

*Mennonite Brethren*  
*Historical Society*  
*Newsletter*

Vol. VIII, No. 3  
December, 1986

NEWSLETTER TO MERGE  
WITH  
MENNONITE HISTORIAN

This is the last issue of the M.B. Historical Society Newsletter in this format. Beginning with the first issue of 1987 a new improved look, as well as a new cooperative relationship, will signify an important change in this modest publishing venture.

At the annual meeting of the Society last July, we agreed to merge the Newsletter with the Mennonite Historian. This is the publication of the History/Archives Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The merger will be for a two-year trial period after which a decision will be made as to whether the merger should continue.

While the merger will create a new look, many items of the Newsletter will remain the same. Subscription and membership in the M.B. Historical Society will continue to be \$5.00 per year. Ken Reddig, together with Lawrence Klippenstein, will remain as editors. Each issue will have a section of news from the Centre for M.B. Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Books of interest to Mennonite Brethren, articles of interest to Mennonite Brethren will continue to be published. However, in addition the merger will provide a broader scope of the Canadian Mennonite historical scene by including news, articles and

books of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. It is hoped that this will help to broaden both Conferences historical consciousness since both groups have their roots in the Russian-Mennonite context.

We look forward to this new venture. A publication printed on better quality paper, capable of handling photographs, will be the result. It should be a significant improvement for a publication which began in April of 1979, utilizing a typewriter and a xerox machine. The first issue of the new publication is scheduled for March of 1987. We invite your comments and suggestions in this unique and historic venture.

SAVED FROM THE FIRE

Recently some young people saved their grandparent's papers from the fire. As often happens when our loved grandparents die there is the painful task of clearing their treasured possessions and everyday items of the household. In times of grief things are often discarded which later are remembered and people often feel sad that, at the time, they had not been more careful and kept items which were full of love and memory.

Old papers, letters, diaries and journals often appear worthless. Scribbles on old pieces of frail, yellowing paper, often in a

language or handwriting which is difficult to decipher, such items seem just rubbish. In the city they often go out with the garbage; in the country they go out to be burnt. How much has been lost is impossible to say but no doubt all kinds of treasures of the Mennonite past are rotting in city dumps or, as fragile white ashes, are fertilizing the fields of the prairie.



JACOB, ITS YOUR COUSIN FROM B.C. WHO WANTS TO LOOK AT THOSE OLD PAPERS OF YOUR GRANDFATHER YOU GOT OUT ONLY YESTERDAY!

The papers the young people saved included valuable letters from Russia and accounts of life in southern Manitoba. There were church books, guides to ministers and other interesting items. They were literally on their way to the yard, to the flame and

### "A BOY'S IMPRESSION"

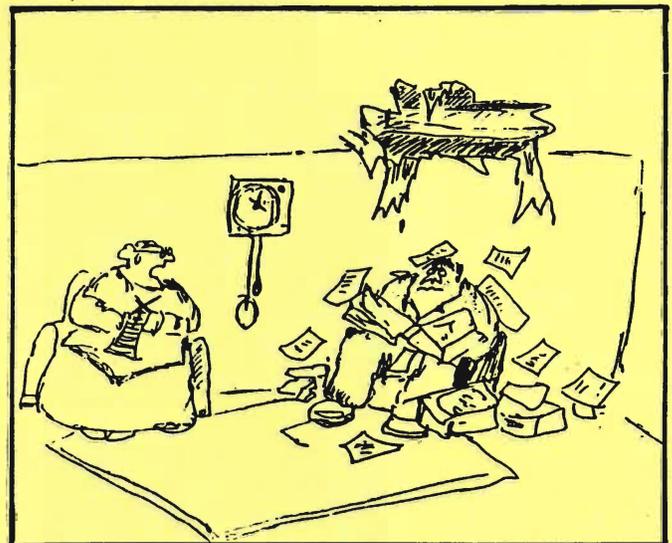
We often read diaries or memoirs of adults describing their immigration journeys to the new world. Seldom do we come across diaries of children, written at the time of the event.

about to be transformed to dust forever when they were rescued.

If you have papers you think are of historical interest and you wish to preserve act now, before your family, in a moment of grief destroy them. If you come across items of possible interest, however insignificant or personal you might think them, do not destroy them. Take advice. Consult the skilled archivist at one of the centres listed below. They will be able to tell you if they are of interest. If you are uncertain, just hand them over to the archivist who will sort them out and tell you their value. If you want to keep the material, let the archivist take copies so that they are always available for others in your family, now and in the future.

Remember, don't destroy the past - it can never be reclaimed.

by James Urry



I TOLD YOU YEARS AGO TO TAKE THOSE OLD FAMILY AND CHURCH PAPERS TO THE MENNONITE ARCHIVES

William Schroeder has found one such diary. It was written by a young boy, age 11, who with his family came to Canada in 1878. Traveling with a group of 47 Mennonite emigrants they left Liverpool on July 13, 1878 and crossed the Atlantic on the "Borussia", a ship of the

Montreal Steamship Company. They arrived in Quebec on July 25.

Gerhard later married Sara Schroeder. They lived on a farm near Gretna, Manitoba.

From the ship lists we note the family members and their ages at the time of their immigration. They are:

<u>NAME:</u>	<u>AGE:</u>
Kornelius Voth	40
Susanna Voth	38
Susanna	15
*Gerhard	11
Katharina	9
Heinrich	7
Kornelius	4
Jacob	3
Johann	1

The diary was written in German and has been translated by William Schroeder. William holds the original copy.

We drove away from the village of Neuanlage on June 12, 1878. We travelled by wagon to Abennovcka and arrived in Konstantinovka at 7:20 on the 14th. We left Konstantinovka at 8:10 in the evening. We arrived in Karkov at 8:40 on Thursday the 15th but immediately continued on our journey and arrived in Mirnegrad at 12:10 and then on to Kursk at 5:30 in the evening. We left Kursk during the evening of the 16th and arrived in Orel at 12 o'clock midnight. We departed from Orel at 3:30 in the morning and came to Vitebsk on Saturday the 17th. We left Vitebsk at 7:30 and arrived in Duenaburg on Sunday evening the 18th. We departed from Duenaburg at 8 in the morning and got as far as Wirbalen on the 19th. We crossed the border at 2:30 on the 19th and stopped in Eitkun. We left Eitkun at 3:20 and arrived in Berlin on the 21st at 8 o'clock in the morning. A wagon took us to another railway station. We departed from Berlin at 2:20 in the afternoon and arrived in Hamburg at 10:10 in the evening. It was raining heavily as we walked to the

immigration house where we stayed from the 21st to the 23rd. At 6 o'clock in the evening of the 23rd we boarded a ship and on the 24th at 2 o'clock in the morning they loaded 58 horses on the ship also. The ship sailed out of the harbour in Hamburg at 4 in the morning during a terrible storm. The storm was still raging when we saw our last Prussian city at 11:40. The name of the ship on which we sailed from Hamburg to Hull was Astrinuni. We arrived in Hull on Monday, June 26 at 10 o'clock in the morning and got out of the ship at 12 noon. We went into the immigration house for our noon meal. At 2:30 we boarded a train and passed through twelve long tunnels before we arrived in Liverpool at 9 in the evening. We stayed in Liverpool for four days and saw many new and interesting things. There are two giant sized statues near the entrance of the museum. One of the statues was about 100 steps high. In the museum we saw many pictures and every type of bird I have ever seen in Russia and many more. We also saw many kinds of fish and frightful looking turtles, terrible snakes and crocodiles. We also saw three big tigers which were set up in a fighting poise and many other things. Near the courthouse are two large statues of men on horseback and many smaller statues.

On Saturday July 1st at 10:30 we boarded the small ship which took us to the large ocean liner. We boarded the big ship and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon we ate beef soup for the first time. The ship was 45 feet wide and 340 feet long.

The big ship sailed out of the harbour at 7 o'clock in the evening. We sailed past Garlou at 7:40 during a storm. On Sunday July 3rd at 10 in the morning we saw an island that belonged to

Scotland (Isle of Man?). And at 2 o'clock we sailed past that island. To the left is Ireland. At 2:15 we could see the rocky cliff on the coast of Ireland for the last time.

This ship has seven life-boats. We had a terrible storm which began on Monday July 3rd and continued to July 7th at 2 o'clock in the morning. However, soon the wind increased again. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon of July 8th the storm was so severe that the waves came over the deck and ran down to the lower deck causing boxes and deck chairs to wash back and forth. The storm finally abated on July 9th and on the 10th we had pleasant weather again. However, the waves were still quite high. At this point the writer of this diary got sick and stopped writing.

Now I have found out that we have passed St. Johns and Halifax and are entering into the Gulf of St. Lawrence on our way to Quebec. We arrived in Quebec on the 14th or 15th of July according to the Russian calendar but according to the American calendar it is twelve days later therefore July 26 or 27. We boarded a train and continued our journey to Montreal and Toronto on Lake Ontario. From Toronto we travelled to Collingwood where we got into another ship and sailed first over a small lake which is connected with Lake Superior by canals. Lake Superior is quite big. We sailed to the city of Duluth where we got off the ship and boarded a train which took us to the city of Moorehead. We crossed a bridge and came to Fargo where we got into a ship again and sailed along the Red River to a point near Niverville. From there, friends took us to their home.

### "DYNAMICS OF FAITH AND CULTURE" SYMPOSIUM

Does being a Mennonite mean belonging to a faith, to a cultural group, or both?

Mennonite Brethren worry about that question a lot, especially when they think about evangelism in the North American context.

A mid-November symposium on the issue also revealed that they have worried about the question for a long time - in fact, ever since the founding of the MB group in 1860 in southern Russia.

The one-day gathering drew about 140 people to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg to tackle the topic of "Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History." They found that there is plenty to discuss.

The most intriguing of the six papers presented came from a New Zealand anthropologist, James Urry, who argued that the 1860 founders of the Mennonite Brethren group were key planters in a new social order. At the time, the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia were in turmoil as the pressures of industrialization and educational and farming reform pushed against the traditions of Mennonite colony life.

Urry first became interested in the Russian Mennonite colonies while studying anthropology at Oxford University. Over the course of 15 years he has become a leading authority on the social organization of those colonies.

The Brethren, Urry noted, generally came from within a new, emerging subgroup. They tended to be young, socially mobile, educated teachers or artisans who "could not find a place" in the changing society. "They wanted to create a new sense of religiosity and a more open community."

Urry views the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren as part of "a radical break with the past" in both religious and social terms.

"You might say that the Brethren were the precursors of modern society" among the other Mennonites. Their emergence was the result of a large set of contingent circumstances, not just a desire for religious reform.

Urry laid to rest the Mennonite Brethren "fold tradition" that the Brethren emerged as an inevitable result of spiritual decline within the colonies. "The simple picture of a Mennonite flock lost in a spiritual wilderness, existing in isolation, ignorance and darkness awaiting the shepherd Brethren to bring them light and renewal, cannot be sustained."

Women are "new" MBs. Katie Funk Wiebe, a journalist from Kansas shifted the discussion into the modern era with a paper on the movement of people in and out of the Mennonite Brethren church. She documented the steady increase in "non-Mennonite" names in the births, weddings and baptism announcements of MB magazines and discussed some of the difficulties these "new MB's" encounter as they move into the centre of denominational life.

But the biggest group of the "new MB's" are the women who have always been there in the background, "for they are slowly becoming visible in the church."

Wiebe ended her paper with an unsettling challenge: "Our (MB) attitude toward women is an aspect of our paternalistic attitude toward weaker, less powerful groups or segments in our midst. Minority members have even fewer opportunities than women of using their gifts in the church and conference structures."

Ethics also came in for some scrutiny. Delbert Wiens of Fresno, California, lamented the passing of more communal style of church life in which children daily experienced the ethical standards of the church. We MB's are uncritically accepting a new unifying ethos of North American mass culture with its "lowest common denominator" approach to

ethics, he urges.

Wiens pointed out how difficult it is for Mennonites to conduct an "ethically nuanced" examination of issues. His conclusion was not optimistic: "I don't have much hope for our survival as we would like to be."

Peter Hamm of Winnipeg provided a contrast with his sociological perspective on "Continuity and Change among the Canadian Mennonite Brethren." He sounded an optimistic note, pointing to signs of continued inner vitality despite the forces of North American mass culture.

Anthropologist Jake Loewen was delayed in India; his paper was read by symposium organizer Ken Reddig. It described the intimate links that once bound MB identity and theology to the German language, as well as the painful process of breaking those bonds by switching to English.

Paul Toews, historian and director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California, proposed a three-staged model to describe MB integration into American culture. An early period of expansiveness - exploring the riches of education and culture in a new land - was followed by a time of fundamentalist separatism and the present era of assimilation.

Toews protested the current attempts by many MB's to reject "any linkage between faith and a particular culture." He called that movement a "fad" that will one day be regretted, since it implies an uncritical assimilation into the surrounding culture of the day. Instead, the church "must always create a distinctive culture that stand separate from the cultural orders of the day."

The symposium ended with a banquet and an entertaining story by James Urry on the British involvement in the migration of Russian Mennonites to Canada in 1874. Diplomatic intrigue, coincidence, Canadian bumbling, human greed and the ambitions of

NEW BOOKS

a certain diplomat named James Zorab all played a role in the final outcome.

Urry stopped short of drawing a lesson from his tale, although anyone with ears to hear might have caught one. It was simply this: When faith and culture cross in Mennonite history, the result is an odd, complicated, jumble of factors. It's dynamic alright, and fun - even crucial - to discuss, but answers only fuel new questions.

by Allan Siebert  
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THE FIRST MB NEWSPAPER IN RUSSIA?

P.M. Friesen mentions in his major history of the M.B.'s that the important evangelist Johann Wieler (1839-1889) produced a small monthly paper which he printed "mechanically" for a few years (page 1013 note 208 of the English translation). Friesen quotes from this paper (was it called "My Thoughts" [Meine Gedanken])? as it appeared in 1882 (See pages 435-443).

What this journal contained, what its format was and how widely it was distributed is unknown. In 1882 he was a schoolteacher at the Centralschule in Halbstadt in the Molochnaia. Was this when the paper was produced? Wieler worked among the Russians and eventually he was forced to flee Russia for Germany. He later settled in Romania where he died after an accident on the site of a church building he was having constructed for Baptists. (see the article in the Rundschau 20 December 1978 p14-15)

It would be wonderful if copies of this paper still existed but it is likely that all were lost. However miracles still happen and maybe we will one day be able to share Johann Wieler's thoughts once more.

by James Urry

Davies, Victor. The Mennonite Piano Concerto. For 2 pianos and 4 hands. \$18.00 plus \$2.00 postage. Available from the Centre for M.B. Studies.

Huebert, Helmut T. Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life. \$25.00 plus \$2.00 postage. Available from Springfield Publishers, 6 Litz Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2G 0V1 or the Centre for M.B. Studies.

Huebert, Helmut T. Kornelius Martens: Our Skillful Advocate. \$10.00 plus \$1.00 postage. Available from Springfield Publishers, 6 Litz Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2G 0V1 or the Centre for M.B. Studies.

Dyck, Arnold. Collected Works Vol II. Contains: Koop enn Bua opp Reise and Koop enn Bua faohre nao Toronto. \$25.00 plus \$2.00 postage. Available from the Centre for M.B. Studies.

Friesen, Bert. Where We Stand: An Index to Statements by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada 1787 - 1982. \$20.00 for the index or \$75.00 for Index plus three microfilms of all 5,568 pages of statements.

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The Newsletter of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada was published four times a year by the Executive of the Society, at the Centre for M.B. Studies in Canada. All correspondence regarding the Society, or the Newsletter should be addressed to:

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If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming a member of the Society and receiving the new Mennonite Historian please have them fill out the following form, and send it, together with the yearly membership fee of \$5.00 to the Mennonite Historian Editor. The editor is Ken Reddig.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_