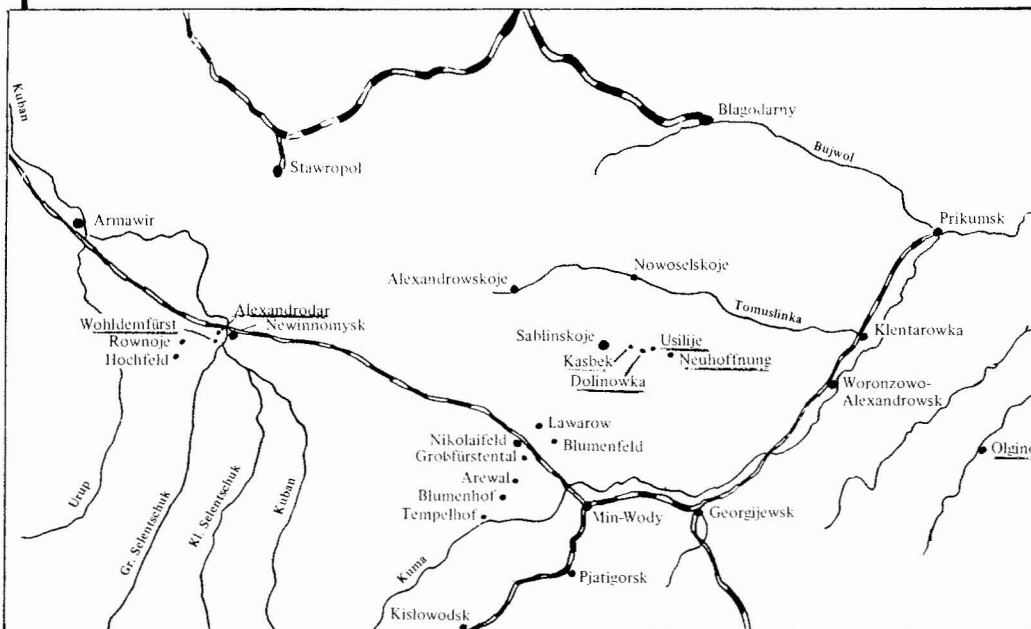
In this scene the Mennonite manufacturing firm of "Bock and Riesen" is discovered to be manufacturing gun carriages disguised as army "supply" wagons. The resulting scandal rocks both the firm and the Mennonite community. August Bock Jr. is the playboy son of August Bock the senior partner in the firm, and will come to a bad end later.

What August Bock and his partner Jacob Riesen had long feared came to pass. The secret was out. It was now common knowledge in the Old Colony and beyond, that the "supply" wagons Bock and Riesen were manufacturing on government contract were really gun carriages. A Mennonite corpsman with battle experience home on leave had seen them lined up in the factory compound and recognized them immediately for what they were: two-wheeled carriages for field guns and ammunition caissons attached to front-wheel limbers which to the inexperienced eye, made them look like ordinary four-wheel wagons.

Gun carriages! ammunition caissons! people said to each other in shocked tones, without being entirely clear — especially the women — just what they were used for. But they were for war, for killing, and that was enough. Just imagine! So-called Christian Mennonites actively helping with the terrible, devil-inspired mass bloodletting — and against our German brothers too! And all for what? For money! It was too much. Bock and Riesen, who had been popular and highly respected figures in the Mennonite community, were now branded as cynical war-profiteers, as opportunistic betrayers of the sacred Mennonite principle of non-resistance. They were reviled in private and shunned in public. There were dark mutterings of banning them from the church.

August Bock was concerned, but not as yet unduly worried. Characteristically, he kept his head and paid no attention to the attacks behind his back. The malicious gossip would, he knew, die down eventually. And there would be no action taken against him by the church in the matter of the gun carriages. Of that he was confident. He was, after all, a deacon in the Einlage church, and by far its largest financial supporter. No, the **Bruderschaft** would not move against him. Not for the gun carriages. They could ride out the gossip and rumors. As long as nothing more got out.

Bock's partner, however, the feisty little Riesen, did not remain aloof. Discreetly at first, then more boldly, Riesen launched a counter-offensive against the rumor-mongers



This map of the Mennonite settlements in the Russian Caucasus region suggests a different location of Olgino than is given on older maps of the area. That village, established by Templar Mennonites was earlier said to be in the vicinity of Sablinskoje. Here four new Mennonite villages were established in 1928 in efforts to escape the collectivization policies of that time. Several members of a Mennonite tour group which got to Pjatigorsk in 1979 were able also to visit the original Mennonite settlements of Alexandrodar (earlier Alexanderfeld), and Velinkoknjascheskoje (earlier Wohldemfuerst). This sketch map of the region was provided by J. Heinrichs, Wiesbaden, West Germany, courtesy of *Der Bote*.

and detractors. He challenged people to tell him why the gun carriages he and Bock manufactured were a greater betrayal of Christian nonresistance than the Mennonite horses requisitioned to pull them. When his opponents argued that they had no control over the uses their horses were put to by a government that had commandeered them, Riesen countered by pointing out that the firm of Bock and Riesen also came under the stringent wartime control of the government. The Ekaterinoslav Defense Ministry, like similar ministries all over Russia, had decided which factories in its jurisdiction were to go into war production and what kind of contracts they were to fill. Thus, individual factories had no choice but to comply and help win the war. Bock and Riesen, he affirmed in ringing tones, was an honorable firm and loyal to its country, as well as to the Mennonite community, in spite of appearances to the contrary. Jacob Riesen's spirited campaign to silence the moral censure of the Mennonite community seemed to work. The criticism of the firm and its owners gradually subsided and other war news — most of it bad — captured the attention of the public.

Then, just when the whole affair had died down, came another revelation that quickly assumed the proportions of a major scandal that shook the firm of Bock and Riesen to its last brick outbuilding.

One of the foundry workers, a young peasant rapidly sinking into alcoholism on his first steady job with good pay, was severely reprimanded one morning for absenteeism and drunkenness, first by his foreman, then even more harshly by August Bock, Jr., who acted as a kind of trouble shooter in the factory. The factory hand, still stoked with **samogon**, flew into a violent rage and walked off the job. That night, blind drunk, he told anyone who would listen, including a couple of Mennonite youths, about the growing piles of shell cases stacked secretly at night in the back shed behind the factory.

Now the darker secret was also out. This time the righteous indignation of the people of Schoenwiese was too great to be stolidly ignored by Bock Sr. or skilfully defused by the clever Riesen. August Bock sensed immediately that he and his partner were in serious trouble with church and community. To make matters even worse, the drunken workman, who had continued his binge after spilling the beans, was found unconscious two days later in a back alley in Alexandrovsk from a beating so savage it was feared at first he would not live. Immediately, the story went around that August Bock Jr., whose irregular life in town was by now well known, had hired thugs to teach the drunken "canary" a lesson he would not forget.

His heavy face a fearsome mask of anger, August Bock Sr. faces his son across the desk in his office.

"August, let me tell you something. If you are responsible for this beating, you're not

only a man of brutal violence and no Mennonite, but stupid into the bargain. Once that **muzhik** blabbed the damage was done. Did you really think the secret could be beaten back into him again?"

He scowls at his son in open contempt, the long curves of his jaw like slabs of granite.

Young August looks neither cowed nor crestfallen. He stares back at his father with the haughty air of well-bred self-assurance he has inherited from his aristocratic German mother.

"You have no right to accuse me, Father. I know no more of the matter than you do. What happens to a drunken, dismissed workman is of no concern to me. He isn't the only one. Sooner or later one of them would have let his tongue wag with **samogon**. It was just a matter of time. I never believed we could keep the casings a secret." He flicks a trace of cigarette ash from his dark, striped vest front.

Father Bock studies the insolent face of his son for a long time. Then the words like heavy stones rumble from his chest. "This is not a threat, but a warning, August. If anything like this ever happens again, you'll be out of this firm before the end of the day." He stops, continues slowly and deliberately. "You're an only son, my boy, a too much loved and pampered one. But I don't think you really know me. I fear the Lord, but I fear no living man. If I found it necessary, I would disown you and cut you out of my life as thoroughly and ruthlessly as I've built up this business."

"I'm well aware that you're leading a disolute life. And frankly you haven't developed here in the firm as I hope you would. These are serious times. If we lose this war, son, there'll be a revolution. And men like you and me will be made short work of. Yes, conditions being what they are, it's quite possible that you won't be able to live out your life as a spoiled and high-handed playboy. And I won't deny that I feel a touch of **schadenfreude** in knowing that."

"The goodwill of the church and our Mennonite community may not mean much to you, August. But they do to me. They mean everything to me, and if I lose them I lose all that's really important to me besides my family. I would sooner give up this firm and all the money and power it has brought me, than lose the respect of my Mennonite people and — above all — the spiritual benefits of the church I have loved all my life."

Again he looks at the smooth, indifferent face of his son and heir, and feels his gorge rising dangerously. In the softest rumble he can muster he says, "Now get out of my sight. As of now you have no official status in this firm, although I'll allow you to save face by coming in as usual."

It is the longest speech August Bock has ever made, and the most painful. After his son has nonchalantly removed himself from the office, Bock heaves a mighty sigh and slides a huge forefinger across his eyes.

The next day Bock has another confronta-

tion in his office. he faces a small delegation of church and lay leaders. Elder Thomas Unger of the Einlage church is the spokesman. He and Bock have been close friends all their lives.

"It's a serious matter, August," the Elder opens, obviously uncomfortable. "There's no precedent for this sort of thing in our whole history." He is searching for words that will not sound intimidating or self-righteous. "We are all equally under God's eye, my friend. He alone knows the trials and temptations you have been subjected to in this distressing matter. But the argument that you had no choice cannot be accepted. No one can be forced to do evil or to disobey the will of God and the rules of the brotherhood."

August Bock, deeply moved, searches his old friend's furrowed face. "Thomas, what would you have me do? Resign from the church gracefully, before I'm thrown out? I-I can't do that. I'm willing to admit error, but I don't want to be rejected by my own church, my own people." The craggy features sag in dejection.

"No, August, I think there are enough mitigating circumstances here to make such drastic action unnecessary, perhaps even lacking in Christian charity. At least I hope so." He looks steadily at Bock. "You need the church — I know that my friend." The Elder glances at the others sitting with him. "And we know, as you do, that the church and community also need you." He squares his shoulders, continues more briskly. "There will have to be a **Bruderschaft** decision over this. But I think" — a wisp of a smile appears at his lips — "that the brotherhood can be persuaded to let you off with a firm, public reprimand. You will be expected, of course, to make a confession before the full body of believers that you have sinned and that you will make a very sincere Christian effort to extricate yourself and your firm from this unholy business as quickly as possible."

Bock's direct gaze sweeps the four stern faces before him. "I accept," he says simply. "I'll do what I can. I'll make every effort to stall the delivery of the casings as long as I can. And I'll do my best to persuade the Defense Ministry to let us go into another line of production — perhaps field canteens, or something like that."

The delegation rises, much more relaxed than when they came in. Bock shakes hands solemnly with the four and courteously bows them out of his office.

He sits at his desk pondering. Yes, the Ministry might just go for the canteen idea, especially since the most recent reports show that the production of munitions and small arms is at last beginning to improve substantially.

Who would have thought that things would ever come to this?

MMHS News

New Arnold Dyck Edition

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society recently passed a motion to initiate a project for republishing works of Arnold Dyck. As an immigrant of the early 1920's, Dyck bought the press of *Steinbach Post* soon after he came to Canada, and also did a good deal of writing for the next several decades. Works like *Verloren in Der Steppe*, the Low German *Koop en Bua* series, *De Milionea von Kosefeld*, and the valuable collection of the *Warte* series (1935-1938) gave him a place of highest prominence among the Mennonite literati of his period and later.

The re-edition of his works in their original language will be directed by an editorial committee which includes Elizabeth Peters (U of M), Harry Loewen (U of W), Al Reimer (U of W), George K. Epp (CMBC) and Vic Doerksen (U of M).

Persons aware of any of Dyck's writing which are less familiar to the public, or which have never been published at all are invited to write to the committee c/o Elizabeth Peters, 234 Oak St., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. It is hoped that some of Dyck's unknown manuscripts, or other documents from his pen, may come to light that way.

Upcoming Publications

Walter Schmiedehaus. *Die Altkolonier - Mennoniten in Mexiko*, a revised edition of *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott. Der Wanderweg eines christlichen Siedlervolkes* (1948). By CMBC Publications, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Summer, 1982.

A history of the village of Gnadenthal, Manitoba, edited by Elizabeth Peters. By the Gnadenthal Historical Committee. Fall, 1982.

A history of the town of Altona, written by Esther Epp-Tiessen. To be published by Friesen Printers, Altona, Manitoba. Fall, 1982.

Cleo Heinrichs, ed. *Treasured Memories of Horndean*. By a local historical committee. Fall, 1982.

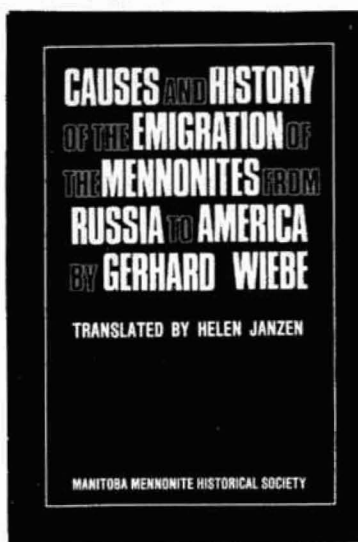
A history of the Rhineland municipality. By the RM of Rhineland, with office in Altona, Manitoba. Fall, 1983.

G. I. Peters, *Remember our Leaders*. Biographical sketches of ministers who have served the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (1903-1977). By the B.C. Mennonite Historical Society. Summer, 1982.

Irm Houle, ed. *And Johann Begat... The Story of Johann Neufeldt (1815-1884) and His Descendants*. By the editor, Victoria, B.C. Fall, 1982.

The materials on this page have been provided by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

Still Available



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Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Report

On Saturday, March 20, about fifty persons met in Winnipeg to participate in the annual meeting and seminar of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. The familiar setting of the Mennonite Heritage Centre offered ample room for the various displays, book sale table and visiting which are always a part of this get-together and discussion.

Exciting news came from the Research, Scholarship and Publication committee. It hopes to initiate a republication of Arnold Dyck writings. An editorial committee has been established to get this project underway. Dyck became a prominent Canadian Mennonite writer and publisher of the thirties and forties. Most of his published works are however out of print, or otherwise inaccessible to many readers.

This year the Interdisciplinary and Arts Committee will help to coordinate special readings at the Mennonite Art and Music festival to be held at Polo Park on Sunday, April 25. The Cairns committee submitted

its first written report on cemetery locations in Manitoba, and deposited records at the MHC archives for public use. The Membership and Publicity committee reported 104 members, and plans for contacting a hundred persons to increase the number later in the year.

Two persons, Delbert Plett of Steinbach, and Royden Loewen of Winnipeg were elected to the Board to replace Esther Epp-Tiessen and Adolf Ens who will be out of the country for the next few years.

A very interesting and useful presentation on making Mennonite maps began the afternoon sessions under the direction of Bill Schroeder of Winnipeg. Bill has himself done pioneer work in locating materials to help create accurate maps of Mennonite communities in Russia and elsewhere. His publication of *The Bergthal Colony* in 1974 got these projects underway.

Everyone also enjoyed *jeraeschte Tveebakk*, a singing group which made its debut with Low German singing at Folklorama last summer. Led by Doreen Klassen, the group sought to interpret original traditional "Mennonite" songs which have become, or are becoming, a part of the people's "lore" in community experience. Closing comments, as it were, came in the form of a brief skit entitled "De prevaut shol", prepared by Peter J.B. Reimer, and set in the context of the Mennonite private school display which will remain in the Centre till the end of June.

Join the Society if you can. Membership fees for the year are \$10.00 providing a free year's subscription to the *Mennonite Historian*, free registration for the two annual Mennonite studies seminars, and place on a mailing list for information on new books and other pertinent data. Write to Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man., Canada R3P 0M4.

Private School Display

A private school classroom display at the Mennonite Heritage Centre was officially "unveiled" at the Council of Boards meetings on January 29 earlier this year. Student desks, original inkwells, samples of books used, etc. have been provided by the Mennonite Village Museum of Steinbach, Manitoba, with assistance from the Centre.

The classroom recently also became the setting for a short Low German skit entitled "De Prevoot Shol", written by Peter J.B. Reimer of Rosenort, Manitoba. Members of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society enjoyed these moments at their recent annual meeting and seminar on March 20.

It is hoped that a reunion of persons who one attended private schools in southern Manitoba or elsewhere can be held in the near future. The display will remain in place till the end of June, and you are invited to "visit" the school.

MHSC Activities and News

Studies Conference

A conference on Canadian Mennonite Studies will be held on June 11-13 at the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario. It will feature a major display by Macmillan of Canada to announce the publication of **Mennonites in Canada**, Vol. II, written by Dr. Frank H. Epp of Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario.

Papers from the various academic disciplines will focus on different aspects of the Mennonite experience in Canada. Information on archival sources and other recent Mennonite publications will be available also.

On the program are representatives from the following: University of Toronto, University of Manitoba, University of Saskatchewan, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Goshen College, Conrad Grebel College, York University, University of Calgary, University of Winnipeg, Bethel College, Temple University, University of Waterloo, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Wilfred Laurier University, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, University of Western Ontario, Mennonite Central Committee, and Christian Leadership Foundation.

The conference is being sponsored jointly by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the University of Toronto Ethnic and Immigration Program, and the Multicultural Society of Ontario.

A Mennonite Bicentennial

Suitable memorial observances marking the 200th anniversary of the first arrival of Mennonites in Canada will be scheduled during 1986 under the direction of the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission established recently by The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Dr. Frank H. Epp was appointed chairman and chief executive officer of the autonomous, incorporated Commission. Mennonite Conferences and inter-Mennonite organizations such as MCC (Canada) will be invited to appoint representatives on the Commission. The Commission will be dissolved upon completion of administrative responsibilities pertaining to observances and projects undertaken in commemoration of this event.

The celebration is significant for all Mennonites in Canada. Those in the first migration of 1786-1820 were of Swiss-German

descent. They left Pennsylvania after the American Revolutionary War and formed three settlements in southern Ontario: the Niagara peninsula, Waterloo County, and York County. During the 1820's a number of Amish families came directly from Europe and settled on the western fringe of the Waterloo settlement.

A mass migration of Mennonites from Russia to Western Canada got underway in 1874. Their first settlement in Manitoba received strong support from Ontario communities which were well established by then. Shortly after the turn of the century some Swiss Mennonites from Ontario moved to the Western provinces as well.

Lorna Bergey

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Jacob Mensch Letters

A project is underway to have the 1603 letters of Jacob Mensch translated and typed, with the possibility of eventual publication. The first phase is estimated to require about \$4000.00 for completion of copying, translation labor, and typing.

You are invited to send a donation to help defray the costs of the project. These should be sent to Isaac Horst, R.R. No. 2, Mount Forest, Ontario, NOG 2LO. Mr. Horst will also be pleased to answer any questions you may have about the project as such.

Mensch, born 1835, played an important role in the life of the Swiss Mennonites of the Franconia Conference of the eastern U.S.A. Microfilm copies of his letters can be obtained from Library and Heritage Centre Committee, Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania, 5323 Lake Drive, East Petersburg, PA, 17520.

Materials on this page are provided by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Mennonites In Canada Survey

"There are at least 22 different Mennonite groups in Canada," writes Margaret Loewen Reimer in the Nov. 9, 1981 issue of **Mennonite Reporter**. The bodies range in size from the 85-member Conservative Mennonite Fellowship of Ontario to the large Conference of Mennonite in Canada stretching across six provinces, with nearly 27,000 members. The total membership of all 22, at last count, seems to be just under 90,000.

Some of the smaller groups are relatively unknown, and many identified among themselves by distorted stereotypes and misconceptions. One looks forward therefore to the continuation and completion of a new series of brief sketches. Each of the 22 groups will have its place in this series, "Mennonites in Canada" begun in the **Reporter** on November 23, 1981. At the time of this writing six installments have appeared, with the others to come later this spring.

There is embarrassment possibly, in such division. Or is this diversity a part of the richness and beauty of the community as a whole?

Perhaps it will be possible to republish the **Reporter** notes in another form, so that the Mennonite mosaic can be better understood and appreciated, not only by those included, but by others as well.

German Canadian Yearbook VI

Volume VI of the **Deutschkanadisches Jahrbuch** is now in print and available to the public. Materials are again edited by Dr. Hartmut Froeschle of St. Michael's College in Toronto. The articles include Peter Liddell's, "The first Germans in British Columbia?", Elvire Eberhardt's "The Growth of the German Population in Medicine Hat, Alberta from 1885 to the Present", and two on Mennonite themes: George Epp, "Der mennonitische Beitrag zur deutschkanadischen Literatur", and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Canadian Mennonite Writings: A Bibliographical Survey, 1970-1980".

Vols. I-V are still available for \$16.00 each and can be ordered, along with Vol. VI, from Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada Inc., P.O. Box 193, Station "K", Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M4P 2G5. The Society also publishes a newsletter, **Canadiana Germanica. Mitteilungsblatt des Verbandes fuer deutschkanadische Geschichtsforschung** (New Bulletin of the German Canadian Historical Association). It is edited by Dr. Karin Guertler of Montreal, and can be obtained at the address above.

Book Reviews

Sawatsky, Walter. **Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II**. Scottdale, PA. and Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1981. 527 pp., Cloth \$19.95 (U.S.) Pb., \$14.95. Reviewed by Dan Epp-Tiessen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Walter Sawatsky introduces his book by calling for a "much more reflective, deliberate, and nuanced response to the Soviet evangelicals." He asserts that "to dismiss large numbers of them as hypocrites or phonies is to judge where we have received no mandate to do so." On the other hand, "To worship them as superheroes of the faith in effect denies them a part of common sinful humanity."

Sawatsky, director of the Mennonite Central Committee's East/West Research Office in Neuwied, Germany, and formerly a research scholar at Keston College's Center for the Study of Religion and Communism, succeeds admirably in revising these stereotypes of evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union. He paints the portrait of a dynamic movement which has since its inception in the 1860s experienced hardship and persecution, but has never ceased witnessing to its Lord. The courage, ingenuity and zeal of its members have resulted in constant growth, until today it claims over 500,000 adherents.

But this is also a human story. There have been conflicts, power struggles, apostasy, and knuckling under to state pressure. Yet Sawatsky avoids the Western temptation to castigate the legally registered churches for their willingness to accept state restrictions and intervention. We North American Christians, he points out, with our history of blessing the actions of our governments despite our freedom to dissent, hardly have the right to cast the first stone.

One particularly sad part of the story is the break-up of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), which at one point encompassed almost all Soviet evangelicals. As part of the Khrushchev crack-down on religion, the leaders of this organization were forced in 1960 to order constituent churches to curtail baptisms and evangelistic activity, and to forbid the presence of children at worship services. This action confirmed the suspicions of many believers that their leaders had hopelessly compromised themselves. After several years of accusations, hardening positions and excommunications, a breakaway group led by Georgi Vins and Gennadi Kriuchkov founded the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB). Because of intense persecution and eventual changes in the AUCECB position, this new association has not kept pace with its rival, though it has gained many converts and managed to print illegally some Christian literature. Again, Sawatsky avoids taking sides, being sympathetic to and critical of both groups.

Contrary to my fears, this book did not turn out to be a compilation of events, dates and unpronounceable Russian names. Through its discussion of such matters of evangelical theology, church life, youth and children's work, and its numerous illustrations and anecdotes, it proves to be an engaging story about human beings striving to be faithful.

This review first appeared in Christian Century, Dec. 30, 1981.

Friesen, Gerald and Barry Potyondi. **A Guide to the Study of Manitoba Local History**. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Published by the University of Manitoba Press for the Manitoba Historical Society, 1981. 182 pp, illus., pb., \$4.95, cloth, \$20.00. Reviewed by Dennis Stoesz, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The strengths of this book lie in the short descriptive and interpretive history of Manitoba and the list of places and sources one can go to, in Manitoba, to research the various historical topics. Its message to historical writers is that they must seriously interpret and explain for themselves and for their communities the events and social changes that take place in their locality. Gerry Friesen, an associate professor who teaches Manitoba history at the University of Manitoba, and Barry Potyondi, who has written among other things a history of Minnedosa, are quite capable of giving us this message.

In chapters two through thirteen, Friesen and Potyondi summarize and explain how the dominant historical themes - economics, politics, and the social base of society - have played themselves out in Manitoba's history. This is a major strength of the book.

The survey of the economic aspects of Manitoba life is done in three chapters entitled "Agriculture", "Business", and "Transportation and Communications". Wheat became the primary agricultural and economic base for Manitoba and out of this grew the elevators, Grain exchanges, and farm organizations. Railroads were one major input to the growth of towns and were the key to transporting the grain to market.

Major political themes are treated in two chapters, "Federal and Provincial Politics", and "Local Government". Many changes occurred with the Manitoba government as it switched hands from Norquay to the Liberals, to the Conservatives, to the "Progressive" farmers' government, to the New Democratic Party. The federal government was involved in the provincial political machine as well as in the issues on schools, railroads, and economics.

Social dimensions of writing history are mainly dealt with in the chapters, "Population Studies", and "Social Studies". One catches a glimpse of the various emigrations and immigrant groups that have come to Manitoba. Four more chapters deal with the history of "Environment", "Education", "Religion", and "Other

Professions". The chapter on "Special themes..." introduces one to native studies, urban history, and ethnic groups.

The authors also provide a section in each chapter on how to approach the various topics. They give suggestions and questions on what to look for and how to start researching each topic.

A second major strength of the book is that a list of sources and places where people can go to research their topics in Manitoba have been provided by the authors. A list for every topic tells one where to find out more about the business, the railroad, the schools, agriculture, etc. in one's own area.

Useful bibliographical sections are included as well. This list is a very practical guide and fills a much needed gap in local history research. A list of libraries, archives, information services, as well as Manitoba directories forms a part of the appendix.

Having outlined in great detail the sources and themes in studying Manitoba local history, Friesen and Potyondi go on and explain in the last chapter how to write a local history book. Here, however, they throw up a word of caution to the local historian and history teacher by saying their main obligation is not a history book, but preservation and education. Teaching local history in the classroom, collecting documents, and listing depositories are the first objectives.

It is here, however, that there is weakness to the book. These ideals set for writing a local history book are somewhat too high. The local and even the academic historian may be discouraged by these ideals rather than be encouraged by the many helpful historical surveys and lists of sources provided in this guide. Happy writing, nonetheless!

New Books Received

P. Batschinski, V. Quiring and M. Perelman. **Emanuel J. Quiring**. Alma Ata: Verlag Kasachstan, 1974. German translation from Russian by Ralf Pfeffer. Pb., 142 pp., 15 kop. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre.

David A. Haury. **Prairie People. A History of the Western District Conference**. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1981. Cloth, 533 pp., \$25.95 (U.S.), pb., \$17.95 (U.S.)

James Horsch, ed. **Mennonite Yearbook 1982**, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1982. Pb., 216 pp., \$4.95 (U.S.)

I.P. Klassen. **Licht und Schatten. I. Teil. Gedichte**. Winnipeg, Manitoba 1981. 92 pp., Cloth, \$10.50; Pb., \$8.50. Order from: Christian Book Store, 266 Hawthorne Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R2G 0H4.

Schloneger, Florence. **Sara's Trek**. Newton Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1981. pb., 105 pp., \$6.25. Order from Fellowship Bookcentre, 1477 Pembina Highway, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

John B. Toews. **Czars, Soviets and Mennonites**. Newton, Kansas, Faith and Life Press, 1982. Pb., \$10.95 (U.S.)