

# Mennonite Historian



Volume IX, Number 1  
March, 1983



The 1927 "MCI Annual" staff: Back row (l-r): B. Hildebrand, Rosa Buhr, Linda Brown, Tina Buhr, Ella L. Peters, Mary F. Friesen, Cornelius DeFehr. Front row (l-r): Abram J. Suderman, Edwin Weaver, Peter Brown, Henry Wall, H. F. Goertz.

## Heinrich H. Ewert and Mennonite Education

By Gerhard Ens

On September 13, 1882, one hundred years ago, a young man of twenty-seven was ordained to the Christian ministry in a small Kansas Mennonite community of Emmen-thal. The person who officiated at this ordination was Leonhard Sudermann, Elder of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church. Present at this ordination was also, without a doubt, the candidate's father, Elder Wilhelm Ewert, who eight years earlier had brought his family and his congregation from Thorn, Prussia to Marion County, Kansas.

Ewert's eldest son, Heinrich, had elected to be a teacher and this ordination was to launch him on his life's work. He had already spent eight years of informal and formal preparation for this task to which he now came with an advanced academic degree and full teacher's qualifications. The task to which he was now called specifically was to head a continuation school, an academy, under the auspices of the Kansas Mennonite Conference.

A year later, 1883, a new school was built in Halstead, Kansas. It was a bilingual

academy which in a sense was the forerunner of two considerably different Mennonite schools in two different countries, one thousand miles apart. After a number of years of operation, the Halstead academy was absorbed into Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, while the founder of the Halstead Academy, Prof. H. H. Ewert, went to a small community in Gretna, Manitoba, Canada to re-open a school which had been started by a group of progressive, educationally minded Mennonite immigrants who had come from Russia to Manitoba in the same migration that had brought the Ewerts to Kansas. This was in 1891.

Two years earlier, in 1889, an immigrant teacher, Wilhelm Rempel, had opened a continuation and teacher training school in Gretna under the auspices of the newly formed Mennonite Educational Society, only to insist after a trial year with sixty students, that the task was beyond his ability and capacity. Aided and encouraged by the provincial Department of Education the society re-opened the school in 1891 after it had

procured the services of Heinrich Ewert to serve as teacher and principal. Two schools at Gretna, the Mennonite Education Institute until 1908 when it was moved to Altona, and the Mennonite Collegiate Institute built in 1908 were the centre of H. H. Ewert's activities for the next 43 years, 1891-1934. He died at the end of the first term of the school year, 1934-1935.

In this almost half century of tireless activity in both church and school, H. H. Ewert exercised an influence which went far beyond the bounds of a small Mennonite community and the lifespan of one human being. There is hardly a phase of the development of the Mennonite community in Western Canada that was not in some form touched, and in many instances given decisive direction by H. H. Ewert.

On the Manitoba Mennonite education scene he succeeded against considerable odds to recruit and train, over the years, enough qualified Mennonite teachers to staff the Mennonite public elementary schools. This was important before 1916, but especially crucial after this landmark date in the Manitoba education. That was the year of the virtual abolition of the Mennonite private elementary school. Not a single Mennonite public school in Manitoba was forced to accept an "outsider", a non-Mennonite teacher; all could be staffed by qualified Mennonite teachers, very many of them trained in H. H. Ewert's school. Many a former opponent of Ewert and of his aims has later made grateful acknowledgment of this fact.

But it was not only in educational matters where H. H. Ewert left his mark; he was a towering figure on the Conference scene as well. A prime mover in the formation of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, he was also the founder and editor of the first periodical the Conferences had ever published, *Der Mitarbeiter*.

In the matter of Mennonite immigration to the country of his adoption, Canada, he was very open and positive. The founding of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, which facilitated the immigration of twenty thousand Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada, was his idea and happened under his initiative. A former stu-

dent of his, Elder David Toews, was a long-time administrative officer of the Board which made the actual immigration possible.

H. H. Ewert's interests were wide and varied: one might in fact almost call them universal. He was equally well versed in German and English literature. He was one of the very few of his generation who had the knowledge of classical Latin and biblical Greek; he was a lover of music, and a conductor of choirs. No history of choral singing among Mennonites in Manitoba can bypass the contributions of H. H. Ewert. He played the piano and already in the 1920's and 1930's he had a collection of recordings of classical music.

His classroom manner was relaxed, rather than flamboyant, his methods were from all accounts, simple and unsophisticated. With H. H. Ewert, it was not technique but the man himself who inspired his students and got them to do their best. Perhaps the lasting legacy of H. H. Ewert in his 42 years' sojourn at Greta is the number of grateful people who studied under his tutelage and were inspired by his vast knowledge, his kindly wisdom and most of all by his gracious presence.

In many ways, this legacy still lives on in our alma mater, the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, the school which he founded and nurtured for forty-three years.

#### Source:

*The Mennonite Collegiate Institute Alumni and School Newsletter, November, 1982, pp. 1-2. Reprinted by permission.*

## Recent Acquisitions

### Manuscripts, documents, etc.

Records of the Manitoba Women in Missions. 6 green boxes. Courtesy of Anita Froese, Rosetown, Manitoba. Also extra copies of MWMA history.

Minutes from the Lichtenauer Mennonite Church, St. Elizabeth, Manitoba, 1932-1980. Courtesy of Rev. Bruno Penner.

Files of Fort Garry Mennonite Church — all records up to 1980. Courtesy of John Friesen, CMBC.

Family Register of Giesbrechts, Elias — Courtesy of Jacob Giesbrecht, Springstein, Manitoba, Duplicate.

Memoirs of David Mathies. Courtesy of Abram Berg, Leamington, Ontario. German script, with English typed translation.

Document of land purchase in Russia. D. A. Klassen. Donated by Mrs. Louise Guenther, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

English translation of "Grandma Buhr's memoirs" deposited by Mrs. Margaret Cormie, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Records re MCI alumni. Deposited by Dr. John Bergen, Edmonton, Alberta.

### Maps, Photos, Slides, etc.

17 color prints of works by Heinrich Pauls, Blytheswood, Ontario.

Maps of Memrik and Schoenfeld, South Russia. Courtesy of Bill Schroeder, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

7 slide sets on Mennonite themes from Heritage Commission, Newton, Kansas.

### Tapes

Anniversary celebrations at Karaganda, USSR. 2 cassettes. Courtesy of Rev. Jacob Thiessen, Virgil, Ontario.

Interviews of MMHS members — by Mary Enns, January, 1983. 2 cassettes.

German Mennonite Literature — lectures by Dr. Abraham Friesen and Gerhard Ens. February 24, and March 24, 1983. University of Winnipeg. From Peter Paetkau.

### Published Materials

Back numbers of *Ich Sende Euch* (MCI alumni) for 1940s and 1950s. Courtesy of Dr. John Bergen, Edmonton, Alberta; and Henry G. Ens, Reinland, Manitoba.

Back numbers of *Winkler Progress* and *Pembina Triangle Progress*. Courtesy of Regional Library, Winkler, Manitoba.

1956 and 1973-1981 issues of *Heimatsbuch der Deutschen aus Russland*. (Bundesrepublik) To complete MHCA set.

## New Inventories and Registers

Additional help received through funding by Canadian Employment has enabled us to work on organizing our records more helpfully for retrieval and research. Mark Froese and Marilyn Froese have been heading up this work since they came to the archives in mid-December of last year.

Since that time it has been possible to create a detailed inventory of the periodical and journal holdings of the archives. This means we know now exactly which titles have come in, and how much of each run is available here. Many of these materials are bound and available for circulation to the public. Quite a few issues remain unbound because the sets or years in question are incomplete as yet. As materials are brought in, the gaps are filled, and when volumes are ready, they are bound.

Most of the Conference materials have now been listed on registers which are complete lists of file tab topics placed in the collections brought in by Conference offices. This will make it more easily possible to locate desired items from a board or committee which needs information from these files. When these lists are complete, they will be typed and copies made available to ex-

ecutive secretaries and others who need to check these sources from time to time.

Considerable time has been given also to properly put away the deposits of worship bulletins and other items sent by congregations. During the past year reports of the 1982 deposits have gone out to the churches so that missing items may be obtained and forwarded to the archives as well.

Inventories are now in progress for the newsletters and yearbooks, etc. which are held by the archives at present. Considerable time has been required to sort through and inventory recent deposits of newspapers such as a 1942-1982 run of the *Altona Echo* and *Red River Valley Echo*, *Winkler Progress* and *Pembina Triangle Progress*, *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten* (1920-1922), *The Carillon*, etc.

Other projects in prospect for 1983 include completion of the second volume of *Der Bote* index, more sorting and cataloging of photos (already worked on by Marilyn), microfilming of MCC (Canada) records, cataloging new deposits (Mark has done much of this already), etc.

We welcome visitors, and hope that additional finding aids such as the above will be an incentive for students and researchers to use the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives as well.

Lawrence Klippenstein

## Donor Acknowledgments

We are much indebted for support in recent months to a number of persons who have remembered the Centre in their giving. The total of these contributions (January - March) was \$701.50. Thank you very much!

John Thiessen, Mather, Manitoba

Helen Kruger, Kitchener, Ontario

A. M. Bergen, Kitchener, Ontario

Elsie Nesbitt, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Jannis Rogers, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Linda R. Thiessen, Mather, Manitoba

Eleonore Janzen, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario

Mrs. Maria Naesser, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario

Eric Wiebe, Kamloops, B.C.

Joseph Eichler, Kamsack, Saskatchewan

David G. Rempel, Menlo Park, California

Ben Dyck, Oliver, B.C.

Peter Funk, Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan

Ernest J. Dick, Ottawa Ontario

Henry Goertz, Virgil, Ontario

Abr. Regier, Virgil, Ontario

Eldon Krause, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Victor Dick, Ruthven, Ontario

W. L. Enns, Winkler, Manitoba

Margaret Cormie, Winnipeg, Manitoba

## Family Studies



Photos: H. J. Siemens, Victoria, B.C.

### My Studies on the Hiebert Family

By Henry J. Siemens

For several years now, Mr. Henry J. Siemens has been carrying out research on the Hiebert family to which he is related. One rather public person in the family story was Cornelius Hiebert, MLA in the first Alberta legislature which convened in 1905. In this article we share some information from Mr. Siemens as he relates a few details about one aspect of his research.

Elsewhere on this page is a short memoir from a local resident of Didsbury, also dealing with the Cornelius Hiebert family.

\* \* \*

In June, 1982, I located the tombstones of Uncle Cornelius and his daughter, Meta Schreifels, side by side, both showing the Masonic insignia, in the Didsbury cemetery. I took the above pictures.

From there I proceeded to the big house in town and took pictures there too.

In the process I made the acquaintance of its new owners, Lorne and Tianne Pringle, who reported that they had received confirmation recently that the Alberta Government had approved their application to have this house declared a "Historical Site", thus qualifying for Government assistance in restoration costs. They handed me the copy of a local newspaper clipping, and showed me the house.

As they were in the process of collecting historical background for publicity connected with the project they were delighted to have some of the pictures and narrative of our report.

### Old School Registers Important

Old school registers seem to have little value. For most people, that is. But there is still some "life" left in them for historians, people who plan community or school district reunions, and for individuals who simply want to recall what school days were like long ago.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre recently received a fine collection of registers from the Thames S.D., brought in by a former resident of the community, Henry P. Giesbrecht. The set that is now available at the Centre includes a complete run from 1920-1976, with the exception of 1933. Perhaps someone will find that one also.

Such materials will be important for the research of the Rhineland municipality history which began last summer, and is to end up in a book next year. We would like to invite persons who still know of collections of school registers in the RM of Rhineland, to report this to the Centre, or to the school division office in Altona. That way they may be checked for information about school history for this upcoming study.

Books may be deposited directly at the Centre at 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Call 888-6781 if there are any questions about transfers.

It may be added that the Department of Education has consented to have these transfers made to the Centre, and the Manitoba Archives favors this also.

**John K. Schellenberg, Steinbach, is currently working on a history of schools in the Hanover municipality, Manitoba. He is making much use of old registers.**

## Research Request

I am looking for information about the family Klaas L. Thiessen, but also used Tysen and Tyssen (1872-1926). We know he was born in Ekaterinoslav, Ukraine. He came to Canada with his father Klaas G. Thiessen. They arrived at the port of Halifax on December 1, 1891. Klaas L. Thiessen married his first wife (unknown) and had two sons (George 1903, Nick 1905). Then he married his second wife in 1909 - Elizabeth Funk (Ginther) 1882-1961 who had a son (John Funk 1905) from an earlier marriage (Peter Funk 1864- ?) Now they had a total of twelve children of their own. Any pictures, or other information about the above people mentioned would be very helpful.

If you have anything, please write to:

**Myrna J. Bowns**  
724 - 8 Ave. South  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
T1J 1N9

**We invite readers to send in research requests at any time. The charge as in above is \$5.00.**

### My Memories of Mr. Hiebert

By Lloyd Chandler

I knew Cornelius Hiebert well. He came to Didsbury in 1901 or 1902 and built a huge brick house in the north west part of town. He was a business man in Didsbury, had a lumber yard and machine business. Also built the first grain elevator in town. A Mr. Hunter ran it for him. He had the first car in Didsbury about 1910, a Buick with lots of brass on it. I have heard smoother running motors, but it ran and a wonder in those days.

He was our first MLA in 1905. He spread himself too thin and went broke and then went to the Peace River to homestead. That wasn't too much of a success so he came back and started a real estate office in Didsbury.

Later he got cancer in his leg, and lost it at the hip. The last I saw him he was sitting on the steps of the Royal Bank selling lead pencils and shoe laces. I bought a pencil and pair of shoe laces from him...

His son became a lawyer and at the death of his father came up from California to make arrangements to bury him...

**Note:** Mr. Chandler, a senior citizen of over 90 years of age wrote this letter in response to a request for information about the Hiebert home. The present owners of the old Hiebert residence are Mr. and Mrs. L. W. Pringle of Didsbury, Alberta.



## The Neukircher Mennoniten Gemeinde

By Irene Klassen

### Conclusion

Worship services were held in various homes and for a large gathering such as Thanksgiving Day, baptisms, or weddings, a school or hall would be rented for a few dollars. There were two choirs, under the direction of Peter Derksen, and Jacob Neufeld. The women, although never formally organized spent their butter and/or egg money making items to sell at the mission sale.

In 1931, the congregation was at its peak. Forty-six men attended the brotherhood meeting. A decision was made to ordain William Martens as elder. Four more ministers were elected - Abram Epp and Peter Penner in January and Wilhelm Pauls and Jacob Neufeld in November.

However, disaster was looming. At about this time the Depression hit. Since those people had little to lose, the Depression might not have been so disastrous, had not the drought come at the same time. After several crop failures, they could no longer make mortgage or tax payments, or even have seed grain for the next spring. Besides, the ever-growing *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) kept gnawing at their conscience.

When crop conditions did not improve, it was not long before people left in large numbers. Between 1934 and 1936 the records show many transfers: to Rosemary where irrigation was just coming into its own; to Tofield, a new frontier; to Didsbury, an established community; to British Columbia and to Ontario. Ironically, the last minutes recorded were on March 14, 1937, exactly nine years after the organizational meeting.

Among those who left were the ministers, who were essentially also farmers. Regehr and Boese went to Tofield, Dueck to B.C., Huebert and Harder to an MB congregation, the Penners to Tofield, Janzen to Rosemary, Neufeld to Gem, Pauls to Didsbury, and Epp to Lacombe. Martens went to Coaldale but continued to serve as elder for as long as the congregation existed.

The little flock, scattered over the entire span, was left without a shepherd. But it survived. In the late 1930s the "seven dry years" ended, the economy was swinging upward and most farmers were able to mechanize and to buy cars, so distances were less formidable. David Epp was chosen to coordinate the group. Informal services were held - with the sermon being read from either the *Predigtbuch* by J. H. Janzen, or from *Der Bote*. Even Sunday School was held for the dozen or so children aged 3-15.

Eventually, however, the hunger for more spiritual nourishment within a Mennonite community led to the complete abandonment of the area. (One family, the Peter Kroekers, remained and have retired at Cereal.) The

once vibrant congregation, the "Neukircher Mennoniten Gemeinde von Chinook-Sedalia" is no more. No church building commemorates the place, for none was ever erected.

The records show that there were 181 members plus children and non-members to a total of 347 persons at its peak. Twelve ministers led the flock. There were 108 births, 51 baptisms, 20 marriages, and 11 burials recorded during that short period. In 1950 the books were closed and handed over to the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta.

Where are all those who were once a part of that Chinook-Sedalia family? Many of course are no longer living, and the rest dispersed in all directions. Let me name a few:

David Boese, a long-time minister at Tofield; Heinrich Dueck, retired minister at Chilliwack; Wm. Pauls, for many years teacher at Menno Bible Institute, Didsbury, now living in Calgary; Abe Baergen, minister at Tofield; Agnes (Baergen) Poettcker, Elkhart, Indiana; Marie, Liese, Anna Wiens, Coaldale; Rudy and Anne (Boese) Regehr, Winnipeg; Jessie (Neufeld) Kehler, Winnipeg; Fred Peters, with Mennonite Central Committee in Nepal; Henry Kroeger, Provincial highways minister, Edmonton.

The memories of the struggles and of the fellowship will die as the grass dies in the wind, but the strengths, and the triumphs, as well as the weaknesses have been carried to the far places wherever its members have gone. The life of that congregation was not in vain.

## Mennonite Participation in Alberta Local Politics

By Alexander Malycky

At present, Albertans of Mennonite origin are unrepresented at the level of federal and provincial politics, but they do participate in Alberta's politics locally. The latest available data concerning this participation are those for 1980/81. They are listed in Vol. XXV of **The Alberta List of Official Personnel in Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments in the Province of Alberta**, edited and published by Isabel D. Bince (Edmonton, Alta., n.d. [c1981]). The list offers no information on the religious denomination of the persons enumerated, but the Mennonite provenance of the individuals shown in the appended list could be deduced with reasonable certainty on the basis of their surnames which are prevalent among Mennonites, without, of course, guaranteeing that they do profess the Mennonite faith.

The listing reveals that in 1980/81, nineteen persons of Mennonite origin participated in the local level governments of sixteen Alberta localities: seven as mayors and twelve as aldermen or councillors. Best

represented were towns where we found two mayors and seven councillors. They were followed by villages with four mayors and three councillors; the cities were in the last place with only one mayor and two aldermen.

There was a very high ratio of mayors vis-à-vis the number of aldermen/councillors (especially for villages). Only three localities boasted more than one Mennonite member of government: the city of Wetaskiwin, the town of Didsbury, and the village of Linden. Furthermore, in only two localities did Mennonites constitute half of the councilmembers: at Linden which has a four-member council, and at Empress, where there are two councillors.

One is struck by the relatively poor Mennonite representation in Coaldale, Didsbury and Tofield, all localities with a high concentration of Mennonite population, whereas the few Mennonites in Wetaskiwin are represented by two persons.

Here is the list of persons involved:

### Cities

- |                |                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Edmonton (12)* | 1. Janice R. Reimer (alderman) |
| Wetaskiwin (6) | 2. F.S. Dyck (mayor)           |
|                | 3. L. Loewen (alderman)        |

### Towns

- |                   |                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Coaldale (6)      | 4. Richard Wiebe (councillor)  |
| Didsbury (6)      | 5. R. L. Shantz (mayor)        |
|                   | 6. David Janzen (councillor)   |
| Hardisty (6)      | 7. C. Rempel (councillor)      |
| Irvine            | 8. Walter Regehr (mayor)       |
| Tofield (6)       | 9. Edward Regehr (councillor)  |
| Turner Valley (6) | 10. Ken Stauffer (councillor)  |
| Vauxhall (6)      | 11. Peter Unruh (councillor)   |
| Wembley (7)       | 12. Neil Thiessen (councillor) |

### Villages and summer villages

- |              |                               |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Coutts       | 13. Erwin E. Thiessen (mayor) |
| Duchess      | 14. Dale Shantz (mayor)       |
| Empress (2)  | 15. Harley Toews (councillor) |
| Linden (4)   | 16. Pearl Penner (councillor) |
|              | 17. Ken Klassen (councillor)  |
| Rosemary     | 18. George J. Penner (mayor)  |
| Silver Sands | 19. Delmar Penner (mayor)     |

\*Here and subsequently, the numbers in brackets indicate how many members serve on the councils.



## First CO Reunion for Saskatchewan

**Rosthern, Sask.** — The Peace and Social Concerns Committee of Mennonite Central Committee (Saskatchewan) has been working on planning an All-Saskatchewan Conscientious Objectors of World War II Reunion. Included are their wives and interested family members. To date two meetings have been held.

Committees have been organized to have Saskatchewan's first CO reunion on the weekend of August 19-20 at Rosthern Junior College, Rosthern, jointly with the Saskatchewan Youth Organization and other interested young people.

For further information contact: The Advertising Committee, c/o A. J. Funk, Box 166, Laird, Sask. S0K 2H0.

## Pioneer Days in Saskatchewan

by Henry Pauls

The depression came, then duststorms, grasshoppers and crop failures. Many farmers were looking for greener land. It was green in the eagle hills and for \$25.00 down payment, you could buy a quarter section of land. Nobody worried about the \$4.00 per acre, to be paid later. It was a hard job to clear the land, but if you wanted to survive, you had to go at it. You cut the trees in winter, pulled the stumps and dug out the stones next spring. Then you could plow it. With a good layer of manure, rotting all summer, you had a nice patch to plant a garden next spring. Late in May you planted the potatoes and all the other vegetables. Everything grows rapidly, so no weeds to hoe on this new land.

Then early in September came a big snowstorm. High wind and heavy snow for three days and three nights. When it was all over, everything was buried deep under the snow. If we wanted to have potatoes for winter, we had to dig. Soon there was a tunnel along the potato row and snow piled high on each side. Then we had a big surprise. Under each plant were up to eight or ten, nice, big, red potatoes. The biggest, the best crop we ever had, but deep under snow. We dug enough to last us through the winter, then gave up.

But, behold - the snow melted, slowly and no frost. So we went at it again, the whole family. A dealer came along, provided bags and a whole truck load for the city. Mother said: "This money will bring us a very happy Christmas!" Even Eatons in Winnipeg were surprised about the big order. Parkas for everybody, sweaters, overalls, boots. Mitts and stockings we did not need since

Mother knitted them. Then books, scribblers and pencils and much more.

On Christmas mornings we all gathered around the pedal organ. They sang many Christmas songs - the children in their clear soprano voices and Mother's alto in harmony with the organ. And the little baby boy joyfully clapped his hands. Now we were

ready for the presents. Then, looking through the window, we could see Santa's reindeer. Standing there, they looked at the happy children. Maybe old Santa was there?

Old Hector, who was always so watchful and chased coyotes and all other animals away, did not even growl. He knew - it was Christmas!

# BETHLEHEM

## '83

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FOR MORE INFORMATION & RESERVATIONS  
CONTACT

**CIRCLE TOURS**  
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Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2A6  
Phone: (204) 775-8046

## Information Wanted

The Gretna History Book Committee is looking for any information available about a newspaper called *Der Rheinlaender*. Apparently it appeared in 1908-1909. It is thought that 13 issues were printed. It was published at the Gretna Printery then owned by Benjamin Ewert.

Send information to:

Gary and Gayle Enns, Box 159, Gretna, Manitoba R0G 0V0

## MHSC

### Partners in Service: MCC (Can.) 1963-1982

For some time rumours have had it that MCC (Canada) would be putting out a small commemorative for its twentieth birthday in 1982. Researcher and writer Bert Friesen, who has been freelancing for MCC (Canada) had spent a good bit of time putting data together. Frank Epp and others were doing some editorial work as well. Glenn Fretz and Gerald Loewen helped with design.

Finally the project is complete. *Partners in Service* prepared by Bert Friesen, and edited by Frank Epp is in one sense a chronology of important events in the life-story of Mennonite Central Committee (Canada). But there is more to it than that. Among the events mentioned are others which helped to create that organization, along with a variety of charts, and some very meaningful photos to help interpret the story.

In all, it's a modest paper back of 76 pages well-bound and illustrated, an ideal way to get an over-all glimpse of the vigorous efforts, at times even struggles, to get the MCC (Canada) enterprise underway, and growing till it became what it is today.

You may get your copy of this booklet by writing to Waldo Neufeld, MCC (Canada), 1483 Pembina Hwy., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2C8. There is no charge, but a donation will be appreciated.

**Materials on this page were provided by the Mennonite Historical Society, Canada.**

### Morris and District Historical Society

At a February 21 meeting held in Morris, Manitoba about twenty-five interested people formed the Morris and District Historical Society "to promote historical awareness and to locate items of historical value". Members of the executive include the following: President, Elmer Sommer; Vice-president, Bill Schellenberg; Secretary, Lillian Stevenson; treasurer, Winnie Davies; and a Board of Directors consisting of Margaret Friesen, Marion Anderson, Jim Stanley and Florence Bell.

A museum is already well-advanced in construction and artifacts are being gathered. Among the contributors to funding are the Manitoba Historical Society, the provincial government under its Destination Manitoba program, and private donors.

The scope of the Society is to encompass the entire Morris district, including Lowe Farm, Rosenort, Riverside, St. Elizabeth, Arnaud, Broadview and Seward.

### Calendar of Events

#### Saskatchewan

Aug. 19-20 First All-Saskatchewan Conscientious Objectors' reunion at Rosthern, Sask. (See article elsewhere on page.)

#### Manitoba

July 23-24 Gretna reunion at centennial celebrations. (See ad elsewhere in this issue)

Aug. 1-7 Historical sites tour to Bethlehem, Pa. Sponsored by the History Archives Committee. Conference of Mennonites in Canada (See ad elsewhere in this issue)

#### Ontario

May 21-22 Rainham Mennonite Church celebrates 100th anniversary. Organizers request photos, and documents for display. Contact Lynn Swent, 1-416-662-1621.

ble School's newsletter, *The Servant*. Articles include an editorial "From the Bishop's Desk", written by Rev. Henry K. Schellenberg, features from the congregations, letters to the editor, and photos of important events in the life of the conference.

*CMC Chronicle* joins a number of other Mennonite Conference periodicals in Canada: the *MB Herald*, the *EMC Messenger*, the *EMMC Recorder*, as well as the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, *Der Bote*, published by the General Conference Mennonite Church, and *Christlicher Familienfreund* published by the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

Complete sets of all these periodicals may be consulted at the offices of these publications, or at the MHC Archives in Winnipeg.

### B.C. Mennonite Historical Society

**Clearbrook, B.C.** — The Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia has on the premises of the Clearbrook Community Centre a museum with many artifacts, pictures, books and displays. Visitors to the Fraser Valley and the Lower Mainland are invited to visit the museum at 2825 Clearbrook Road. The museum is open six days a week.

The society has also developed a slide exhibit, about 140 slides, to show in churches. The slides show the migrations of the Mennonites, through the ages, to 14 countries.

The society undertook the publication of the book **Remember Our Leaders** which contains 261 photographs and short biographies of ministers of the General Conference of Mennonite Church in Canada, spanning the years from 1902-1977. For information on price and on provincial sales persons write: Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., Box 2032, Clearbrook, B.C. V2T 3T8.

### CMC Chronicle — News

We would like to mention briefly the recent appearance of a new Mennonite Conference periodical. The *CMC Chronicle* is in fact, not quite new. It began to appear in 1980 as a monthly publication of the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, with headquarters in Steinbach, Manitoba.

The paper usually comes out in eight pages with periodic inserts from the Steinbach Bi-



Mr. and Mrs. Abram Friesen of Rosenort, Chihuahua, Mexico, hold two of their miniature buggies which they have built in recent years. Samples of these models are available in the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Persons wishing to purchase items may write to *Die Mennonitische Post*, Steinbach, Manitoba R0A 2A0. Photo: Courtesy of George Reimer, Mexico.

# MMHS

## Annual Meeting Banquet

By Peter B. Paetkau

The annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba was held on March 19. Combined for the first time with the business meeting was also a banquet featuring an address by a special speaker. In attendance were about 65 members and guests of the Society.

During the brief business meeting, opened by out-going President, Dr. Victor G. Doerksen, a number of committee heads presented reports.

The Society, whose present membership stands at 140, has reached its 25th anniversary. In conjunction with this a brochure describing the life and work of the Society is being considered. It could also be mentioned that *MENNONITE MIRROR* recently (March issue) carried an excellent article on the organization, written by Mary M. Enns.

A major endeavor currently underway is the preparation of a multi-volume edition of the writings of Arnold B. Dyck.

It was noted as well that interest in and knowledge of the so-called "conservative groups", i.e. Chortitzer, Sommerfelder and Berghaler in Saskatchewan, needs to be enhanced by the publication of some of their documents uncovered by recent research.

There was some preliminary discussion about the production of a recording featuring the Mennonite piano concerto composed by Victor Davies on commission by the Mennonite Centennial Committee to commemorate the Mennonite Centennial in 1974.

Finally, a proposal regarding the formation of a Mennonite Book Club was presented to the meeting by Al Reimer.

After a delicious banquet meal Professor Donovan Smucker addressed the meeting. Dr. Smucker is the noted Mennonite sociologist of religion from Kitchener-Waterloo on leave-of-absence from Conrad Grebel College, and currently visiting Professor of Theology and Ethics at CMBC.

In his well-taken address entitled, "From Winnipeg to Waterloo: Perspectives on Mennonite Meccas", Dr. Smucker reflected on the different experiences of these two distinct Mennonite communities in Canada.

"Kitchener-Waterloo", he said, "are the only major cities in North America actively settled by Mennonites in which there were all the advantages of being the very first white people. Initially K-W was a mecca for Swiss Mennonites exclusively until the coming of Russlaender in 1924, and now it has the finest array of the whole Mennonite family."

In conclusion, the speaker mentioned "the advantages we have in Winnipeg of a perfect symbiotic relationship between this great ci-

ty and those small towns down to the south. It is something we definitely do not have at Kitchener, or anywhere else in North America for that matter".

The evening concluded with the showing of a film produced by Alan Kroeker called "Capital". It is based on W. D. Valgardson's story of an extraordinary relationship between a down-and-out secondhand car dealer and his son, who early in life, learns the necessary tricks for survival."

### Join the GREтна HOMEcoming July 23-24, 1983

#### Includes

- \*parade
- \*official birthday ceremony (1883-1983)
- \*sports
- \*history displays
- \*ecumenical church service
- \*souvenirs

The Gretna History Book Committee hopes to finish a 300 page book on the community for that time.

**Prepublication price: \$25.00**

For further information write to:

**Village of Gretna**  
Box 159

Gretna, Manitoba R0G 0V0

Registration forms can also be had at the address above, or by calling 1-204-327-6666.

## Mennonites Become Canadians

Some months ago, Mr. Ed Thornhill, one of the residents of a senior citizen's home in Winnipeg, wrote to us about a Mennonite choir which had sung at the legislature in 1927. I couldn't imagine what that had been about so I asked him to insert a research request in *Mennonite Historian*. He did, although I was not at all certain he would get any response.

Recently, however, I was travelling in Ontario and met a friend, Dr. Victor A. Dirks,

of Kingsville, Ontario who said he had seen the request, and answered immediately. He showed me a copy of his letter to Mr. Thornhill. There he had written: "I was a first grader, not yet 7 years old at the time; our school was 100 percent Mennonite, all recent immigrants from Russia. For weeks that spring of 1927 we practiced the song "Manitoba". The occasion was the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Canadian Confederation, as held on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Buildings (Broadway side). The school was Lyman Centre, at Arnaud, Manitoba."

Mr. Dirks then went on to describe the scene at that occasion when the teacher, his father, Alexander Dirks, had taken the class of which Victor was a member to sing in Winnipeg for this celebration. "We were assembled close to the ropes so we had an excellent view of the parade, with its banners, bands and regiments. I recall how tremendously we were impressed by the Highland regiment, with the pipers, kilts, and tartans... no doubt the Queen's own Camerons of Winnipeg. Then came the song, done by the massed choir of children..."

The children had come from all over the province. After the celebration Victor's class took time to tour the city, Fort Garry gate, the provincial museum, etc. Victor ended his account thus: "(It) was the first time we had a glimpse of the greatness of Canada. Each of us had been given a bronze medallion commemorating Confederation. I still have mine. It was a marvelous experience that made us children feel a strong sense of belonging to our new country."

So Mr. Thornhill's efforts bore fruit, and the modest *Mennonite Historian* could play a small part in getting the story of that "Mennonite choir" in 1927. If you have something you'd like to ask about, why not write to the public through the pages of *MH*? Not every one can do as well as Mr. Thornhill, but who knows?

Lawrence Klippenstein



Mr. Alexander Dirks, with his Arnaud class of students in 1927. Son Victor is in front, extreme left.





## Book Reviews

**Epp-Tiessen, Esther. *Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town*.** Altona: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1982. 373 p., hc. \$25.00 Reviewed by Richard Klumpenhower, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Any work of local history, if it is to transcend the status of an anniversary book, must attain at least some degree of universality. Gerald Friesen in his Preface assures the "outside" reader that ***Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town*** is interesting enough in its style and presentation to at least satisfy one's curiosity. He implies that it is Epp-Tiessen's historical explanations of Mennonite institutions and prairie-town politics and economics, i.e., her abilities as a recorder of interesting facts, which forms that basis of the book's wider appeal. I must admit at the outset that, as an outsider who has previously concerned himself with early modern European history, my standards for evaluation were quite different, but for me more important. It is Epp-Tiessen's ability to weave some kind of consistent interpretive thread through at least three-quarters of her work which sustained my active interest. Where this interpretive approach seems to have been forsaken by that author, the author, the book's wider appeal is also jeopardized.

In the first five chapters of her history of Altona, Epp-Tiessen outlines the transition from a relatively homogeneous, self-sufficient community with a shared religious and cultural consensus to one which took on the values and goals of the larger part of North American society. The harmony and overall commitment to traditional institutions in the early years from about 1880 to 1920 allowed Altona Mennonites, in contrast to their Old Colony counterparts in other areas of the municipality, to unselfconsciously accommodate the demands of Canadian society, economics, and government. Their readiness to accept government funds, to participate in federal and provincial politics, and to welcome the emergence of the railway town nearby as an economic blessing (even if area Mennonites would not live there at first) are demonstrations of this. The strength of Altona's identity as a group of German-speaking Mennonites fostered rather than precluded a healthy relationship with Canadian society as a whole. The residents of the Altona area in this early period also seem to have had quite a relaxed, spontaneous attitude towards social and cultural activities. The idea that dancing was a sinful and worldly activity, for instance, did not occur to the Bergthal church leaders of the 1880s until influences from the out-

side (American General Conference Missionaries) advised them otherwise. Altogether, Epp-Tiessen paints the picture of a relatively contented, united and hence culturally spontaneous community which maintained a general confidence in traditional forms.

It was the unprecedented economic crisis of the 1930s, the pressure of falling prices and unpayable debts, which began to undermine this confidence in the religious, cultural, and economic consensus and its institutional proprietors, the Bergthal and Sommerfelder Churches. The collapse of the **Waisenamts** in 1929 may have been only the most visible sign of a more general decline. The essentially secular responses to the crisis, the most important being the co-operative movement, aroused the opposition of the Bishop and Lehrsdiens because they viewed them, and understandably so, as strong ideological challenges. The Women's Institute which sprang up in the forties was another secular expression of Altona residents' activism which faced similar opposition. Epp-Tiessen's fifth and sixth chapters on this crucial period of transition, even though this transition not explicitly recognized, are perhaps the best in the entire book.

For the rest of Altona's history, from the 1950s to the present, Epp-Tiessen's account fails to get at the problems of acculturation and economic and social structures which allow one to gain interpretive insights from earlier chapters. Her only overall thesis seems to be that the co-operative movement which ensured the continued existence of the town as an economic entity complemented a peculiarly Mennonite spirit of co-operation. This argument is thoroughly unconvincing. Epp-Tiessen in fact takes over the perspective of her sources, drawn from the editorial pages of the **Altona Echo** and the board minutes of the Chamber of Commerce, which seems to express a semi-urban capitalist sensibility rather than intrinsic Mennonite social and cultural values. D. K. Friesen's words of concern about the emergence of large outside firms in the area arose not primarily out of his desire to preserve home-grown economic structures, but mainly of a suspicion of labour unions. This may explain the town's solid political conservatism.

Given the in-house context in which ***Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town*** was written, it relates for the most part a surprisingly universal human story of a small-town immigrant community's accommodation to North American life. The problems with

Altona's very recent history are those which historians in all fields must face when dealing with the contemporary past. Be that as it may, the last chapters tend to leave unfortunately, an unfavourable last impression.

Margaret Epp. ***A Fountain Sealed***, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Press, 1982. 237 p., pb. Reviewed by Marilyn Froese, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

***A Fountain Sealed*** is a novel about a newly settled Mennonite community near Rosthern, Saskatchewan, which seeks to preserve itself from worldliness rather than reach out to the world with the gospel of Christ. The story centers around the experience of the young boy and man, Hendrik Niessen who at first opposes the community's stagnant Christianity which does not understand his aspiration for learning but insists that he live as a simple farmer.

Hendrik leaves his authentic Mennonite community to seek more education and follow his call as a missionary. But he believes that even Lisa, whom he loves, has rejected him. Hendrik learns to face these obstacles with courage and is true to his call to missions. The reader learns with Hendrik and with the apathetic community that even where the fountain for growth has been sealed by indifference, God's grace is at work in human lives to reopen new channels for growth.

The conflict within the community seems slow in coming to a head, and the reader feels impatient with characters who cover up rather than face the issue. But all this suits what Margaret Epp wants to say about God binding up His purposes in a relationship of grace to man.

Epp vividly and accurately portrays traditions of a Mennonite farm community such as the love feast, the pig butchering, mutual aid in the fall harvest, etc. The writing style and diction include Low German, High German and English, and shows the struggle of the Mennonite immigrants to gain command of the English language while trying to preserve the traditional Low German.

Happily for the reader less skilled in German, a glossary of High German and Low German words is provided at the back of the book. The characters realistically show that the process of growth is slow and often painful. The young teenager will sympathize with Hendrik's personal struggle to find out God's will while the older adult will also enjoy Epp's book for its comment on God's part of grace in the growth of every community.