



*Mennonite Brethren
Historical Society
Newsletter*

Vol. VII, No. 4
December, 1985

JOHANN A. GOERZ
A RESPECTED TEACHER
1883-1957

Johann Abraham Goerz was born on March 29, 1883 in Ohrloff, Molotschna. (1) He was the son of Aeltester Abraham Goerz who, in addition to being Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt-Neukircher Gemeinde, served on many committees and commissions. (2) His mother died when he was only ten years of age, and since his father remarried he was likely, at least for part of his life, raised by a step-mother. Johann completed Dorfschule and Zentralschule in Ohrloff, then went on to complete his teacher training in Kharkov. He began his teaching career at the age of 20. (3)

Johann Goerz began as a tutor on an estate at Hochfeld, then taught at the Zentralschule in Spat, Crimea for four years. After that he occupied teaching positions in the Dorfschulen of the Molotschna in Blumenort, Ladekopp, Waldheim and then in 1919 finally in Hierschau.

Johann had, in the meantime, met and married Helena Regehr of Blumenort. They were married on August 19, 1912, and the family eventually had five sons and four daughters.

Rudolph	b. August 7, 1913 Spat, Crimea
John	b. January 14, 1915 Blumenort
Walter	b. March 2, 1917 Ladekopp
Abraham	b. May 8, 1918 Waldheim
Katharina	b. September 8, 1920 Hierschau
Heinrich	b. October 18, 1924 Hierschau
Margaretha	b. January 24, 1927 Davidson, SK.
Helena	b. March 2, 1930 Dalmeny, SK.
Anne	b. April 21, 1933 Dalmeny, SK.

In Hierschau the Goerz family lived in the teacherage, which was at one end of the school building. There they occupied four fair-sized rooms and a kitchen, all heated by a large tiled oven. Apparently the quarters were warm in winter and cool in summer. When the family moved to Hierschau they had four children ages one to six; they were blessed by the arrival of another two during their stay.

Since the school then had two positions, Johann shared teaching duties in Hierschau, most of the time with Franz J. Willms. Willms had the subjects such as arithmetic and geography which were taught in Russian. Johann was the instructor for Religion and German language, both of which were taught in German. As a teacher he was

well organized and methodical. His systematic methods seemed to instill the knowledge successfully, since in later years when his students knew more than was expected of them, people were not surprised when they found that the teacher had been Johann Goerz. He was strict, but apparently in a nice way, "so that you didn't mind." (4) Story time, often at the end of the day, when he would tell the students stories on almost any topic, was very popular. Johann's influence spread beyond the school, for in the village of Hierschau he was an authority figure even during the summer holidays; he was greatly respected by everyone. According to his family he was a "typical teacher," and was nothing else except a teacher. In his later years he included his church ministry in this single-minded devotion.

Johann Goerz was a tall, thin and wiry man, somewhat stooped over. While his hair was initially dark, for most of his adult life he was partially bald, with just a fringe of hair. He was short-sighted and wore thick glasses. It is not difficult to imagine how this man, through his character and his appearance, projected the image of "typical teacher." Just after the Goerz family moved to Hierschau, tragedy struck. His wife's father, Johann Regehr, and her brothers Peter and Jakob were murdered by the Machnowze in Blumenort in 1919. When Johann received the bad news he came to the classroom crying, told the class what had happened, then dismissed the school for that day. (5)

But the years spent in Hierschau were also a time of spiritual growth. During a revival in the Molotschna in 1923 both Johann and Helena were converted. It was likely teacher Goerz who confessed at a meeting held by D. M. Hofer in Waldheim, "Dear God, I am a miserable person; I wished to lead others, and have preached. Now I realize that I

was a blind man leading the blind...I pray, be merciful to me a sinner and give me a clean heart!" (6) Johann later contributed to D. M. Hofer's book in which he analysed the status of the Mennonites in Russia. "We were rich in material goods, and also thought we were rich in things that moths and rust could not destroy knew what he wanted to do with our people, and had to show love by punishing us ...the beautiful automobiles, the horses, the wagons with springs, the clothing, yes finally the daily bread was taken from us. Has God now achieved what he wished to accomplish?" More specifically outlining his own personal struggle he mentioned calling to God during the thunder of cannons in the Revolution, yet forgetting. Then he called to God during the time of hunger, and again forgot. Finally at the evangelistic meetings in Waldheim God met him and through his grace confronted him. (7) After their conversion both Johann and Helena Goerz were baptized by Rev. Gerhard Unruh and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Waldheim.

In 1925 the Goerz family, by then with six children, decided to emigrate to Canada. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the same ship as the Isaak Peters family, the S.S. Montnairn, landing in Quebec on October 24. Then they continued on to Rosthern, Saskatchewan by train. (8) After the initial reception they settled in Hepburn for one year, then moved to a farm near Davidson, Saskatchewan, where they stayed two years. But Johann's reputation as a teacher, and presumably his desire to continue in this field, carried on even in the new homeland.

When a new Bible School was established in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1928, Johann was asked to be the first teacher. (9) He accepted the position, and the first year

taught all the subjects, since he was the only faculty member. The next year he was joined by missionary Franz G. Wiens, so the load was shared. A student who was at the Bible School the first two years remembers Goerz as an excellent teacher, obviously very thorough, since he taught him all the German grammar he knows even to this day.(10) Despite economically difficult circumstances, Johann Goerz continued teaching at the Dalmeny Bible School (actually called Tabor Bible School), also serving as principal for most of this time, for a total of 13 years.

After the stay in Dalmeny, Johann taught at a Bible School in Didsbury, Alberta, for one year, then accepted a position as Bible School teacher in Black Creek, British Columbia in 1942. A Mennonite Brethren congregation in this community, on the north-eastern part of Vancouver Island, was somewhat isolated, and felt that it needed the inspiration that the presence of a Bible School could bring.(11) In the spring of 1942 the Goerz family moved to Black Creek where Johann served as minister of the Word and as winter Bible School teacher. Initial salary was \$30.00 a month, though the congregation also helped prepare the living quarters for the family and promised additional funds at the end of the school year. By that time some of the children had left home, so only the four youngest, Heinrich, Margaretha, Helena and Anne accompanied their parents. No sooner had Johann arrived in Black Creek when he assumed the work as church secretary, a position he held for the next eight years. He mentioned having preached in Russia, but seems to have increased this ministry when he arrived in Canada; both in Saskatchewan and later in Black Creek; this was an important part of his work. Being very well versed in German, he continued, as part-time German language teacher even after the

Bible School in Black Creek ceased to function in about 1945. A family tragedy occurred during the time the Goerz's were in Black Creek. Son Heinrich, by then a teacher by profession, was admitted to a sanatorium in 1947 with tuberculosis. Despite medical treatment he died in 1950 at the age of 25 years.(12) Johann Goerz continued his service to the church in what was described as "quiet, but blessed years" until heart trouble forced him to resign from his preaching and teaching ministries in 1956. For three months he was very sick, then he died on May 10, 1957 at the age of 74. His funeral was on May 14, the funeral oration being delivered by J. G. Thiessen of Vancouver, a former colleague of Goerz's during the Dalmeny years. Helena Goerz, Johann's wife, by that time a resident of Clearbrook, British Columbia, joined her husband in death on July 8, 1985.

Johann Goerz, tall, thin and slightly stooped, meticulous and methodical, had a very positive influence on the lives of many throughout the 50 years of his teaching career as well as in his preaching ministry.

Written by
Dr. Helmut Huebert

ENDNOTES

1. John Goerz, son of Johann Goerz, personal letters, used as information throughout
2. Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. 2, p. 131, and Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, p. 536, as well as a number of references in P.M. Friesen.
3. Obituary of Johann A. Goerz MR, 5 June 1957, p. 11, No. 23.
4. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.

5. Ibid.
6. D.M. Hofer, p. 71
7. Johann A. Goerz, written 6 June 1923 as contribution to D.M. Hofer, pp. 165-166
8. Report of Immigrants, MR, 20 January 1926, p.15, No.3
9. J.A. Toews, p. 261
10. J.H. Quiring, student at Dalmeny in 1928, personal interview.
11. J.A. Toews, p. 263
12. Obituary of Heinrich Goerz, Zionsbote, 21 June 1950, pp. 12-13, No. 25

LOST LETTERS FROM RUSSIA

1920 - 1930

When our brethren left Russia during the 1920's contact with friends and relations who stayed behind continued for many years through the exchange of letters. These letters, full of personal details of family and old comradeship, were an essential link between people separated by distance and different experiences. In Russia people were coming to terms with a new regime in a land devastated by war and revolution. In Canada new settlers were trying to re-establish their lives in a land with conditions and institutions different from those they had known in Russia. There was much to be shared, much to be reported and only the written word to communicate it all. But in the early 1930's things changed. Letters sent to Russia remained unanswered and fewer and fewer letters were received from the old country. Stalin's rule cut the link between family and friends.

What has happened to all those letters received in Canada from

Russia during the 1920's? Some were thrown away at the time, but many were carefully preserved. So much had been lost in Russia, so much had been left behind. Photographs and these letters were all many people possessed to keep alive their memory of relations and friends. Letters were tied up in bundles, stored in boxes or drawers and occasionally re-read. In time, however, they were forgotten. Children and grandchildren may later have discovered letters, written on poor paper, often in handwriting and sometimes in a language they could not understand. Such documents were then lost, thrown away or burnt with the trash. But some have survived and it is time that they were preserved. The Mennonite archive centres in Canada are appealing to people to rediscover these letters of past contacts and to send them to be collected and conserved.

Why should you help preserve these letters? Many people will think they are of little or no interest. Are they not just full of personal details and dull trivial issues? But just think if you had access to letters written to your ancestors by their Prussian brethren shortly after migration to Russia almost two hundred years ago - would they not interest you? And what of the letters of the first immigrants to Russia sent to their Prussian family and friends? They too must have been full of personal details which would have been of great assistance to you today in tracing family connections. And they would have contained more information of interest; accounts of how it felt to lose contact with relations who had migrated; how settling in a new land was full of perils and hardships. Unfortunately we have few such letters from this early period; most have been lost or destroyed. Must the letters written from Russia to Canada in the 1920's suffer the same fate?

What can you do to help? If you have such letters or know where some are, go and get them. If you are not sure if your parents or grandparents received such letters why not ask them and see if they can be re-discovered? What should you do then? Read the letters through or get someone to help you. Be careful as the paper may be very fragile. If you cannot decipher the letters do not worry. There is sure to be someone in your community who can help you. Try and identify who all the people discussed in the letters were, write this down with any other important details on the place, conditions etc. you can discover. Then you have a number of choices. You may wish to keep the letters or make copies. Copies can be made cheaply today by using good photocopy machines or you can copy out the letters by hand. Photocopies however are better as you can make mistakes copying them out manually. Whatever you decide to do with the letters you should send details of them to the Mennonite archives either in the form of the originals or copies along with the details you have established about the contents of the letters.

Where should you send them? There are three major archives which have the ability to preserve original letters or copies;

Conrad Grebel College Archives
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3G6
(Sam Steiner, Archivist)

Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3P 0M4
(Dennis Stoesz,
Acting Archivist)

Center for Mennonite Brethren
Studies in Canada
1 - 169 Riverton Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2L 2E5
(Ken Reddig, Archivist)

Sometimes these centres will provide you with copies of your letters if you cannot make them yourself and wish to retain ownership. The letters will be catalogued and carefully stored for future reference. Remember nothing is too unimportant or insignificant. If you know of any other material which should be preserved from this, or earlier or later periods (letters, diaries, notes, documents etc.), please also inform the archives. They are always glad to hear from anyone with such items. Will your grandchildren and great-grandchildren be able to rediscover lost relations and friends in letters you or your parents or grandparents received from Russia during the 1920's? Preserve the past for the future; ACT NOW

GENEALOGY:

A SERVICE TO GOD'S GLORY

Service to the Church of Jesus Christ can take many different forms. Preaching and teaching, while important, are not the only ways to communicate God's love to others. Particularly with people who are less mobile and unable to participate in the usual service opportunities, more creative ways of giving glory to God must be found.

It may seem strange, indeed, to say that genealogy is one form of giving glory to God. At first thought, most would dismiss genealogy as a purely "self-centered" activity. Not so, however, with Kay Peters. Her extraordinary collection, which she recently donated to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, has always had as its primary focus a better understanding of the

families who have been a part of the Mennonite Church, and thus have a mission to glorify God on this earth.

To meet Miss Peters is to meet a bright, articulate individual with a keen sense of history. She is a person who, for health reasons, is not able to get around as others do. At the same time her active mind literally carries her around the world, particularly to areas where Mennonites reside.

To most Mennonites Kay Peters is relatively unknown. To those interested in Mennonite History, particularly genealogists, she is well-known. Over the past fifteen years she has compiled twenty genealogies, probably the most of any Mennonite genealogist.

How she first became interested in genealogy is, in part, a story of her own life. Her background provided her with a context out of which the study of history became meaningful.

Kay Peters grew up in Russia, in the village of Landskrone, in the Molotschna settlement. She lived through the revolution and its horrible aftermath. In 1925 her family moved to Canada. They settled on a farm near Grand Point, which at that time was only ten miles from the end of the Winnipeg streetcar tracks. Between the years of 1930-1941 Kay worked in Winnipeg at various jobs, all the while relating closely to the "Girls Home", i.e. the Winnipeg "Mary-Martha" Home, administered by Anna Thiessen.

Kay worked at various jobs. She worked in a printery, sewing-factory and during the evenings took courses at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. She also enrolled in evening business courses offered in the city. These courses enabled her to find office jobs where she took on secretarial and book-keeping positions.

In 1962 health reasons forced her to begin working out of her home. She became self-employed and earned a living by sewing, typing and doing the book-keeping for a local business.

At the same time she became involved with "Home-Care." She took care of two ladies in her home who required constant attention. Her experience with them made her resolve that being "home-bound" could be devastating to one's mind. As she puts it, "I needed to do something with my mind so that I would not become like they were."

During this time Kay resolved to build a new house and pay for it in ten years. Eight years later, she gives glory to God, He helped her see this accomplished with her own labour, no outside help from anyone.

It was in 1962 that her family began thinking of compiling a Peter's genealogy. Kay began collecting data and eventually completed this book. Soon to follow was a Dyck book and a Riediger book.

But it was not until 1970 that she began compiling genealogies in earnest. In that year Ernie J. Klassen asked her to compile a Klassen book. Following the completion of that book she soon began another one, in all compiling eight books for him.

Thus in 1970 she began what is now a very extensive collection of family-genealogical materials. Her collection is over-whelming. It includes 65,856 cards of family names. 205 binders of family genealogies, 62 binders of histories of Canadian and Russian congregations. Five binders listing immigrants from 1874 to the 1970's. With many other materials the total collection contains some 600 binders of information together with the 65,856 cards, plus 7 linear feet of information in

regular file folders. All this material was collected in the short space of 15 years of concentrated activity.

But in talking with Kay about the wealth of information she has collected, she is always careful to point out that she gives the glory to God. "He helped me accomplish this work, it was done to glorify him, not me."

One senses that Kay means what she says. She has a strong sense of what God has accomplished through the many families who have made up the various Mennonite congregations both in Russia and Canada. An example is that among her many binders of information are 24 binders of clippings on congregations in Canada, South America, Africa, Central America, Europe and Russia. An additional 16 binders are full of biographies and autobiographies of various Mennonite leaders.

How has compiling all this information changed her? Obviously it has kept her alert and developed her into a walking encyclopedia on Russian-Mennonites. For example, she is the first and only person in Canada who, when I was first introduced to her, knew I was a Mennonite and in what family line I belonged. I must say I was impressed.

Why then have all her materials come into the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. Health reasons again. Miss Peters presently is unable to maintain the collection as she would like. Therefore, she has given it to the Centre where, as she puts it, "It will now be accessible to anyone interested."

Truly Kay loves her church and the people who make up that church. The thousands of hours dedicated to this task have not only enriched her, but will provide future generations with a resource not only of their

family history, but a witness of the dedication to God of thousands of men and women who, through Mennonite congregations, have glorified God in many parts of the world.

Written by Ken Reddig
Conference Archivist

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

FROM RUSSIA WITH MUSIC: A STUDY OF THE MENNONITE CHORAL SINGING TRADITION IN CANADA. Wesley Berg. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Ltd., 1985. 152 pp. \$10.00.

From Russia with Music traces the Russian Choral singing experience from 1870 to 1920 and its introduction to and development in Canada and the United States Midwest from 1870 to 1960. It is the first comprehensive study of the Mennonite Choral singing tradition.

VISIONS AND REALITIES: ESSAYS, FOEMS, AND FICTION DEALING WITH MENNONITE ISSUES. Harry Loewen and Al Reimer. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Ltd., 1985. 260 pp. \$10.00.

This anthology tries to recapture and reveal, both in scholarly articles and in creative literature, the strong Mennonite longing to replace "paradise lost" with a "paradise regained." Specifically, this vision embraces both spiritual and earthly homelands, and love and peace for all in a community of believers in which God's justice prevails. As the selections in this volume indicate, that Mennonite vision has been only partly realized, for the "world" has always managed to frustrate the Mennonites' hopes and ideals.

MY HARP IS TURNED TO MOURNING.
Al Reimer. Winnipeg: Hyperion
Press Ltd., 1985. 439 pp.
\$14.00.

This panoramic historical novel unfolds in the years 1905 to 1924, a momentous period that saw the secure and prosperous Mennonite colonies in the central Ukraine ravaged by revolution and civil war. Set mainly in the large Molochnoya settlement, this epic story follows the fortunes of the Fast family which has been farming in the village of Blumenau since coming to Russia from West Prussia in 1804.

DIARY OF ANNA BAERG 1916 - 1924
Translated and edited by Gerald
Peters. Winnipeg: CMBC
Publications, 1985. 158 pp.
\$8.00

The Diary of Anna Baerg is a small window through which the reader can catch glimpses of the life and work of a seemingly ordinary young Mennonite woman living in very extraordinary times. The scarcity of writing paper forced Anna Baerg to entrust large portions of her diary to the back of the labels on the relief packages distributed in the Mennonite colonies by Mennonite Central Committee. Reflecting upon the destruction of the Russian revolution and the civil war, the diary notes what life was like for ordinary people, for impoverished factory workers, for lowly foot soldiers in great military campaigns, for the ordinary child, woman, the sick or handicapped persons in the past. The diary helps to answer some questions of this kind, thereby making a unique historiographic contribution.

PLEASE NOTE: THE PRICES FOR THE BOOKS REVIEWED ABOVE ARE ONLY AVAILABLE IF PURCHASED THROUGH THE MENNONITE BOOK CLUB. Please send your orders to:

The Mennonite Book Club
207-818 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3G 0N4

THE NEW CHURCH MEMBER PROFILE

The latest issue of Direction (Fall, 1985) contains an excellent summary of the Church Member Profile completed in 1982. This profile is one of the most incisive reports and analyses of the state of the Mennonite Brethren Church produced in this half of the century.

The study came out of a concern to determine trends in the Mennonite Brethren Church today. The findings point to some disturbing trends in Mennonite Brethren faith and life which demand further consideration.

Copies may be obtained for \$6.00 by writing:

Direction
M.B. Biblical Seminary
4824 E. Butler Avenue
Fresno, California
93727

LETTERS FROM RUSSIA

The article (in this issue) requesting letters from Russia to be donated to the Archives, first appeared in the Mennonitische Rundschau in November. It has already resulted in some 5,000 letters being deposited in the Centre. Please, if you know of someone who has such letters, kindly alert them to the fact that the Centre for M.B. Studies in Winnipeg would appreciate having copies of, or the originals, deposited in the Centre.

FAITH AND CULTURE:
SYMPOSIUM 1986

This coming fall, the Centre for M.B. Studies will sponsor another in its series of Symposia. The theme for this fall will be Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History.

Scheduled for November 14 and 15 the Symposium will bring together a wide variety of scholars. The following individuals have been scheduled to present papers:

Paul Toews
(Fresno, California)
"Disintegration of Faith and Culture"

James Urry
(Wellington, New Zealand)
"A Religious or a Social Elite? The Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite community in Imperial Russia."

Katie Funk Wiebe
(Hillsboro, Kansas)
"New M.B.'s and Faith and Culture"

Delbert Wiens
(Fresno, California)
"Ethics and Culture"

Jacob Loewen
"The German Language and Faith and Culture"

Peter Hamm
"Continuity and Change Among M.B.'s"

The Saturday evening banquet (November 15) will feature James Urry from New Zealand on a "yet to be announced" topic.

This Symposium is sure to be a significant event. The question "Are Mennonites a Faith or a Culture" keeps recurring as we gain new, non-ethnic church members and as we seek to re-define who we are in a pluralistic 20th century cultural environment. Be sure to reserve this weekend for this special event.

A NEW ARCHIVES AUDIO-VISUAL

A new audio-visual on Mennonite Archives in Canada will be available by the end of February for use by church groups or any other interested organizations. Featuring the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Center for M.B. Studies and the Conrad Grebel Archives the audio-visual in a unique, and often humorous way, introduces the viewer to what Archives collect, who can use the archives, and why archives are important to maintain.

Preparing the audio-visual was Gareth Neufeld, a teacher in the Landmark School Division. He comes to this project having developed numerous audio-visuals and films for other Mennonite organizations. Further information on the slide set will be forth coming.

MAJOR MUSIC THESIS COMPLETED

A most significant and important thesis has just been completed by Peter Letkemann, formerly of Winnipeg. Entitled "The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia, 1789 - 1915" this 860 page doctoral thesis is a fitting companion piece to Wesley Baerg's book, From Russia With Music.

The thesis begins with an analysis of hymnody of the Prussian Mennonites (1597 - 1830) and concentrates upon the Russian Mennonite Hymnody (1789 - 1914). A significant section is the appendix which traces sources of the hymns included in the various editions of traditional Mennonite hymnbooks.

Since the thesis has just been received, a formal review is not possible. In our next issue a review will be included.

THE MENNONITE PIANO CONCERTO
TWO-PIANO ARRANGEMENT

For many Winnipeggers, the evening of January 4, 1986 could already be declared a highlight event of the New Year. That evening the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada sponsored a banquet at which the two-piano arrangement of the Mennonite Piano Concerto was premiered. Providing a superb performance were Irmgard Baerg and Jenny Regehr of Winnipeg.

An additional highlight was hearing the comments of the composer, Mr. Victor Davies, on how the concerto was written. A spell-bound audience questioned the composer as to why he had chosen these particular hymn themes, and secondly, what inspired him to choose different musical styles for the three movements of the concerto.

One major result of the evening was that two individuals have consented to help publish the two-piano arrangement. It is hoped that by summer the arrangement will be available to the general public.

THE
MENNONITE BRETHREN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF CANADA

ANNOUNCES

AN HISTORICAL ESSAY CONTEST

FOR
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
(GRADES 10-12)

COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY
&
BIBLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS

PRIZES

<u>HIGH SCHOOL</u>		<u>COLLEGE</u>	
1st	\$100	1st	\$100
2nd	\$ 50	2nd	\$ 50
3rd	\$ 25	3rd	\$ 25

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE SUBMITTED TO
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BY
JUNE 1, 1986

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION WRITE:

M.B. HISTORICAL SOCIETY
169 RIVERTON AVENUE
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA
R2L 2E5

The Newsletter of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada is published four times a year by the Executive of the Society, at the Centre for MB Studies in Canada. All correspondence regarding the Society or the Newsletter should be addressed to: NEWSLETTER EDITOR, MB Historical Society of Canada, 1-169 Riverton Ave., WINNIPEG, Manitoba R2L 2E5. If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming a member of the Society please have them send their name and address, together with a \$5.00 membership fee, to the address indicated above.