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volume 19 / number 2 / october, 1989





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## ForeWord

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This edition has a theme in that it explores several aspects of the bicentennial of the Mennonites in Russia. In 1789, the first Mennonites left Europe to take up land grants in Russia -- so beginning what many call a "golden age."

James Urry, who many will remember from earlier issues is a contributor. Dr. Urry is on leave this year in Winnipeg from his university in New Zealand and is currently finishing a major book on the Russian Mennonite experience. In the opening article, Dr. Urry describes what the Mennonites left behind in north Europe and what they found in their new land.

Closer to home, Dr. Urry in a second article reports on his discovery of descriptions of Mennonites in Canada around the turn of the century. The descriptions on the one hand paint Mennonites as unusual enough to merit comment, but on the other hand the descriptions of thrift and hard work are really quite flattering. One must remember, however, that the observers being quoted were hardly biased -- they wanted more settlers to move into the Western plains.

Harry Loewen, whose articles have graced these pages many times, contributes an article on the rather strong emphasis higher education had among Mennonites. Though they were concentrated in Russia, many of their most gifted youth went abroad to study at European universities. So Mennonites can hardly be said to be isolated from the outside world during their Russian sojourn. Indeed, when one looks at the Mennonite school system, one is impressed at how comprehensive it was and how committed community leaders were to education in general.

Al Reimer, our former editor, closes this issue with an Our Word reflection on the Bicentennial. The focus of his essay is that the so-called "golden age" premise for our Russian years is only one part of the story. He points out that other aspects of history, some much less attractive, must also be explored if we are to have an honest picture of our people.

In addition to the foregoing features on the bicentennial, we have several other articles worthy of interest.

Any one who listens to the funeral announcements on CFAM, or who has attended a few Mennonite funerals, will have heard the name of Klassen Funeral Chapel Ltd. Walter Klassen provides an essential service at a time when the bereaved are least likely to be comfortable making "the arrangements." So, one must combine a strong sense of compassion and service with the no-nonsense realities of running a business. Sarah Klassen takes us behind the chapel doors for a visit with Mr. Klassen.

Karl Fast is well known in the German community for his efforts in keeping the German language alive. He moved here in the wake of the Second World War, qualified as a teacher, and then directed second language education programs for Manitoba Education before retiring a few years ago. Agnes Wall describes the path from refugee to educator and then to a helper of modern 'Umsiedler' after retirement.

Agnes Wall makes a second appearance in this issue with a Low German article, while Helene Janzen makes her debut in the German section.

Other items are in their usual places -- look for them, enjoy them, and pass this issue to your friends.

**The Cover:** A Mennonite farm scene in Russia, photo provided by the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

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october, 1989

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### Mennonite Mirror

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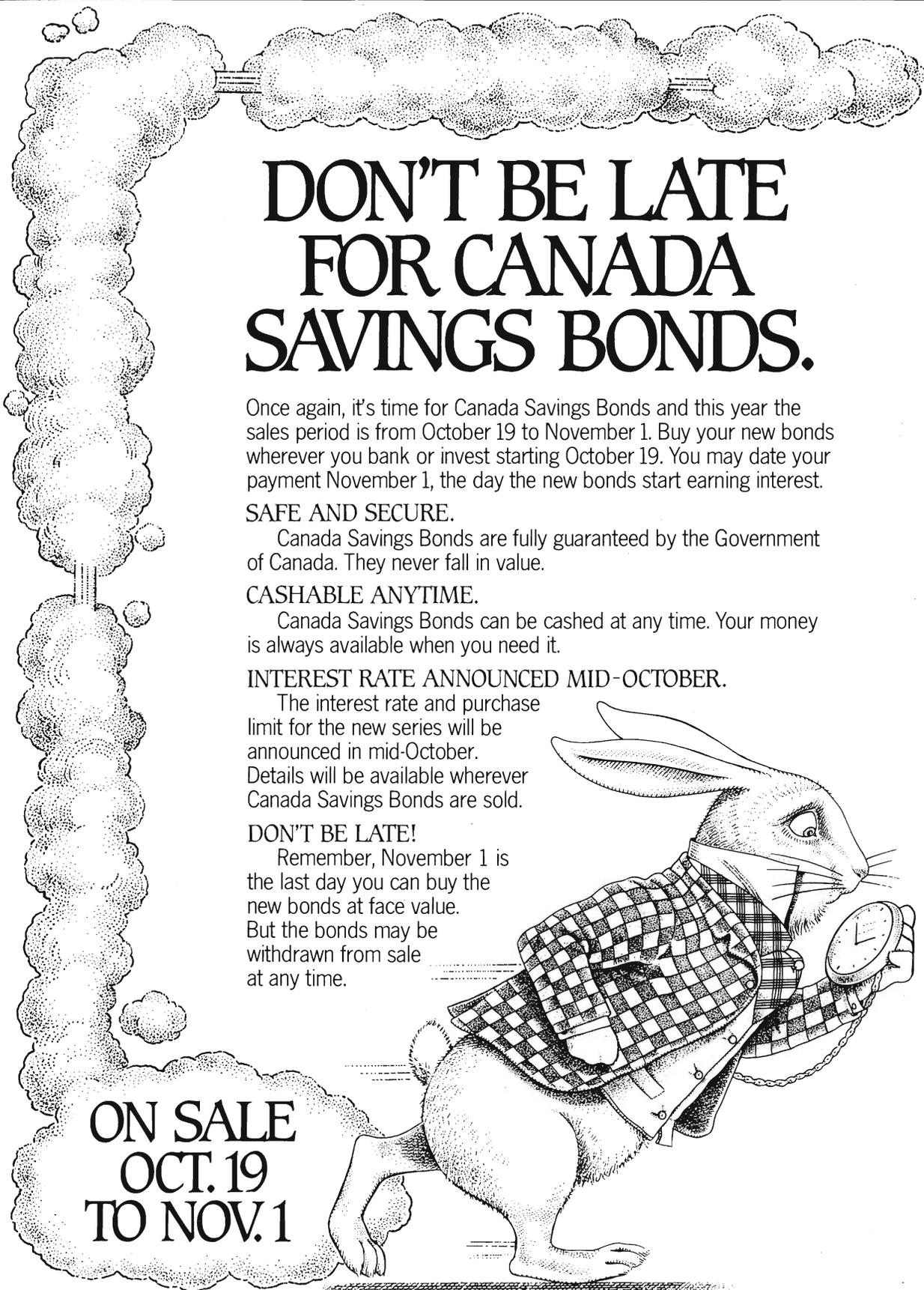
**President:** Roy Vogt **Vice-President:** Ed Unrau **Secretary:** David Unruh **Office Manager:** Freida Unruh **Directors:** Rudy Friesen, John Schroeder, Mavis Reimer.

The Mennonite Mirror is normally published 10 times each year for the Mennonite community of Manitoba by the Mennonite Literary Society Inc.

All business and editorial correspondence should be addressed to 207 - 1317A Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0V3. **Telephone 786 2289.** The Mennonite Mirror observes the following part-time office hours: Monday 1 to 4 p.m.; Tuesday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday, 9 a.m. to noon. **Subscriptions:** \$15 for one year, \$28 for two years; no charge for those on pension.

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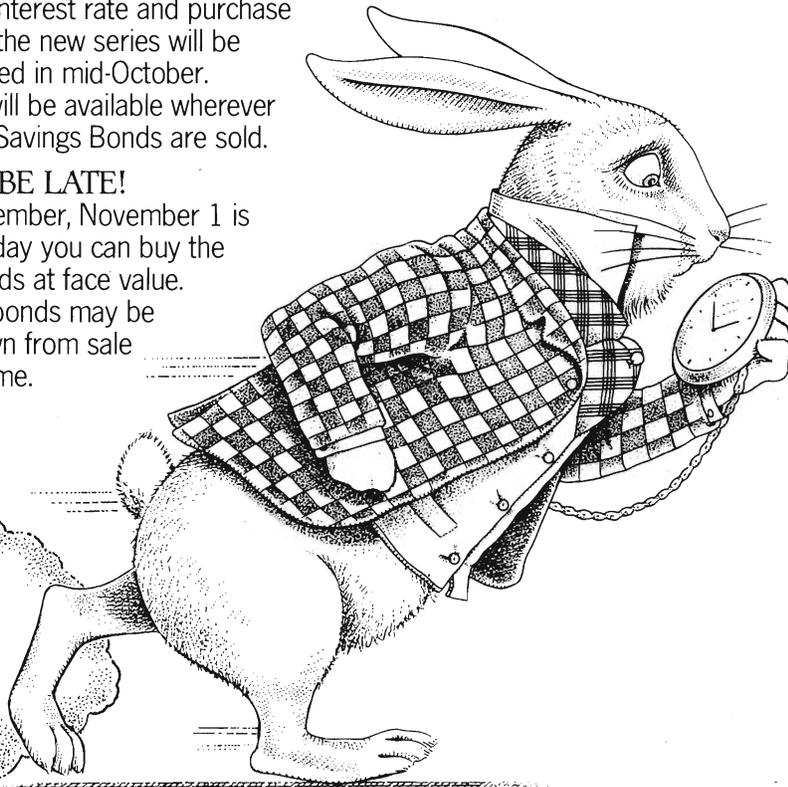
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# Motherland, Fatherland and Mennonite identity

"So there is something of Russia deep in all Mennonites of 'Russian' descent. And something of German culture as well. These aspects were not part of the cultural baggage of those first settlers who set out for Russia just 200 years ago. Most of them were acquired in Russia, they remain with Mennonites even today."

by James Urry.

It is two hundred years since the first Mennonites settled in Russia. Some are still there. Others who once lived there are scattered throughout western Europe and North and South America. While many call or have called themselves "German" Mennonites, a more popular term is "Russian."

What is the "Russian" and the "German" in the identity of these Mennonites? Where did the labels come from and when and why did they emerge? Are they just convenient labels identifying places in which Mennonites once lived? Or do they symbolize something more?

When those first Mennonites moved from what had long been their Polish-Prussian homes they left behind them their cultivated fields and woodlands and their small, but well-established towns and suburbs. They entered a new world. As the land gave way to open steppe the trees were left behind. Immense grasslands stretched to the horizon across gently rolling plains and a vast expanse of sky filled their vision.

Within this new landscape they established their homes. They domesticated what had seemed at first a primeval wilderness. They built houses in the style of their old homes, themselves an echo of an even more distant place, far across the north German plain. They planted gardens, cultivated trees, turned the soil, smothering the steppe grass. They attempted to submit the land to their will, to mould the landscape to their customs. But nature can never be totally dominated.

The open steppe, its climate and changing seasons, even its wildlife, became as much a part of their being as the signs of their own cultural imprint. And soon it became clear that they were not the first to mark the land. It was not as wild or as

primeval as they had thought. They discovered ancient burial mounds, silent witnesses to nomads long since vanished. There were also indications of more recent settlers, of Cossacks whose romantic deeds and tempestuous freedoms many a Mennonite youth appropriated in his imagination. And around the colonists settled a multi-ethnic muddle: Little Russian peasants, Russian sectarians, Tartars, other German-speaking colonists, Jews, Armenians, Bulgarians and Greeks: a world of many-coloured coats amidst a Tower of Babel whose inhabitants' voices were lost in the immensity of the steppe.

There was as yet no sense of being Mennonite, only a sense of belonging to a particular group located in a specific place. Religion defined a person's separation from outsiders, Mennonite and non-Mennonite, and ordered one's entire life, from birth to death.

## Ties that unite

In Russia the early Mennonite settlers reestablished their old practices and identities. The security of family, the web of kinship, and the deep-seated prejudices of congregations were born anew. But new forms intruded upon the old. The close-knit villages, rarely found in their old homeland, created the basis for a wider sense of community and the seeds of endless conflict. And the villages were bound into a larger community, also new, the colony. Mennonites took their bearings for their journey along the narrow path of life from these old and new markers: by family ties, congregational allegiances, by village and colony affiliation.

While they lived within its boundaries, for a long time most Mennonites had little concept of Russia or the Russian state. Although for Men-

nonites God may not have been distant, the Tsar was certainly far away. Relations with the state were mediated through local government or regional officials who were either of German descent or who spoke German. The need to refine their knowledge of the German language, more for administrative than for religious reasons, brought Mennonites into increased contact with High German language and culture. Mennonite school teachers from Prussia, trained in the Prussian educational system, improved Mennonite knowledge of the German language and brought an appreciation of German culture. But these links did not include allegiance to German nationalism. There was no German national until 1870, and even in the new German empire no real sense of a common identity until many years later. In Russia it was only after 1880 that Mennonites experienced the new spirit of Russian nationalism, in spite of some Mennonites' passionate fears of russification, which caused many to abandon Russia for the Americas during the 1870s.

## National assertiveness

Mother Russia, however, had begun to assert herself in ways other than through the rhetoric and policies of nationalism. Versions of Russian dress, food and drink entered Mennonites homes and molded their lives. Little Russian (Ukrainian) words and phrases drifted into Low German. This was local culture, local colour. Aspects of Russian high culture came by the same route as German culture: via the schools and the influence of teachers. The Russian language, just like the equally alien High German, had to be laboriously learned in the classroom. For many the learning of both languages was a burden of youth, and interest in the languages and

cultures of the two traditions was gladly abandoned in adulthood. Low German and Mennonite idioms were sufficient for most of the farming community.

For a number of Mennonites, however, especially the teachers and other elite groups, Russian culture and the Russian language became increasingly important after 1889. They read Russian books, journals and newspapers; Russian poetry and other literature became part of their lives. A wider appreciation of Russian history and culture developed and a strong allegiance to their Russian Motherland. And equally German culture was cultivated. German was a major language of the inhabitants of Russia's multiethnic empire, and many of Russia's elite were brought up to speak German and to appreciate German culture. German was seen as related to the Mennonite mother tongue, even if Germany was not the Fatherland.

**New pressures**

But the European wars and the social and political upheavals of the twentieth century cast dark shadows across the links Mennonites established with their Russian homeland and Russian and German culture. War, revolution and civil war caused many Mennonites to doubt their Russian ties. Mother Russia was torn asunder by violent revolution which reached into Mennonite homes; the country became dominated by a godless ideology. Many who emigrated in the 1920s rejected their Russian heritage and suppressed their love of Russia and Russian culture. The homeland from which they felt exiled was a Russian homeland and to leave it involved a deep sense of loss. So in the name of culture, and particularly religion, a number of Mennonites fabricated a false Germanness which substituted an ugly nationalism, a new Fatherland, for the genius of German culture. A full realization of the consequences of the Nazi era later shattered these delusions and led some Mennonites even to doubt the value of German culture itself.

For those who stayed in Russia the power of Russian nationalism, combined with Soviet ideology, created conflicting loyalties between religious faith and an intolerant Communism. The trend of integration into Russian culture, the language and customs of the country begun before 1917, continued. But the oppressiveness of

Soviet ideology and the institutional terror experienced by all Soviet citizens forced many to hold on to elusive aspects of Mennonite and German culture, although both were now cut off from outside influences. Slowly the Russian language and Russian culture became dominant.

Aspects of the wider identities acquired in Russia have been reflected in many areas of Mennonite life. Kinship has long been as important in Mennonite life as religion. And the first experience of kinship is that of one's parents. Russia is the Motherland of many Mennonites, with all that

implies: nurture, love and closeness. Germany is the Fatherland: authority, dominance and distance. Each manifests itself in different ways, and with different emphases in Mennonite experience.

So there is something of Russia deep in all Mennonites of "Russian" descent. And something of German culture, as well. These aspects were not part of the cultural baggage of those first settlers who set out for Russia just two hundred years ago. Most of them were acquired in Russia and they remain with Mennonites even today. mm

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# MENNONITE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

by Harry Loewen.

"I love it here!... There's one splendour after another!...I have never seen such beauty!...I have never imagined paradise so beautiful!...This then is Switzerland!"

These are the exclamations of a 19 year old student from the Mennonite colonies in south Russia who in the spring of 1906 went to study theology in Basel, Switzerland. Writing to his friend, Abram Enns, who intended to travel to Basel as well, Johann Klassen could not find words enough to describe his experiences in the new world to which he had come.

Johann Klassen and Abram Enns were not the only young men who left their Russian Mennonite colonies to study abroad. Toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries there were many intelligent Mennonites who went to study in such Russian centres as Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa, and in west European cities such as Hamburg, Basel, Leipzig, Berlin and Munich.

How can we explain this drive for higher education among the Russian Mennonites?

In the last decades of the 19th century the Russian Mennonites made great strides in developing their educational system and institutions. All children enjoyed a good elementary education and many young people continued their schooling in the so-called Zentralschulen (secondary schools). There were boys' and girls' secondary schools which prepared the students for the ministry, teaching profession, and other careers in the colonies. The subjects in these schools were taught in German and in Russian and students were introduced to Russian, German and other foreign literature and history. Music, singing, drama and other school events shaped the cultural sensibilities of the Mennonite students.

## Well educated

There was no illiteracy among the Russian Mennonites prior to the First World War. Compared to Russian and foreign standards of education, the Mennonite school system in Russia was one of the best at the time.

It was in the Zentralschulen that bright young people--mostly male students -- were influenced to seek a

post-secondary education, a level of education which could only be acquired away from home. In some instances these students were encouraged by their well-to-do parents to further their studies and in some cases the community provided scholarships and sponsored promising young men in their educational endeavors.

Toward the end of the 19th century Mennonites in Russia felt keenly the attacks upon them by the Russian nationalists who sought to integrate foreign settlers into the Russian way of life. The increasing introduction of Russian language and ways into the Mennonite educational system and the nibbling away at Mennonite "privileges," were perceived by Mennonites as a challenge to their identity and faith. It was thus felt by the leaders that a good education on the post-secondary level could help Mennonites to meet that challenge and at the same time contribute positively to the society at large.

There is no doubt that it was risky to attend Russian and other European institutions and universities. Some young men studying in Russian centres married Russian women and were thus lost to the Mennonite community. According to Russian law the children of such "mixed" marriages ceased to be Mennonite.

Some students, who initially went to study theology, switched to such disciplines as philosophy, languages, history, and even art. Johann Klassen, for example, had set out to become a preacher or missionary when he left for Basel but in the end scorned theological studies and became an artist.

## Returned to serve

A few Mennonite young men even wavered in their faith and had difficulties integrating their Christian beliefs and "secular" studies. But the majority of these talented young men returned to their colonies to serve their people and society with distinction and devotion.

Service was in a sense the watchword of the Russian-Mennonite "intelligentsia," as this educated group has been called. In this the Mennonite intellectuals resembled the Russian intelligentsia of the late 19th and early 20th century. Like the Russian intellectuals who sought to reform Russian society and contribute to the advancement of culture and political and economic improvement,

so the Mennonite intelligentsia at this time attempted to change Mennonite educational, cultural, and religious life and institutions. The young Johann Klassen, for example, wrote to his friend Abram Enns at home that when he has completed his studies and acquired a doctorate in Basel, he will be able to serve his people better.

How did these Mennonite students fare "abroad"? They did generally quite well in their studies. They studied hard, were well liked by their teachers, and they expressed a sense of responsibility toward the home community which sponsored and supported them financially.

But they also had "good times." They went on excursions to art museums and during their vacation spent time in mountain resorts. Arnold Dyck writes of hikes in the vicinities of Stuttgart and Munich, and Johann Klassen of beautiful sites along the Rhine River and mountain valleys in Switzerland. Some young men, like Abram Fast, fell in love with German girls and together with them read poetry, discussed what they had learned, and visited such places as Worms on the Rhine and Paris, France.

When the educated young men returned to their home colonies they were variously received. Many of them, men like Cornelius Bergmann and Benjamin Unruh, served their communities as teachers and ministers. Henry Neufeld, who was later shot and killed by Makhno's bands, was one of the finest teachers and preachers who sought to raise the level of culture and Christian ethics among his people in Zagradovka.

#### Not always welcome

Some young "reformers," however, were often opposed and severely criticized for wanting to introduce new ideas and ways. Jacob H. Janzen, for example, tells us that when he practiced singing or staged plays with the girls he taught in the girls' school, there was much opposition to what he was doing. For the simple Mennonite farmers all this was "worldliness" and dangerous secular activity.

Johann Klassen, who in 1910 returned to his home village, writes to his friend Enns in Germany that his parents do not understand his desire to become an artist and that his community has virtually excluded him, looking upon him as an outsider. Klassen did, however, eventually receive commissions from wealthy Men-

nonites to sculpt art objects and beautify their estates.

This intellectual, cultural and artistic activity among the Russian Mennonites before World War I bore considerable fruit. People like Gerhard Loewen, Peter B. Harder, and Jacob H. Janzen published their poems and novels, and historians such as David Epp, Franz Isaac, and P. M. Friesen had their work published. Some of this material was published by the Mennonite publishing house, **Raduga**, in Halbstadt.

The Russian Mennonites also published two periodicals, **Die Friedensstimme** and **Der Botschafter**. The rich and varied content of these papers indicates that Mennonites were well informed about domestic and foreign affairs, including politics, culture, religion, and art.

There is reason to believe that the students who returned to their colonies after their studies exerted a considerable influence on the development of Mennonite life and thought. They came home informed, often culturally sophisticated, and liberal in their thinking and views. While they remained attached to the Mennonite faith and institutions, they sought to contribute to the advancement of learning and culture among their people. With regard to religious views they were now more tolerant and open toward other denominations and persuasions and less dogmatic about their own faith. Politically and economically some were receptive to drastic changes, including the need to distribute land among the poor and landless groups in Mennonite and Russian society.

#### Hope soon dashed

This tolerance and openness among the Mennonite intelligentsia found a remarkable expression in the All-Mennonite Congress held in the summer of 1917. This meeting of Mennonite leaders in the wake of the February Revolution (1917) sought to come to terms with the changes that were occurring in Russia. Led by Benjamin Unruh, the Congress debated questions of theology, economics, politics, and educational matters. Such things as capitalism and socialism were discussed, and the relationship of the Christian faith to these socio-economic issues. Many delegates looked to the future in Russia with hope and anticipation and expressed their willingness to work actively toward a just

and better society.

However, the hopes and good-will of the Congress were soon to be dashed to the ground. With the October Revolution of that year and the subsequent takeover of the Bolsheviks, most Mennonites realized that their time in Russia was at an end. Beginning in 1923, many Mennonites left Russia for Canada. It was in Canada that writers like Jacob H. Janzen, Arnold Dyck, Gerhard Toews, Gerhard Loewen, and Gerhard Friesen (Fritz Senn) continued to write and publish their poems and stories, thus laying the foundation of Canadian-Mennonite literature.

And what about the talented men and women who remained in the Soviet Union? Gerhard Sawatzky and David Schellenberg are only two names among the Soviet-Mennonites who wrote stories and novels in the first half of the 20th century. Writing in German, they sought to reflect the new reality and society in their country and come to terms with the new problems they faced. The descendants of this generation of writers are still publishing their work in such Soviet-German periodicals as **Neues Leben** (New Life). Hildegard Wiebe, for example, is a frequent contributor of poems, written in High and Low German, in this paper. The story of these Soviet-Mennonite poets and novelists still needs to be researched and made known in the West.

Harry Loewen holds the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

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## The Mennon Bold: Prairie observer describes the Mennonites

by James Urry

There are many early accounts of the first Mennonite settlers in Manitoba. The strangeness of the new immigrants and their life-style attracted many outsiders to comment on them. But these fleeting glimpses are sometimes as odd as the people the outsiders believed they were describing.

In 1876 J.C. Hamilton, M.A., LL.B., published an account of his journey through Manitoba entitled *The Prairie Province: Sketches of Travel from Lake Ontario to Winnipeg*, (Toronto: Belford Brothers). Early in the book Hamilton describes how Mennonites had recently settled on the East Reserve, or the Rat River Reserve as he calls it. They had established villages and begun to farm.

Later Hamilton relates how he traveled with his companions by coach from Winnipeg to the United States. Along the way they pick up two Mennonite gentlemen who "were on a business trip to St. Paul, but would soon return." These Mennonites are described as "intelligent, (and) plainly dressed, having broadcloth overcoats lined with dressed sheepskin, the woolly side next the person."

The writer observes, "Our two (Mennonite) companions passed the time with their pipes and a religious book which one of them had. We asked them how they liked Manitoba. 'O,' said they together, brightening up, 'a guttesland, a schoenesland.'"

Traveling on the coach is an old ex-ferryman who responds by announcing that "you old Mennons, you broadbrims, have the best of all worlds with free passage from Quebec, land and a railroad which will soon pass close to your villages. Then you have no fighting, no lawyer's bills, and I guess but little doctor's stuff to swallow or pay for, you'll soon make this a land of Goshen."

A youth whom Hamilton calls a "smart boy," questions the old ferryman about his statements. "Why, these old sober-sides are a sort of Dutch quakers" replies the ferryman, but he warns the youth although they might not "strike from the shoulder, they may squeeze like the bears of Russia, from which they came, being invited to leave because they won't go soldiering for the Czar."

While Mennonites settled their disputes by "friendly arbitration" and "hate the smell of gunpowder," their women, the ferryman assures the boy, are "stronger than our average American men." The ferryman claims that when he traveled on the old steamer the *International* with a group of Mennonite immigrants, one of their women had given birth below "but was up again before sunset with a little Mennon in her arms, whose first squall was heard about Pembina."

Two merchants, also traveling in the coach, are now drawn into the conversation. One praises the Mennonites as a "stout fraternity." The second relates how their purchases in stores were welcomed by the business community. The only negative comment concerns the potential difficulties that may occur having pacifists settled close to resources "which we Yankees may some day take a fancy for."

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Before anyone else can speak the "smart boy, who could not sit many minutes quiet...broke out with a rattling little ditty" -- "The Mennon Bold" a song with three rhyming verses and a chorus.

This account sounds legitimate and the words of the song are amusing, if rather poor verse. But did the journey and the reported conversations really occur? Did the smart boy sing his ditty "firing off his revolver at stray prairie hens and blackbirds?" Have we here a song of the frontier, reflecting contemporary opinions of pioneering Mennonites? I think not.

John Cleland Hamilton (1836-1907) was born in Belfast and as a Toronto lawyer must have been aware of the business opportunities once the West was settled. He obviously wrote the book to promote Manitoba and to encourage people in the East to move to the new prairie province. In his introduction he speaks of the "men of various hue, speech and origin, who are gathering in its valleys and finding happy homes in this wonderful West." The book was also a commercial venture. At the back are 12 pages of advertisements, some for eastern goods and companies, a number for Winnipeg merchants, land agents and one for the **Manitoba Free Press**.

The conversation on the coach is a literary device to convey information in a varied and interesting manner. The Mennonites are shown to be good farmers, beneficial for business, a hardy folk who will help to develop the region in spite of concerns about the military security of the US/Canadian border.

The characters traveling on the coach are carefully selected. Each has a different tale to tell, an opinion to express. The old ferryman is a survivor of the frontier days. Like an old salt, he is an experienced sailor, not of the world's oceans, but of the lakes and rivers of the prairie sea. He knows the country and its people and can relate the story of the immigrants' coming. The merchants represent the solid basis of the polite, civil society being established in urban centres. The young boy is quick and keen to learn. In him lies the future prosperity of the new province.

And the song? Hamilton expects us to believe that either the song already existed, or the boy coined it on the spot. If it already existed and the boy had learnt it by heart, why did he need to ask the old ferryman to explain more about the Mennonites? And if he cleverly invented it on the spot, why are there some unexplained details? For instance the reference to Gorschakoff is to the famous Russian minister of foreign affairs at the time of the Mennonite migration from Russia, Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Gorchakov (1798-1883). Did a young boy, however "smart," have such details at hand on a coach bouncing along a prairie trail southwards into the U.S.? I doubt it.

Undoubtedly Hamilton either had encountered Mennonites on his journeys in the West, or had collected much detail on these new immigrants. Some Mennonites did travel on the steamer the **International**; the description of their dress is correct; the names of the villages are accurate. Their buying bonanza upon their arrival did seem to promise good business for local merchants and there were concerns of settling non-resistant people close to the border in case war broke out between the U.S. and Canada. But surely all this detail was constituted into a fictionalized episode by Hamilton.

So, while early non-Mennonite descriptions of Mennonites are of interest to us today, as historical sources they should be used with caution. Beware indeed, the Mennon Bold!

### THE MENNON BOLD

A beautiful home has the Mennon bold;  
His harvest he reaps and he sells it for gold;  
From lawyers' bills and from doctors' pills,  
He is free as the winds of western hills.

The prairie land is a beautiful land,

The chosen home of the Mennonite band.

He never would fight for Gortschakoff,  
And the word of the Czar was -- "Drill, or be off!"  
O'er Gitche-Gumee, then away came he,  
With his frau and his kind, to the land of the free.

The prairie land is a beautiful land,

The chosen home of the Mennonite band.

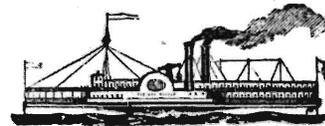
The Metis may laugh by the River Rat,  
At his sheep-skin coat and his broad-brim hat;  
But he drives his steer, and he drinks his beer;  
And a happy home is the home he has here.

The prairie land is a beautiful land,

The chosen home of the Mennonite band. mm

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# Walter Klassen works hard to bring compassion into his funeral service

by Sarah Klassen

When Sunday morning church service is interrupted by an electronic beep, it may simply be someone's wristwatch sending out a reminder that time is moving on. On the other hand, it may be the pager carried by a person whose work revolves around matters so urgent they can't wait for the preacher's "Amen." At the River East Mennonite Brethren Church, it could well be the pager carried by Walter Klassen, who waits for a few moments, then discreetly leaves his place and heads for the telephone. Neither the congregation nor the preacher is unduly disturbed by Mr. Klassen's untimely departure: he is a funeral director and everyone understands that

death does not abide by our notions of convenience or propriety.

Whatever negative images the word "undertaker" conjures up in your mind, they are images that must be discarded in the case of Walter Klassen. He comes across to his friends as a person who is generous, sociable and who likes to see other people enjoying themselves.

When Mr. Klassen applied, early in the 70s, for a permit to build a funeral chapel on Henderson Highway at Kingsford Avenue, his application was rejected because of strong objection from the community. Specifically, the parishioners attending the North Kildonan M.B. Church on Kingsford did

not relish the idea of passing a funeral establishment every Sunday on the way to church.

Mr. Klassen's subsequent application to build at 1897 Henderson Highway was also denied for three years because of community resistance. It was feared the presence of a funeral chapel would drive down property values. Such reluctance to accept a visible reminder of mortality is not shared by Walter Klassen and his two colleagues, Harry Froese and Terry Siemens. For them the daily experience with death and grieving is both a service to the community and a way of making a living.



*The staff at the Klassen chapel; from left: Walter Klassen, Shauna Gerelas, Harry Froese, Sonia Gonske, and Terry Siemens.*

### The Steinbach start

Walter Klassen, who comes from a farming family, has been in the funeral business for 32 years. He started in Steinbach, helping Bob Loewen, who later became his employer. After employment with several rural funeral homes, Mr. Klassen managed Loewen Funeral Chapel in Morden from 1963 to 1967. In 1967 he moved to Winnipeg to take charge of a chapel Loewen had opened in 1960 at 194 Henderson Highway in Winnipeg.

In 1970, the Loewen chapel moved to new premises on Talbot Avenue, which was sold to Greenacres after a year with the understanding that Mr. Klassen would work for this firm. After two months of employment with Greenacres, Mr. Klassen decided to start out on his own.

With a modest separation pay, and with no equipment, cars or license, Mr. Klassen rented back the old establishment at 194 Henderson, and launched Klassen Funeral Chapel. It operated from this inadequate site until 1977.

As early as 1972 Mr. Klassen began to look around for a suitable location to build a better facility. When this proved fruitless, he grew discouraged and was tempted to get out of funeral directing completely.

Then, in 1976, the Klassen's 16-year-old son, Gordon, died suddenly. In some providential way, this tragedy provided the impetus to stay in the business. "If it weren't for Gordon's death," Mr. Klassen says, "I probably wouldn't be in this business today. Within two weeks of his death I had the permit to build at the present site." Apparently the attitudes of the authorities and the public had been softened by the personal loss of the Klassen's.

In 1977 the present building opened complete with a chapel that seats 170, a mortuary, embalming facilities, offices, garage and a residence which Walter and Bettie Klassen with their son, Philip, occupied for several years. Once the attractive, tastefully laid out funeral home became a part of the Henderson landscape there were no further objections to it from neighboring residents and businesses.

The business has flourished. An average of five funerals per week are conducted, less than half of which involve Mennonites.

Prior to the existence of a Mennonite funeral home (first Loewen, then Klassen) Mennonites in Winnipeg

overwhelmingly chose Kerr's Funeral Home. However, once a service run by Mennonites was available, they tended to look to a director who could identify with their faith, language and culture. Many Mennonites, however, remain loyal to Kerr's who, according to Sieg Enns whose family came to Winnipeg in the 1920s migration, have dealt with the immigrants with fairness, dignity and generosity.

### Assisted by two

Walter Klassen is assisted by two full-time funeral directors, both of them limited partners. He also employs a woman enrolled in the two-year apprenticeship program required of all who wish to become licensed funeral directors in Manitoba. A secretary completes the staff.

All three full-time directors are involved in each phase of the burying process, although Mr. Klassen handles most of the administration while his partners do most of the embalming. In general, the tasks include picking up the body from the hospital, meeting with the family for counselling and planning the funeral, embalming and preparing the body, and directing the viewing, funeral and burial. In addition, they all take turns washing cars, cutting the grass and watering the geraniums.

Because this is a small business, the director who initially meets with the family usually takes charge of the remaining components of the service as well. This continuity provides a more personal touch than larger establishments are likely to give and is reassuring to the bereaved. Generally two of the directors are present at a funeral.

Terry Siemens began his career as funeral director with Mr. Klassen in 1982. Before that he had completed a course in design and drafting technology at Red River Community College and worked three years in that field. He quickly realized he didn't want to sit at a desk all his life, doing work that was seasonal at best.

He finds death care work rewarding. "Helping a family through the steps of a funeral is a real service," he says, adding, "the image of the funeral director who is in it just for the money isn't always true. This work can be a ministry."

A two-year apprenticeship program

is in place in Manitoba for training of morticians and funeral directors. Applicants for this program must first establish employment with a funeral chapel. In each apprenticeship year there is a three-week session of courses and exams. Upon successful completion of this apprenticeship, the student is granted a license entitling to work anywhere in Manitoba.

Harry Froese's decision to become a mortician also involved a career change. From a farming background, he trained as a teacher and taught history, business and Bible courses at MBCI from 1980 to 1982. Following this he and his wife Lorna spent three years in Nigeria with MCC. For two years he taught Math, then worked in administration for one year. In 1985, prior to his reentry into Canada, Harry contacted Lorna's uncle, Walter Klassen, and arranged to work for him.

Why would a young man make a switch from teaching the living to working with the bereaved? One reason was that teaching jobs were not easy to get in 1985. A second reason was the open door into a career that would provide both employment and a way of service.

"I work more with the living than with the dead," Harry explains, estimating that, for each funeral, he spends approximately one hour preparing the deceased and 10 hours with the living (counselling and planning, viewing service, funeral and burial.)

He says, "Without my faith I would not be a funeral director," adding that his satisfaction comes from helping a family confront and accept death and deal with it. He believes that a mortician who views his work simply as a disposal service, or as selling funerals, may well resort to drugs and alcohol. Although selling is an inevitable part of the work, Harry gains more satisfaction from helping a bereaved family than from chalking up record funeral sales.

### Clear about cost

Klassen Funeral Chapel has the policy of being up front about the cost of dying. For instance, when a family is asked to select a casket, the prices are clearly marked and no pressure is exerted to choose any particular one. The basic cost of a funeral is \$1,125. To this must be added the cost of the casket and cemetery expenses, as well as optional items such as memorial cards, newspaper obituaries, flowers

and a death certificate. The average earth burial costs \$3,000 to \$3,500. Cremation is less expensive.

Mr. Klassen says he has learned not to be defensive when faced with criticisms about the cost of dying or

about any other aspect of his work. His aim and that of his colleagues is to work hard at giving the best service they can. "We want to serve 100 per cent. If we get criticized, it shouldn't be for not trying." This aim is clearly displayed in the sign at the funeral home: "To serve as we would like to be served." As he sees it, in this business one can strive either to be the biggest establishment or to offer the best service. Klassen funeral directors opt for the latter.

At present, most of the funerals end in earth burials, with cremations constituting 15 to 20 per cent of the service. None of the directors at Klassens have any theological quarrel with cremation, although each one hastened to add he would not choose it for a family member.

However, Mr. Klassen believes strongly that "Cremation is only the end disposal. Immediate cremation, without a funeral and viewing, leaves the parting process incomplete." He believes that if life is worth living, it is worth remembering and celebrating after its completion. And that includes a respectful viewing.

Although he never insists upon viewing, he believes it is part of the process of taking leave of a friend or family member. In his experience, family members who have initially resisted viewing the body have later found it to be a helpful, healing experience. He also believes it is healing for a family to be unitedly involved in preparing the funeral, and that building a casket could be a therapeutic process for the bereaved.

When Sieg and Vera Enns' daughter, Cathryn, died suddenly in January, 1989, they expressed preferences that departed from the typical Mennonite funeral, choosing cremation after a small family service with viewing by the immediate family at the chapel. Later, a memorial service was held in the First Mennonite Church. The Enns' appreciated the patience and flexibility of the directors at Klassen Chapel, who waited for them to make decisions, then assisted, sympathetically and competently, in carrying out these decisions. They also delayed cremation so out-of-province family members could travel to Winnipeg.

Of course the preparation of the deceased is of importance and here the directors have a firm philosophy. It is their aim to restore the physical part of the person to a natural

appearance, resorting as little as possible to cosmetics. A Mennonite grandmother who has never used makeup should not appear unduly colorful in her coffin. At the initial counselling session with the bereaved, conversation about the deceased is encouraged. The family is assisted in remembering "Who was she/he, really?" The physical appearance of the body in the coffin should reflect as truly as possible the person once housed in that body.

When the Isaak family buried their 90-year old mother, Maria Isaak, in 1988, it seemed right for them to call Klassen Funeral Chapel to help with the arrangements. According to Kathie Isaak, a daughter, the family appreciated both the tasteful preparation of their mother for burial and the sympathetic expertise offered by the directors at Klassen Chapel. Kathie says, "It's not like calling on a total stranger, and besides, Walter can move people and cars and programs without any fuss."

#### Understanding the process

Educating the public about funerals and burial is a concern at Klassen Funeral Chapel. Groups are encouraged to visit the premises and see for themselves the facilities and to discuss issues surrounding death. Church youth and brigade groups have availed themselves of tours, as have adult Sunday school classes and the pastoral class from MBBC. School groups are welcome to this learning experience.

Sometimes the tour is augmented by a panel of four to five people who have experienced bereavement and who are willing to talk about their experiences. A video tape dealing with grieving and death is available for groups and also for bereaved individuals and families.

Like any other small business, Klassen Funeral Chapel must face the reality of the big corporations. In Manitoba there are three large funeral corporations: the Loewen Group (with 110 establishments), the Arbor Corporation and the Service Corporation International.

Mr. Klassen claims he is not threatened by their service, which tends to be less personal, more "assembly line" than that of a smaller business. He does confess, however, to being threatened a little by their advertising and by their aggressive "pre-paid" schemes, which lap up potential business in ways that tend to be manipulative. Older people, according to



The City of Winnipeg

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An information package, including an application form, may be obtained from the City Clerk, Main Floor, Council Building, City Hall, 510 Main Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 1B9.

Vacancies for citizen members exist on the following boards or commissions:

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St. Boniface Museum Board  
Municipal Hospital Commission  
Board of Directors, Concordia Hospital  
Winnipeg Public Library Board  
Library Advisory Committees  
Boulevard Provencher Advisory Committee

October 1, 1989

Robert B. Hayes  
City Clerk

Mr. Klassen, care a great deal about their eventual funeral. They are reluctant to leave the arrangements to chance or children, and consequently fall prey to the pre-paid package plan. This may remove from the family major responsibility for funeral arrangements, a responsibility that Mr. Klassen believes is healthy for the survivors. However, in spite of these convictions, he will not refuse to sell a pre-paid funeral if the client insists.

### Not always easy

What about other stresses? Is it possible to separate work that requires ongoing contact with death and with the intense emotions accompanying it, from private life? "It's not always easy," admits Harry Froese, who, with his wife, occupies the residence connected with the chapel. Because of their location, he and Lorna handle the telephone more frequently than the other directors. However, thanks to pagers, which two of the three directors carry at all times, it is possible to get away. Harry and Lorna enjoy travelling and they take seriously their involvement with the Olive Branch, where Harry has just completed two years as president.

Being on call is a strain; death does not necessarily happen during business hours. Mr. Klassen, who remembers the time when, as sole director, he was always on call, says, "Now holidays are real holidays." He and Bettie enjoy outdoor vacations in the Whiteshell area where fishing is good. Mr. Klassen is one of the regulars of an informal volleyball group that meets weekly for an evening of physical and verbal sport. In free hours he may also exchange the hearse for skis or for his motorbike, depending on the season.

Terry Siemens finds recreation in family activity. "I want to do things with my kids, the way my parents did with us," he says, adding that he is always a willing fishing partner for Walter.

Probably none of the three directors would describe their work as "fun," but all three admit they have fun working with each other. They do not give the appearance of restlessness in their profession or dissatisfaction with it. Their work and their faith has helped them to understand that the inevitability of death need not cancel out the possibility of joy in life. mm

## Welcome translation of an old series

reviewed by James Urry

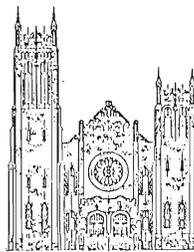
The Echo Verlag series of historical booklets was founded in 1943 by exp-pupils of the Chortitzer Zentralschule who had emigrated to Canada. The leading figure in the promotion of the series was Arnold Dyck who designed the distinctive symbol published on all volumes depicting the "Thousand-year oak" of the Old Colony. Between 1945 and 1965 fourteen volumes appeared, some reprints of works published previously in Russia, but others written especially for the new series. Some were obviously more successful than others as, in spite of large print runs, a number were soon out of print whereas others are still available.

In 1987 the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in association with CMBC Publications agreed to publish English translations of the series under the general editorship of Victor G. Doerksen. The first volume, originally number nine in the series, on the Kuban settlement has now appeared. Translated by Herb Giesbrecht, who also wrote a brief preface to the volume, includes photographs not printed in the original German edition. Otherwise it is a faithful translation of the original volume. It details the settlement of this area of the Russian Caucasus by Mennonites, mainly Mennonite Brethren, from the 1860s onwards.

One could question the value of translating and re-publishing all the booklets in the series without major revision or more detailed commentaries, but no doubt the increasing numbers of Mennonites who cannot read German and yet who are interested in Mennonite history, will welcome the appearance of the volumes.

C.P. Toews, Heinrich Friesen and Arnold Dyck, *The Kuban Settlement*, translated from the German by Herbert Giesbrecht. Winnipeg: CMBC Publications and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1989; \$9.

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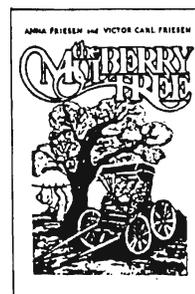
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by Roy Vogt

### STUDENTS SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTE TRUTH, WHILE THE TEACHER EXPLORES ITS UNCERTAINTIES

34

The fall season is appropriately named. Not only do leaves and fruit fall from the trees, but those of us who had a wonderful, relaxing summer are suddenly brought down to earth again. In early September, immediately after the Labour Day weekend, thousands of reluctant students find their way back to the university campus and we, who are supposed to teach them, must be there just a step ahead of them.

My wife and I do manage to enjoy one last break before all this happens. The birth in August of our fifth grandchild gives us a good excuse to visit our family in Edmonton again. I think our daughter and her husband ought to be put in charge of the Soviet planning system. She told us shortly after their marriage she would like to have four children, two boys and two girls. This is what they now have, and I figure that anyone who can plan so well ought to aspire to even greater planning challenges. Fortunately all of the children are healthy, and the last one has surprised everyone so far by actually lying still for an hour or more at a time. All three of our children were extremely active. Maybe we should have tried for a fourth.

We cherish the visits with our children, grandchildren, and friends this past summer, and they help us to prepare mentally for the onslaught of students in early September.

As I walk into the lecture hall the first day of class and see 300 students looking down at me from their lofty heights I wonder whether there is any way that I can possibly meet their expectations. I recall that a much greater man, Winston Churchill, had a life-long fear of public speaking. He partially overcame this, he said, by doing one simple thing. Just before he got up to speak he would look over his audience and say silently to himself, "Those people are even more stupid than I am." His great oratory

proves, I suppose, the power of negative thinking.

Actually I am not afraid to face the students; I rather enjoy the challenge of exchanging ideas with them. What worries me at times is their youthful desire to discover absolute truth. I believe that my field of study, economics, has developed to the point where it can shed some light on the operation of modern economies -- despite numerous jokes to the contrary -- but like all human knowledge it remains incomplete, surrounded by mysteries.

Oh yes, there are many facts that the students will learn in this course, such as the Gross National Product of Canada and the calculation of our Balance of Payments, and they will learn much about such things as the purpose and performance of business corporations and government policies. But as they get deeper into the course and ask more questions they will find that we often don't have good answers, and the best answers of one economist don't necessarily agree with the best answers of another. In the end they don't only want facts, they also want **understanding** -- they want to know the **truth** about things -- and this is something that we can probe with them but we cannot, to our dismay and to their chagrin, provide them with easy or absolute answers. It is one thing to tell a student how Canada's unemployment is calculated; it is much more difficult -- really impossible -- to explain with great precision **why** the rate is now at 7 or 8 percent.

Students share with many other people the conviction that truth is somehow to be found neatly wrapped up in a box, waiting for us to discover it, so that we can unwrap it and hold it in our hands, unchanged, forever. It is like an apple dangling from a tree hidden in the forest. Presumably the teacher knows where this tree is, and

many students expect the teacher to lead them to it and place a ladder underneath, so that all the student has to do is climb up and pluck it (some even hope that the teacher will do the climbing and place the apple in the student's hand). Woe to the teacher who admits, "I'm not exactly sure where that tree is, but should we discover it we will have to climb it together because it is difficult to pass the fruit intact from one hand to another. Furthermore, the fruit is unlikely to be smooth and whole. We will find only parts, forcing us to move on in our search for the other parts."

This honest teacher might also add: "As we go from one tree to another, gathering bits of the truth, we will constantly have to revise our understanding of what the final 'whole' will look like. Each piece that we discover will prompt us to make some guess about the ultimate shape of the truth, but each subsequent piece will indicate that at least part of our earlier guess was likely wrong. It is the wise who question, it is the ignorant who dispute the need to question."

The discovery of religious truth is no different. What do we understand by the name "God?" What does heaven mean? In what way, and for what purposes, did Jesus of Nazareth reveal God to us? The road of religious discovery is also a road through a dark wood, revealing parts of its mystery to those who search, but always leaving the true seeker with the need to find more and to revise earlier, seemingly fixed ideas. It was St. Paul, a man much more sure of his faith than I ever expect to be, who admitted that we now see in a mirror darkly; some day, presumably not in this world, we will see the whole truth face to face. To some, such an admission appears to be a terrible threat, to others it is simply a part of the exciting human drama into which God has

placed us.

This past summer I read the brief autobiography of the late Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar. Reflecting on his life he observes "Every chamber in the great mansion of man's heart has a secret door into another chamber -- and this one into a third -- and so on and on without end, from one chapel into another chapel, from one dungeon into another dungeon, from one secret into another secret...." Cankar writes about life the way it really is.

Some years ago I saw a play in East Germany by Peter Hacks, a playwright who has been influenced by Christian motifs. The play is set in the medieval period, and features two delicate and pious ladies who long to escape from the harsh realities of this world "to be with Jesus." They especially wish to escape from the rough language and manners of some knights who are seeking their favour. Finally, through some calamity, in the course of which they die, the ladies find themselves in heaven. They are overjoyed, of course, to come face to face with the keeper of this new kingdom. However, they are dismayed by two things. First, the rough knights are in heaven with them. "How can this be?" they ask the keeper. "We wanted to go to heaven so that we could get away from these inferior human beings. We assumed that they would go to the other place." To which the keeper answers, "You were pious, but you never learned the meaning of love. You will discover love in heaven, and the knights will learn some manners. Don't rue them this opportunity."

They are also disappointed that Jesus is nowhere in sight. "Where is he?" they ask forlornly. The keeper replies, "He is indeed in heaven, but he is walking much further ahead. As you learn to love you may catch up to him. Just don't rest on your pious cushions anymore."

Revising our ideas of heaven, of God's love, and even our understanding of what it means to be religious, is not something that necessarily threatens our faith. It may, in fact, be the only way of keeping it. Karl Barth, the late great Swiss theologian, was once challenged by a student after a talk he had given. The student said, "Dr. Barth, I would like to read a quotation from something that you said twenty years ago. It completely contradicts what you just told us now." Barth listened carefully as the student read the quotation. "You are right,

young man," replied Barth. "I have changed my mind, but I am more exhilarated than dismayed by that. I can't believe how stupid I was twenty years ago. I am glad to see that I am still capable of learning new things."

May the spirit of Barth go with us. mm



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It's that time again - the "OOOOOO" series!

From the 10 entries to the July/August puzzle, Klaas P. Loewen, of Gretna, was selected winner.

Answers to July/August are rite, tear, flier, cater, tread, and carefree.

The letters are to be re-arranged and written in the squares to form words. Letters which fall into the squares with circles are to be arranged to complete the answer at the bottom of the puzzle; the drawing above provides a clue.

A winner will be drawn from among the contest entries and the prize awarded.

Entries must be sent to the Mirror office by November 14.

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Send entries to: Mix-up Contest, Mennonite Mirror, 207 -1317A Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0V3

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#### TOUR III — USSR

**August 1-22**

Host: Dr. H. Harder  
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#### TOUR IV — USSR

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*Grete and Karl Fast*

## **Karl Fast: teacher and educator returns to help the Umseidler and so closes a circle**

by Agnes Wall.

"What language do you want to use in this interview?" asks Karl Fast. "German, English or Russian?"

He is fluent in all three, as well as Low German, the dialect familiar and dear to Mennonites in many parts of the world. The knowledge of these languages was a great asset to him in his work with the Umsiedler, the people emigrating from Russia to Germany. Mr. Fast was an Umsiedler himself when he, his wife Grete and young daughter emigrated to Canada in 1949. In fact, he is one of the best known and most successful Umsiedler in Mennonite circles. His life story reads like a romance.

He was born in Dolinowka, one of the Mennonite villages near Orenburg in the Soviet Union. Before the war with Germany started, young Karl, a teacher by profession, was drafted into the Red Army. Only six weeks after the outbreak of war he was captured by the enemy, along with thousands of others. There were so many prisoners the Germans didn't know what to do with them all. "Ruskie, go home," the POWs were told.

"I wanted to get to our people in the occupied Ukraine," recalls Mr. Fast. "I had an uncle in Konteniusfeld, so I thought I'd go there. I got to Alexandrowka instead where I taught school, then later I also taught in Steinfeld, where I met my dear wife. Shortly after our marriage, we had to flee before the advancing Red Army. We settled in the Warthegau Province in German-occupied Poland,

where I again worked as a teacher. It wasn't long before I was drafted by the Wehrmacht and subsequently captured by the Soviet forces. I was POW of the Russians for five years and was released late in 1949. We came to Winnipeg just before Christmas of the same year."

### **Printshop first job**

Work was hard to find for the new immigrant, but Mr. Fast was willing to do any work available. His first job was in a print shop, where he learned the craft of typesetting. His first task was setting the type for *The Book of Life of the Dukhobors*, printed entirely in Russian. Because of his knowledge of the language, he was the only one in the shop capable of doing this job. Unfortunately the work wasn't permanent so Mr. Fast then tried his hand at carpentry for a construction firm, then again worked as a typesetter for eight years.

However, Mr. Fast's talents lay in educating young people and his goal was to go back to his old profession of teaching. He hadn't lived in Canada for long before he began teaching German in Saturday school. As he studied at night school and became more proficient in the English language, he started to teach at Westgate Mennonite Collegiate and served there for 11 years. In 1972 he accepted a position with the Manitoba Department of Education as a consultant for "The Teaching of Second Languages other than French." In this capacity

he became involved with further teacher training abroad, mainly in Germany and the Ukraine. His excellent work was recognized when he was presented with The Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (Verdienst Kreuz Erste Klasse) by the German Consul General of Canada.

### **Spiritual awakening**

Mr. Fast's love of teaching reached beyond the general academic field and extended into the spiritual. "Father was a teacher in Russia," he recalls. "After the revolution he was ordered to teach communistic ideals and anti-religious dogma to his students. As a Christian he could not do this. He left his profession and became a merchant. I was not quite 12 years old when he died. It was left to mother to take care of the family's spiritual needs, since churches had been closed. I remember being in Sunday school once in my life and never in church during those years.

"Mother was an intelligent, educated woman. She had studied the scriptures and knew her Bible very well. She fought the anti-religious teachings of the school, but we thought her old-fashioned and out of date. She sat there with her Bible and we with the newspapers of the godless and we debated the existence of God. In time we stopped saying grace before meals, we stopped praying together and mother didn't read the Bible to us anymore."

But the seed his mother had sowed  
mennonite mirror / october, 1989 / 19

in those years bore fruit later. Both Mr. Fast and his wife were baptized in Steinfeld in 1943. In Winnipeg, Mr. Fast served the youth of his church for 21 years and in the capacity of a Sunday school teacher and superintendent for 17 years. He was ordained as a minister in 1976, but had often spoken from the pulpit before his ordination.

#### Writing in his own right

Karl Fast had always loved the written word and has done a considerable amount of writing himself. *Geht der Wahrheit die Ehre* (Honor the Truth), his first major work, was written and published during the first years in Canada. It dealt with the author's experiences as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. Throughout his career as an educator, Mr. Fast wrote many articles pertaining to his profession. Beside this, he found time to write for *Der Bote*, a Mennonite paper. Mr. Fast has been and still is active in developing historical pamphlets, brochures, and yearbooks for Mennonite churches, institutions and community projects.

*Geht der Wahrheit die Ehre* has been republished and was released in July, 1989. Since his retirement, Mr. Fast has written another book, *Junge: Lass Dir an Meiner Gnade Genuegen* (My Son: "Let my Grace be Sufficient Unto You.") The work is based on 269 letters -- and Mr. Fast

has saved every one of them -- written by the author's mother and describes the fate of our Mennonites who had to remain in the Soviet Union. This book will be available soon.

Karl Fast's retirement years have been busy, filled with satisfying work. "One day I had an overseas phone call," he remembers. "It was Hans von Niessen, business manager for the Umsiedler in Germany. He reminded me that some years before I had offered that, after my retirement, should he need me, I would be willing to help. He now took me at my word and asked me, together with my wife, Grete, to come to Unna-Massen for at least a year. He needed help in caring for the many brothers and sisters arriving from Russia. We asked for time to think about this. God had blessed us and our family in so many ways that we soon knew what we must do. The requested service was only a small fraction of what we owe to our Lord. We decided to go."

They left Winnipeg in July of 1987 and it wasn't long before they were established in Unna-Massen, where the bureau for registration of the Umsiedler was located. At first it wasn't quite clear exactly how the Fasts were to minister to the newcomers to do the most good. "We prayed for guidance," says Mr. Fast. "We asked God to bless us and the brothers and sisters we were to serve. The answer to our prayer was very simple. We were to listen to them. Now that they had no more to fear from the Soviets, and could talk freely, they poured their hearts out. Some of these stories were happy, but many were of senseless cruelty which debased the mind and spirit. They were almost unbelievable, these stories of fear, hunger and degradation."

#### Similar experience, years apart

"We were, I think, suited to this task. We knew the background of many of the immigrants. Had we not been in a similar situation not so very long ago? We could empathise with them very well. We spoke their language, be it Russian, German or Low German. We gained their trust very quickly and the stories began."

"Generally we visited the Umsiedler in the morning and again in the afternoon," says Mrs. Fast. "Always there were the stories, always, without fail. As soon as we were home from the visit, at noon or in the evening, Karl made notes about what we had heard.

If we hadn't, we would have forgotten. He was very, very busy."

Mr. Fast continues, "It was better to make the visits as a couple instead of one man alone. I couldn't have done this work without my wife. This was clearly brought home to me one day when Grete had to stay in bed with the flu. By myself I didn't seem to get through to people very quickly. Widows -- and there were many women alone -- do not really want to tell their troubles to a strange man. They want a woman present. Grete's sunny disposition and her instant friendliness broke down most barriers and soon we were all fast friends."

After the year of service was over the Fasts returned home. The stories they had heard cried out to be written and Karl Fast is writing them. They are entitled *In Unna-Massen Gehoert* (Heard in Unna-Massen). At present some of them have been published in *Der Bote* and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* in installments, but the book itself is not quite completed so far.

"When it is finished I hope it will be published in both German and English," says the author. "These stories of our people should not be forgotten. They are historically significant. Our young people, especially, must read them and remember."

Some of these, translated into English, will soon appear in the *Mennonite Mirror*. mm

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## THIS WORD FROM DOWN EAST

### WE ARE STILL MARRIED, AND OTHER STORIES OF HIGHWAY TRAVEL

"And now, for the five hundredth time, Raffi!"

I'll admit--it was a weak moment. Marlene and I had driven through the night, en route prairieward from the east. We had a full car, a 13 month old daughter, and three -- count'em, three -- children's tapes. Thanks to the power of Duracell, the tank-like toughness of our Aiwa ghetto-blaster and our little one's insatiable love for these classics of western culture, we'd been seranaded for over 1,000 miles.

I came to understand, with a depth of insight I hope never to reach again, that "There was cheese, cheese, walking on its knees at the corner grocery store." I'm sorry, Raffi. There comes a point when even your soothing childhood ditties begin to push the "irk" meter into regions of dangerous high pressure. In a crowded car half a day from home, a scream of resigned anguish is about all the catharsis a classically-trained adult can hope for.

Fortunately for all concerned, my cry of derisive despair didn't issue forth until we had swung north out of Crookston -- just three hours from Winnipeg, Buckingham Road, and home. A quick passage through a few small towns in upper Minnesota (but slow down in Hallock, the cops are waiting), some delightful resurfacing delays on good 'ol 75, north of Emerson, a touch of Winnipeg rush hour (Toronto folk would kill for our kind of gridlock), and we were planted, officially, for a month and more, in our native soil.

I suppose I'm a tad nostalgic at times for those long drives home when it was just us two -- sailing east along #2, skirting Lake Superior, squeezing through Duluth, and inching along a lone of small towns: Bemidji, Grand Rapids, Cass Lake, Ballpark.

You bet, Ballpark...by which time I would have read Marlene, my gracious captive audience, a few dozen choice snatches from Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegone Days, Stephen Leacock's Sunshine Sketches, or some other piece of literary whimsy.

There would be a major stop for some serious eating in Ironwood, on the Wisconsin-Michigan border (Elias Big Boy's, of course), a few more quiet hours on the road, and then a motel near Marquette as the setting sun laced the pine-scented air with festive color. The next day would begin with an early morning run while Marlene rested, followed by a trucker-style breakfast, a fresh start, and arrival, at our Ontario-in-laws, in time for a lavish evening snack.

Now, of course, we're a little more constrained. We've diapers to change, schedules to adjust, strategic stops to make (no, sweetie, you stay in the car with Emily... I'll pump the gas. Feel free to play her some more Raffi). And, too, we've negotiations. Often. Whose turn to change her? Feed her? Dress her? (Mine). "But didn't I just...?" "You did, but that was this morning." "Oh..right. Could you pass the vaseline, please?"

Don't get me wrong. I love our little Emily. I love watching her respond to our remonstrations with laughter, surprise, or a sly grin when, delighted, she "gets the joke." Or seeing her gaze about in silent, blue-eyed wonder as we edge around a moon-bathed Lake Superior. Or feeling her pat me on the back as we take her out of the car during a gas stop. You're alright, dad. A bit weird maybe, but I love you anyway.

The blessings far outweigh the banes, and each day of sharing her young life is a gift -- even though there are some days when I'm not in

by Tim Wiebe



the mood for presents! Hey -- I've even gotten another book of Garrison Keillor stories for the trip back east. It's called **We Are Still Married**. Boy, are we ever. With a kid, even.

I can still delight in the odd bit of whimsy. And I can still enjoy the fleeting pleasures of long distance travel. I can even gear up my best radio voice and play reader's theatre with Marlene. This time 'round, however, I'll have to enjoy these delights on the installment plan -- when Emily's asleep or while Raffi's quiet...whichever comes first! mm

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## MANITOBA NEWS

**Monarch Industries Ltd** of Winnipeg was one of five suppliers recognized by Ford New Holland Inc. in receiving its prestigious Q1 Preferred Quality Award. Only 135 of the 3,000-plus suppliers Ford New Holland deals with world-wide have received the award. It is given to a select few suppliers who demonstrate a commitment to institutionalizing quality control systems and processes in their operations. **John Klassen**, president of Monarch Industries, said that the award would become "a tremendous door-opener."

**The Oak Lake Mennonite Church** celebrated its 60th anniversary on August 5-6. Members, former members and friends gathered to celebrate the occasion in the church located beside the Trans Canada Highway several miles west of Oak Lake.

**Herm Martens** of Rosenort was elected President of the Canadian Egg Producers Council (EPC) at its annual meeting held in St. John, N.B. Mr. Martens, a hog and poultry farmer, was also recently appointed to the Provincial Veterinary Medical Board for a three-year term.

**Rudy and Kathy Franz**, who graduated from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana, in spring, members of the Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church, have begun pastoring the Gretna Bergthaler Mennonite Church.

**Sam Schellenberg**, an Emerson farmer and businessman and general manager of the Pembina Valley Development Corporation, has been appointed to the Manitoba Telephone System board.

**Peter and Betty Hamm** of Winnipeg have begun studies at The Centre for New Religious Movements in Birmingham, England, to begin a three-year assignment with Mennonite Board of Missions. They will move to Liberia in late October.

"Business, Power and Justice" is the theme of the 1989 convention of **Mennonite Economic Development Associates**, to be held November 9 to 12 in Winnipeg. Major resource person will

be **Tony Campolo**, a popular speaker and author of books like **The Power Delusion**. He will speak on "Power Games People Play" and the "Power of Christian Entrepreneurship." The convention is open to the public, including businesspersons, managers, employees, pastors and church leaders. MEDA is an association of 2,000 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ who want to apply Christian faith to the world of work. More information about the convention can be obtained by contacting MEDA at 402-280 Smith Street, Winnipeg, R3C 1K2. Phone 944-1995.

**Walter Sawatsky** will become associate professor of church history at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries beginning January 1, 1990. He was director of MCC Europe for a number of years and has recently worked with MCC Canada.

The following athletes from Manitoba participated in the **Canada Summer Games** in Saskatoon in August: **Kevin Neufeld**, Brandon, mission staff. **Brendan Epp**, Winnipeg, archery. **Houston Klassen**, Winnipeg, and **Terry Letkeman**, Altona, baseball. **Liane Hamm**, Winkler, basketball. **Lori Bergman**, Winnipeg, **Krista Isaac**, Winnipeg, **Gwen Penner**, Winnipeg, rowing. **Karyn Klassen** of Winnipeg was a rowing coach. **Mark Loewen** of Selkirk and **Michelen Loewen** of Winnipeg, sailing. **Russell Barkman**, Klee-feld, **Nathan Giesbrecht**, and **David Neufeld**, Landmark, softball. **Gail Sirant** (nee Voth) was the women's softball coach. **Gerry Neufeld**, Winnipeg, was a swimming coach. **Keith Dyck**, Winnipeg, Long and Triple Jump. **Ron Hoepfner**, Winnipeg, 10,000m track. **Henry Klassen**, Winnipeg, was a gold medal winner in the 3000m race. **Darren Klassen**, Winnipeg 5000m track. **Janna Nikkel**, Winnipeg hurdles. **Ken Krahn**, Brandon, **Jonathan Labun**, Winnipeg and **Ron Olfert**, Winnipeg, volleyball. **Tracie Goertzen**, Winnipeg, **Robyn Plett**, Oak Lake, **Michelle Sawatzky**, Steinbach, **Christine Toews**, Headingley, volleyball. **Vic Loewen**, Winnipeg, was a volleyball coach. **Gene Buhler**, Winnipeg, wrestling.

**Marcia V.J. Kran** has completed a

masters degree in political science at the University of Toronto. In 1988 she received a Diploma in Social Sciences from the International Graduate School, University of Stockholm, Sweden. She is the daughter of **Emil Kran** and the late **Esther Kran** of Morris.

**Dawn Hiebert**, daughter of Mrs. Amy Hiebert of Niverville, has been asked to participate in an International Outreach Ringette Federation trip to the U.S.S.R. during the latter part of October. The players will stage exhibition games and will do on-ice training during their trip.

**The Mennonite Heritage Village** is one of three museums in Manitoba recently designated as regional museums under a new program set up by the provincial government. Each museum will receive \$24,000 annually for the next three years to upgrade facilities, deliver educational programs and provide services to other community museums.

An extension to **Waldner's Meats** of Niverville was recently opened. Owner **Harry Waldner** said his poultry plant will be able to process 2,000 birds a day and will now be licensed for sale to stores and restaurants.

### **School opening news....**

**Westgate Mennonite Collegiate** has 260 students. The school has just completed its 30th Anniversary Year, and plans to open a new addition to the building at a dedication service and opening program on Sunday, October 15. Staff changes include the appointment of **Reg Klassen** as teaching vice-principal, **Victor Loewen** for band, choir and English, and **Deanna Wiens** for junior writing skills and resource.

**Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute** has 488 students. New teachers are: **John Bock**, math, science and computer science; **Harold Kroeker**, practical arts; **Karen Martins**, human ecology; **Carla Reimer**, physical education; **Rob Visch**, Grade 7 choir, geography and general business; **Pat Wiens**, art and Bible. **Harry Wall** is returning following a sabbatical and

will teach maths and physics.

**Mennonite Collegiate Institute**, Gretna, reports an enrollment of 150 students. New teachers include Lester Schellenberg, French, history, geography, and Bible; and Dennis Friesen, math and physical education.

**Mennonite Brethren Bible College** has 82 full-time and 85 part-time students. Dave Balzer is the new admissions counsellor and Cheryl Pauls will be a part-time music instructor.

**Canadian Mennonite Bible College** has an enrollment of 163 full time and 49 part time regular and seminary students. New teachers include Leonard Enns, who will teach music while George and Esther Wiebe are on leave in Ontario. Peter Fast has returned from sabbatical leave. Brenda Sawatzky has been appointed as admissions counsellor.

**Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School** has an enrollment of 270 students. New teachers are Elfrieda Nikkel, Grades 5 and 6; Elsie Rempel, Grade 3; Sharon Fenton, French; and Elsie Friesen, part-time resource teacher.

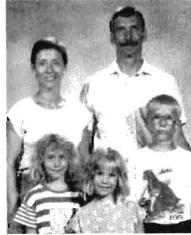


**Dr. John Krahn** was recently elected president-elect of the Canadian Society of Clinical Chemists. This two year term will be followed by a two year term as president of the society. Presently, he is the head of the Clinical Biochemistry Laboratory of St. Boniface General Hospital and assistant professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Manitoba. He received his BSc in 1968 at the University of Winnipeg, and his PhD in 1973 at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Krahn currently resides in Niverville.

**Bonnie Rae Warkentin**, daughter of Wilf and Grace Warkentin of Morden, has recently graduated from Queen's University with a Bachelor of Laws degree and is articling with the firm of Bastedo Cooper and Shostack

in Toronto.

**Lydia and Menno Plett** of Landmark are beginning five-year Mennonite Central Committee assignments in Lusaka, Zambia, where they will be working as MCC country representatives. The Pletts are members of Prairie Rose Evangelical Mennonite Church in Landmark.



**Eric and Kathleen Fast** of Altona, are beginning five-year Mennonite Central Committee assignments in Gaborone, Botswana, where they will be working as MCC country representatives. The Fasts are members of Altona Mennonite Church.

**Naomi and William Stoesz** of Kleefeld are beginning three-year Mennonite Central Committee assignments in Ghana, where William will be working as an agriculturist. The Stoeszes previously served with MCC in Zimbabwe. They are members of Kleefeld Evangelical Mennonite Church.

At MCC Manitoba, **Robert Miller** has been appointed director of the newly-created Employment Concerns Program. Miller, a member of Winnipeg's Hope Mennonite Church, previously worked as a free-lance community development worker. He is a graduate of the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague, The Netherlands. He is married and has one child. The purpose of the Employment Concerns Program is to create employment opportunities for groups that MCC has special interests in: assisting disabled people, ex-offenders, Native people, refugees and women.

**Mennonite Central Committee** (MCC) was rated the "best of the denominational agencies doing relief and development work" by **The Other Side**, a bi-monthly evangelical magazine. In its July/August Giver's Guide, the magazine rates 123 charitable organizations. The Other Side gave MCC full marks for "its desire to learn as well as to help promote mutual dignity and interdependence, com-

mitment to non violence and "its belief that God intended all people to share the earth's resources." The magazine goes on to say that "it understands the relationship between faith and action and is widely respected for its cultural sensitivity." The magazine also praised MCC for "religious consistency." "Consistent with its character," the magazine says, "staff must have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and His teaching of non-violence." MCC received low marks from **The Other Side** for the small number of women and people of color involved on boards or in key staff positions.



**Cheri Nickel** of Winnipeg is beginning a one-year SALT assignment with MCC in Nakashibetsu-cho, Japan, where she will teach English and kindergarten classes with the Japanese Mennonite Churches of Hokkaido. She is a member of Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

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## ILLINOIS IS SITE OF CANADIAN CONFERENCES

"God's people are not limited by national and denominational boundaries," said moderator Walter Franz in his opening address to the 87th annual sessions of the **Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC)**. The 384 conference delegates and 105 registered guests ignored the boundary of the 49th parallel to gather on July 31(evening) and August 1, 1989 in Normal, Illinois, for the first-ever CMC conference outside Canada. A shortened version of a regular five-day conference was held in conjunction with the August 1-6 joint meeting of the Mennonite Church General Assembly and the General Conference Mennonite Church Triennial Sessions.

The Canadian arm of the General Conference participated later that week in the 87 percent decision to continue exploring integration of the two North American Mennonite bodies. One of the major discussion items at the CMC sessions was the impact such a move toward integration

would have on the Canadian conference.

Concern was expressed that the east/west focus not get lost in larger binational concerns. Conference delegates were also asked to respond to "A Discussion Paper on CMC Priorities." With this paper a process has been set in motion to look at major reorganization of the Conference's structures by 1990-91.

Present at the 1989 annual sessions were representatives from the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada's 62 churches which had become associate members of CMC at the 1988 conference. Their good experience with a merger of three smaller Mennonite conferences in 1987 brought a sense of reality into the integration discussions at these sessions.

Finances -- or lack of them -- surfaced in several of the reports by CMC boards and committees. Native Ministries asked questions about the financial viability of its program. The NM Board is currently undergoing a major review process to assess what changes are necessary to make best use of available funds.

Both the committee on ministerial leadership and Canadian Mennonite Bible College raised concerns about sources for continuing funds to train youth leaders and pastors for CMC churches.

Troubling information came from the committee on ministerial leadership. Twelve pastors are leaving CMC through retirement in 1989 and 30 churches are currently looking for pastors. This news was somewhat tempered by the fact that 34 new leaders had come into CMC churches in the past year. To promote leadership training, Ralph Lebold, who has been appointed director of external programs for Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, will work part-time with CMC to develop conference-based theological education in Canada.

Despite a projected accumulated deficit of \$84,000, delegates adopted a \$3,563,664 budget, marking an eight percent increase in congregational giving. The finance committee reported that congregational giving has levelled off; individuals and business donations provide the extra funds needed to maintain programs.

Elections were held to fill board/committee vacancies and several resolutions were approved: to continue support of Mennonite churches in the Soviet Union; to encourage movement

toward integration of the General Conference and Mennonite Church; and to convey thanks to the Normal '89 hosting committee for its fine organization and hospitality. The 1990 conference is scheduled for July 7-11 in Edmonton, Alberta.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada with headquarters in Winnipeg is made up of 157 member congregations and 62 associate member churches from the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada. Most of the CMC churches are also members of the General Conference Mennonite Church based in Newton, Kansas.

## Coming Events

**October 15:** 25th anniversary celebration, River East MB Church, 755 McLeod Avenue.

**October 24:** Geneology workshop, Mennonite Heritage Centre 7:30 p.m.

**November 8:** Second Annual fund raising dinner for Bethania, guest speaker: Rev. Jacob Tilitzky.

**November 9-11:** Russian Mennonite Bicentennial symposium.

**November 9-12:** MEDA Convention. Theme: Business, Power and Justice.

**November 25:** "Valuing Life" conference. Menno Simons College; main speaker: John Howard Yoder.



The Winnipeg Mennonite Children's Choir, under the direction of Helen Litz, has been invited to sing at Carnegie Hall's International Children's Choirs in Concert in New York next spring. The choir is one of five or six from around the world invited to the conference, and was invited

without the normal procedure of a prior audition as a result of its impressive performance last summer at Expo '88 in Canberra, Australia. The choir will also perform at the Music Educators National Conference in Washington, D.C.

## Marija-unser russisches Dienstmädchen

von Frau Helene Janzen

Sie hiess Marija, nicht Maria. In meinem Heftchen mit den selbstgemachten Reimen aus der Schulzeit hatte ich ihr ein Denkmal setzen wollen. Neben den zwei Strophen stand die Anmerkung: "Gedichtet am 21. September 1920 in Erinnerung an unsere Marija." (So war's doch immer bei einem richtigen Dichter!) Die Verslein waren in russischer Sprache, und der Hauptgedanke des ersten Teiles enthielt die Frage: "Sollte es wirklich mein Schicksal sein, immer zu dienen, wird mir kein eigenes Glück zuteil?!" Die zweite Strophe enthielt die prophetische Antwort: "Es wird nicht immer so bleiben, auch Du wirst Dein Glück erleben."

Es war im Herbst, als Marija eines Tages vor unserer Haustür stand und nach Arbeit fragte. Sie war gross und kräftig gebaut, ein wenig hager, mit einem schlichten offenen Gesicht und glattem, fest zurückgekämmtem Haar. Schön war sie nicht, dennoch hatte sie etwas Anziehendes in ihrem Ausseren. Das waren ihre hellen graublauen Augen. Diese Augen waren nicht gross--keine langen Wimpern--aber sie hatten die Eigenheit zu strahlen. --Meine Eltern nahmen Marija ins Haus, und sie wurde zum Gottesgeschenk für uns.

Marija war 29 Jahre alt, als sie zu uns kam und konnte weder lesen noch schreiben. Kein Mädchen ihres Dorfes hatte je eine Schule besucht. Da regte sich der Lehreifer in uns Kindern. Karin, meine jüngere Schwester, und ich hatten schon einige Erfahrung im Unterrichten von Analphabeten! Mokrina, unseres Brüderchens Kindermädchen, hatte mit 17 Jahren bei uns lesen und schreiben gelernt, und zwar russisch und deutsch. Mit Triumph brachten wir ihre Hefte unserem Lehrer und er

zeichnete die uns wohlbekannte rote 5 darunter. Das bedeutete "sehr gut."

Und nun kam Marija dran. Ihren kleinen 10 und 12-jährigen Lehrerinnen brannten die Wangen vor Eifer, und Marijas Augen strahlten, auf ihrem hageren Gesicht erschienen die roten Flecken, die bei jeder Erregung hervortraten.

"O mein dummer alter Kopf!", klagte sie lachend, aber sie buchstabierte, sie malte die Schriftzeichen. Schon im zweiten Winter nahm sie ihr russisches Testament zu Hand--ein Weihnachtsgeschenk meiner Eltern. --An den langen russischen Winterabenden, wenn draussen alles tief verschneit war, oder der Schneesturm um das Haus tobte und an den Fensterläden rüttelte, wenn die ganze Familie an dem langen Tisch sass, um die schöne gemütliche Hängelampe herum, sass auch Marija dabei. Vater las oder schnitzelte, Mutter strickte, wir Kinder machten unsere Hausaufgaben, und Marija buchstabierte in der Bibel. "Nu djadja, objasnite poshalujsta, tschto eto snatschit?" (Onkel, erklären sie mir, bitte, wie ist dieses gemeint)--und mein Vater erklärte ihr die ihr unverständlichen und fremd scheinenden Bibelverse. Sie war auch bei unseren Morgenandachten am Frühstückstisch zugegen und hörte mit Andacht zu, ohne viel zu verstehen. Wenn aber Marija die Hand aufhob und sich bekreuzte, oder wenn ihr schlichtes eisernes Kreuzchen am Halse sichtbar wurde, verspürten wir eine Ehfurcht vor der Innigkeit eines Glaubens, der uns fremd war.

Dann kamen die schweren Jahre. Alle anderen russischen Dienstleute mussten allmählich entlassen werden. Marija blieb. Ihre Heimt war fern, es war ein kleines weltabgelegenes Dorf nördlich von Tschernigoff.

Sobald nun die Anarchisten an unsere Tür schlugen und nach meinem Vater riefen, oder wenn die Machnowzen des Nachts Geld und Wertsachen verlangten, Marija stand neben meinem Vater--und das Wort einer Dienstmagd hatte damals noch Gewicht bei der "Arbeiterregierung."

Natürlich, Raub und Plünderung konnte auch sie nicht verhindern, aber mein Vater wurde nicht geschlagen, blieb am Leben--bis auf jenen 30. Oktober des Jahres 1919. Damals, ehe es tagte, musste Marija das Dorf verlassen. Mit einem Bündel in der Hand ging sie weinend vom Hof, für zwei Tage ins nächste russische Dorf. (Alle russischen Dienstleute mussten an dem Tage Altenau verlassen). Als sie wiederkam, war mein Vater tot...Es geschah an einem wunderbar schönen sonnigen Spätherbsttage. --Marija trauerte mit uns.

Nun sollte sie eigentlich unser Haus verlassen. Meine Mutter konnte ihr keinen Lohn mehr zahlen, wir waren arm geworden. Das treue Mädchen antwortete: "Ich bleibe bei Ihnen--ohne Lohn".

Marija lebte nun ganz mit uns. Sie war stolz, wenn wir Kinder Auszeichnungen in der Schule erhielten. Als meinem ältesten Bruder ein Anzug fehlte, schloss Marija ihren "Sunduck" auf und holte eine Rolle grauer grober Leinwand hervor. Sie selbst hatte den Flachs dazu gesponnen, daraus die Leinwand gwebt und später gebleicht. Es half kein Widerstreben, meine Mutter musste den Anzug daraus zuschneiden, und Marija klopfte mit einem Hammer auf den Zemenstufen die widerstrebenden Nähe glatt.

Am Tage vor Pfingsten schmückten wir unter Marijas Anleitung unsere Sommerküche und Diele mit grünen Rüster und Eichenzweigen, und sie selbst belegte den Fussboden dieser

Raume mit selbstgeschnittenem duftendem Gras. So war es russische Sitte.

Marija stand auch neben meiner Mutter am Sarge unseres fünfjährigen Brüderchens, damals, als wir anderen an einer Scharlachepidemie krank lagen. Auch sie legte einen aus Herbstlaub und bunten Asten geflochtenen Kranz auf den kleinen Grabhügel, der neben meines Vaters Ruhestätte frisch aufgeworfen wurde. Das war wieder im Herbst, ein Jahr nach Vaters Tode.

Eines Tages erlebte Marija ihre grosse Liebe. Die Sowjetregierung fing an, sich zu stabilisieren. Die Tragödie in der Krim hatte ihren Abschluss gefunden. Unser Dorf erhielt Einquartierung, natürlich war eine Abteilung der roten Armee. Unsere vorhergehende Angst ging dieses Mal in Verwunderung über: Diese Soldaten verhielten sich ordentlich, viele von ihnen hatten auffallend gute Umgangsformen, waren höflich und gebildet.

Durch einen Zufall wurde uns alles klar. Es waren dieses frühere Anhänger von General Djenikin, also hauptsächlich Offiziere und Generale, die in einer letzten Zwangslage geschlossen zur Roten Armee übergegangen waren.

Unter ihnen war auch "Kyrill", wohl der ehemalige Bursche eines Offiziers, von Hause aus Bauer, ein wenig derb, aber gutmütig. Eines Abends sahen wir Marija und Kyrill auf einer versteckten Bank in unserem Garten sitzen.

Marijas Augen strahlten mehr als sonst, sie arbeitete und lächelte dabei. Und wir wussten ihr Geheimnis. -- Dann zog das Militär ab. Noch einmal

sahen wir Marija auf der Bank sitzen. Sie las einen Brief, besah das schlichte kleine Bild. Weiter hörte sie nichts mehr von Kyrill. Das Strahlen ihrer Augen liess nach.

Bald darauf äusserte Marija den Wunsch, ihre alte Heimat widerzusehen. Sie war auch nicht mehr ganz unentbehrlich in unserem Hause. Ich hatte auch gehört, wie meine Tante, die seit einiger Zeit bei uns wohnte, zu meiner Mutter sagte: "Anna, du lässt Marija zu sehr den Willen, sie fühlt sich als Herrin des Hauses." Es wird wohl auch gestimmt haben, aber was meine gute Mutter darauf erwiderte, weiss ich nicht mehr.

Marija rüstete nun zur Heimfahrt! Ihre in unserem Stall für sie grossgezogene Kuh wurde verkauft. Meine Mutter schüttete Betten und teilte ihr davon zu, auch Handtücher, Laken. Marija küsste uns, weinte und fuhr ab.

Nach einigen Jahren besuchte sie uns wieder. Sie sass am Familientisch u. erzählte. Ihre Augen strahlten, die roten Flecken im Gesicht brannten vor freudiger Erregung. Marija erzählte von ihren Erfolgen in der Heimat. Man hatte sie als einzige Frau in den Dorfsrat gewählt. Keine andere Frau des Dorfes konnte lesen oder schreiben! Marija hatte ihr Glück erlebt. Sie war im besten Zuge, sowjetische Aktivistin zu werden. Die ihr zugefallene "Ehre" erfüllte ihr ganzes Herz. Sie wollte ihre Freude mit uns teilen und merkte nicht, dass wir von dieser Veränderung, die ihr "Glück" schien, schmerzlich berührt wurden.

Später ging ich mit ihr in unseren Garten, um die letzten süssen Kröckeln zu suchen. Es war wieder Herbst, ein wenig windig, die Wolken jagten am Himmel dahin...Hier vertraute ich Marija mein Geheimnis an, erzählte von meiner Liebe. "Also Wladimir Heinrichowitsch, dein gewesener Lehrer?! Wie mich das freut! Das war ein guter Mensch! Er war doch wirklich ein gebildeter Mann und war doch zu mir, dem einfachen russischen Dienstmädchen, genau so höflich und freundlich, wie zu deiner Tante, die doch eine wohlhabende Gutsbesitzerstochter war!" Ich hatte es gewusst, dass Marija mit meiner Wahl einverstanden sein würde. Sie trug mein Geheimnis mit zurück in ihr kleines Dorf, wo sie sich nun unentbehrlich und glücklich fühlte.

Später hörten wir nichts mehr von Marija. Aber im Geiste sehe ich sie

in ihrem mit Hilfe des Dorfrates erbauten weissgekalkten Häuschen. Sie lebte still und zurückgezogen. Damals erlebte sie ihre Glanzzeit, jetzt braucht man Marija schon längst nicht mehr. Die Mädchen ihrer Nachbarin lesen und schreiben fliegend, sie sprechen auch von Algebra und Trigonometrie, und davon weiss Marija nichts. In der neuerbauten zehnstufigen Schule ihres Dorfes wimmelt es von flachsblonden Mädchen und Jungen durcheinander, und der Sohn ihres Bruders studiert sogar in Moskau...

Marija aber streichelt wieder ihre Kuh im kleinen warmen Stall, füttert ihre Hühnerchen. Sie pflanzt im Frühling Kartoffeln und Kohl, freut sich im Sommer über die blühenden Stockrosen am Haus und die leuchtenden Sonnenblumen im Garten. Im Herbst schneidet sie die schweren Scheiben ab, legt sie zu Trocknen auf das flache Dach des Stalles. Später klopft sie die dünnen Scheiben mit einem Stöckchen aus, lässt die Samenkörner durch den Wind an der Hausecke und tut sie behutsam in den Sack. Im Winter, an den langen russischen Abenden, wenn die Nachbarin zu Plaudern herüberkommt, holt Marija eine Handvoll gerösteter Samenkörner und bietet sie dem Gast freundlich an.

Ob Marija wohl wieder ihre Ikona in der Ecke ihrer Stube hängen hat? Ob unter den vielen Bildern und Photographien an der Wand auch unser Familienbild nicht fehlt? Ob sie wohl am Abend ihr russisches Testament zur Hand nimmt, darin liest und betet? Sie ist nicht verbittert, nein; denn Marija hat nicht nur gedient, sie hat im Dienen ein reiches Erleben gehabt, ihr ist später auch "Glanz und Ehre" zuteil geworden.

Manchmal wird Marija an meinen Vater denken, an meine Mutter, an uns Geschwister. Dabei steht ihr mein Elternhaus vor Augen,--das langgestreckte Haus, die drei mächtigen Eichen, die blühenden Akazien, der schöne grosse Garten mit dem Kastanienbaum und der Bank darunter. Dort sucht sie uns in ihrer Erinnerung und weiss nicht, dass sie den grössten Teil der Familie in Sibirien wiederfinden könnte, in fremden Hütten und in kühler Erde. Und einen "Splitter" im fernen Kanada. Aber--das ahnt Marija nicht. Gott schenke ihr den Lohn ihrer Treue! mm

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unter der Leitung von Selma Enns.

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## No Dietschlaunt Trätje

fonn Agnes Waul

"Diene sesta haft nu daut Weesow schetje kunnt, onn nu jeitet no Dietschlaunt," säd dee Neetje Teewsche too am. "Wanea foa wie looss?"

"Ditt ess oba blooss fe die onn mie," meend Teews, aus hee sitj daut Papia goot betjitt haud. "Wie welle oba aum leewsten, daut dee Kjinja onn Groottjina uck foats mett kjenne."

"Wann wie dee Milits dee Papiere brinje, welle an doa mol froage aus wie Onse aula mettrinje kjenne. Woo doo wie daut nu?"

Onn soo deede see daut. See jinje no däm Milits direktj enn sien Kontoa nenn, jeewe am daut Weesow onn unjastunde sitj daut wäajen dee Kjinja.

"Wann jie aula opp ditt Weesowtje wajch welle, dann mott jie aula toop oppe selwe Städ wone soo daut jie dee selwe Adress habe," säd dee Milits opp rusch wiels ditt passead aula enn Russlaunt onn doa kjenne dee Milits nijch plautdietsch. "Wann jie ditt doone, sull daut gone no miene fäaschreff no."

"Wie sennt aula toop bie dartijch Lied. Woo kjenn wie aula enn een Hus nenn? Du weetst daut ons Hus nijch sea groot ess."

"Mie ess daut eendoont woo jie daut doone," säd'a. "Onn wan jie emm Tselt schlope, soo lang aus jie mau aula opp eene Städ sennt. Onn proowt mie nijch auntooschmäare. Etj woa kjitje kome."

Nu kaum dee gaunsse Famielje toop. Kjinja, Schwiejatjinja, Groottjinja, soogoa dee Schwiejadochta äare Ooma. Doa wort han onn häa jerädt. Manja, Jreetje onn Wellem äare Dochta, road, "Etj well mie befree. One am tratje etj nijch no Dietschlaunt."

Nu wort äwalajcht, doa wort jemäte, doa wort beräatjent, doa wort jetalt. Aules wort tackseat. See muste daut doch irjent woo too Staund kjree. Jo, daut Tooptratje wudd fleijcht afents gone. Enne Garazh wudde see koake. Doa fuats

besied wea noch eene Garazh, opp haulf twalw toopjeschloage. Doa benne wudde see aula äte. Bade kunne nu enn jieda Stow emm Hus oppjestalt. See kunne je Mauntje aun Mauntje scholpe, soogoa bunte Reaj moake, wann daut nijch aundash jintj.

"Daut reatjt noch nijch gaunss too," säd Neetje opp eenmol, aus see wada enn äarem Kopp jetalt haud.

"Reatjt noch nijch?" meend äare Dochta Jreetje. "Dann riet wie äwent dee Schatelbentje ute Koma rut. Soo paust doa en Bad nenn fe Ooma. Onn wie kjenne ons bie dee Nobasch onn Frind bode ooda banje. Mien Wellem woat dee Bodwaun Looschruwe on rütstale. Dann kaum doa een Dobbeldbad krajt nenn. Hea opp too tsipple, Manja, wie foare no Moskau onn unjastone ons daut wäajen dee Friarie. Wann jie junt boolt befree, kaum dien Briegaum hejchstens uck mett no Dietschlaunt."

Jreetje wea eene druglijche Taunte onn 'et wea äare Natua, een bät fäatoosaje. See haud foaken daut Woat onn dee Aundre horjchte no äa wiels see emma gooden Rot jeef.

Daut tooptratje haud waut opp sitj. Daut gaunsse Darp kjitjt too woo see daut deede. Jiede Famielje brochte Bade, Loakes, Kjesses, Toodatje, Teetijch, Kjleeda, Äte, Desche, Steela -- kort, aulet Barajchlo waut see haude. Dann weare uck dee Heena, Kjeaj, Ente onn Schwien. Toom Jletj haude Eenje aul äa Fee jeschlacht. Daut jintj nijch sea goot, oba daut jintj, wann doa uck erno fäl Mensche opp eene Städ weare. Daut kunn uck enn däm loossgone, daut tratje. Eenje fekoft aul äare Hiesa.

Jreetje foa mett Manja onn däm Briegaum no Moskau onn aus see doa waut unjaschräwe haud kunne see sitj stauntepee befree onn so jeef daut noch Kjast. Aules wort ütjstraumt onn dee Brut haud een schmocket, wittet Brüttjleed aun onn dee Briegaum een feinet Kjrietje aunjespalt. Jast kaume fonn wiet onn breet. Dee junge Lied kjreaje soogoa

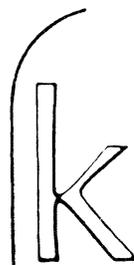
eene Stow fe sitj auleen, dee jewäsne Bodstow.

Onn soo läwde see sitj bott daut loossgone sull.

Opp eenmol wea dee Milits doa. "Lied etj saj, jie wone too fäl Mensche opp eenem Klompe. Waut schot junt blooss? Mien Fäajesata saj wann jie soo toopjetjwatscht läwe unjaschrift hee june Papiere nijch. Jie motte uteneen tratje, dann deit hee daut fleijcht. Onn dee Ooma fonne Schwiejadochta, fonn dää fejat mau. See woat nijch aus Frintschoft jerätjent."

Na, oba! Tridjtratje? Eenje haude nijch mol äa Hus mea. Waut

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nu? Na, Dise muste nom Frintschoft mett Hack onn Pack, mett Kjeaj onn Schwien, mett äare Bade onn Kjinja, mett Teetijch onn Kjesses, mett Eatschocke, mett Gaufel onn Massasch onn Struckbassems; mett aul dee Sache woone see sitj aul toopjekoft onn ennjepackt haude toom no Dietschalunt näme. Dee

Schwiejadochta äare Ooma must no aundret Frintschoft tratje onn haud nu opp äare oole Doage kjeen rajchtet Tus mea, dee oarme Taunte!

Daut jeef en Jeräd emm Darp. Eenje meende dee Milits wist nuscht, dee haud aules faulsch. Eenje säde see weare enn Orenburjch jewast onn dee haud doa jesajt dee Lied muste toop wone wann see blooss een Weesow oppe gaunsse Grupp haude, sest jeef daut nuscht mett dee Tratjerie. Eenje jniesade onn säde jiedem enne Grupp see haude äwahaupt eene domme Iedee, aum baste wea daut see bleewe leewa tus onn schaufte wieda emm Kolchos. Ditt weare dee woone selfst nijch tratje wulle. "Feriet jun Weesow," meende see.

Daut jeef 'ne Fetal, han onn hää, han onn hää, bott see aula kjrieselrunt weare. "Wie motte no Orenburjch foare onn ons daut unjastone," säd Jreetje to äarem Wellem.

So läde see looss. Wellem aum Stia, Jreetje bie Sied. See haud sitj äa grootsindoagschet Kjleed aunjetrocke. Een schmocket Kjleed, nijch too läajch ütjeschnäde. Hinje saute noch dree Maunslid ut äare Grupp. Oba daut wijchtijchste wea daut Jreetje mett wea. Etj ha' junt aul jeschräwe daut see goot daut Woat feare kunn onn aules sea scheen beräde deed. 'Et kaun soogoa senne daut dee Oobrijtjeit fe äa een bät Schnett haud wann see an too Räd stald. Wie Menniste brucke soone Frues aus Jreetje, soone Derjchsatasch.

Aust see no Hus Kaume fonn äare Reis säd Jreetje, "Wie tratje wada toop. Etj well nuscht mea hia äwa saje."

Onn soo wort daut jedone. Dee Lied emm Darp reete de Uage op, see jnerde onn pludade, oba daut wea aules eendoont.

See kaume wajch. No Dietschlaunt. Soogoa dee Ooma fonn Schwiejadochta haud Jreetje mettjeschlijt. Daut wea kratjt ferr Wienachte. See stalde sitj aula enne Reaj onn sunge feastemmijch, "Oh Du fröliche...." mm

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## Attend the

# RUSSIAN MENNONITE BICENTENNIAL SYMPOSIUM November 9-11, 1989

### PRESENTATIONS

**Thursday, November 9, 7:30 p.m., at CMBC**

Len Friesen: Mennonites and the fissuring of the New Russian society, 1860s-1905.

**Friday, November 10, 9:30 a.m., at University of Winnipeg**

Peter J. Klassen: Historiographic Perspectives: Through Different Eyes

Adolf Ens: The Prussian Mennonite views of those who emigrated to New Russia

Harry Loewen: Intellectual Developments

Harvey Dyck: Variety and change in external and self-images of Russian Mennonites, 1840-1914

Lawrence Klippenstein: State service among Mennonites

John Dyck: The struggle for self-understanding: Two conceptions of Gemeinde amongst Russian Mennonites, 1914-23

James Urry: Prolegomena to the study of Mennonite society in Russia, 1880-1914

**Saturday, November 11, 9 a.m., at University of Winnipeg**

Abe Dueck and John Friesen: Church developments

George K. Epp: Mennonite experiences during the 1930s and 40s

Walter Sawatsky: Soviet reference points for Mennonite identity

Anna Janzen: Personal Reflections of life in the U.S.S.R.

Responses: Dan Stone, University of Winnipeg, and Theo Stavrou, University of Minnesota.

To register for the symposium, call John Friesen at 204 888 6781, as soon as possible. Registration fee is \$20.

**BANQUET:** At the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, 6:30 p.m., Saturday, November 11, with speaker Al Reimer, University of Winnipeg, topic: Peasant Aristocracy: The Mennonite gutsbesitzertum in Russia.

Registration for the banquet is separate from the symposium, but may be made by calling John Friesen at 204 888 6781. Cost is \$15.

**more about BICENTENNIAL**

cases expressed itself as a naked pursuit of the good things in this world and devil take the hindmost. But the tragic events of the Revolution brought the prosperous Mennonite commonwealth down like a house of cards and crushed a society that had allowed itself to become complacent. Those who escaped by emigrating were able to save from the ruins the best part of themselves, their faith and integrity as Christian Mennonites. Through suffering and deprivation they learned the fragility and impermanence of earthly things and rededicated themselves to more lasting values and a greater faith.

But even the sternest lessons of history are soon forgotten. Here we are, a scant two generations after the Mennonite holocaust in Russia, our drive for the good things in life, for "Hab and Gut," stronger than ever. The tragic curve of the Russian-Mennonite experience no longer hangs over us. Instead we see a bright rainbow of promise and opportunity. Is not the biggest threat to our integrity as Christian Mennonites our whole-hearted participation in the ceaseless competition of a secular society driven by impulses and aims that are as far removed from our Anabaptist origins as they could possibly be? Is it too much to say that our rampant materialism is a bigger threat to our future as Mennonites than Makhno and his murderous hordes or the godless Bolsheviks ever were?

And what about the Mennonites who remained in Russia? After unspeakable hardships and cruel oppression they are now fleeing the Soviet Union in the thousands. If the trend continues there will soon be only completely assimilated non-Mennonite "Mennonites" left in the country. And so, sad to contemplate, "the way" in the ancestral land will have reached an end.

All is not yet lost, of course. There are some encouraging signs. As we continue to explore our Prussian-Russian-North American heritage more diligently and honestly through history, literature and the other arts, we may become more self-aware and more constructively critical of our own inadequacies and misplaced values, whether inherited or self-generated.

Mennonites in the Russian tradition have always shown a degree of committed social consciousness and concern, at least in certain areas, and that concern seems to be growing as our guilt mounts. There are also signs that the Mennonite church as an institution is becoming more self-probing, more tolerant and more compassionate in its outreach towards those who are not "us."

Parochialism and ignorance of the world were among our main weaknesses in the past. Maybe, just maybe, now that we have overcome those weaknesses, we can find ways of being in the world without becoming completely of the world, as our ancestors always feared we would.

-- Al Reimer

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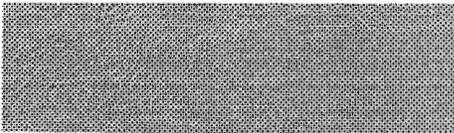
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## A Reflection on the Bicentennial of the Russian Mennonites: 1789-1989

In 1789, the year the French Revolution released violent forces of change in Europe, our peace-loving Prussian-Mennonite ancestors turned their backs on Western Europe altogether and settled down in a barbaric land where nothing ever seemed to change at all. In Russia the Mennonites gradually evolved from a primarily religious sect into an ethnic faith community that thrived economically and culturally as no Mennonite group had done before. And yet, even as they were sinking their roots more deeply into Russian soil, they could still refer to themselves as being "on the way," as wandering witnesses to their Anabaptist faith who could find no final abode on this earth. And they were right, although not quite in the simple sense they imagined. The Mennonite odyssey that began in 1789 has not yet ended and we Russian-Mennonite descendants are still on a twisted, at times tortured ethnic and spiritual journey whose outcome none of us can foresee.

Human motives are never as pure and simple as we would like them to be. The Mennonites of the Great Werder in West Prussia may have thought they were emigrating mainly for religious reasons, but their hunger for land and for the special privileges promised by the Czarist government was equally strong. Some, no doubt, went for the sheer adventure of it. Inexplicably, the original group of 228 families that established Khortitsa, later known as the Old Colony, had not even been provided with any ministers (Lehrer). They had to hold a special ministerial election shortly after they got there so marriages could be performed and the necessary rituals of the church maintained. Worst of all, in their eyes, they found when they got there that the land assigned to them was in a different place and inferior to what had been promised them.

From these unpropitious beginnings the Mennonites in Russia developed into a progressive and highly visible group of settlers. They were regarded as model farmers by the government and with its approval the energetic and iron-willed leader Johann Cornies almost single-handedly turned the Molochnaya, the largest of the Russian-Mennonite colonies with its 60 villages, into an agrarian showcase admired by foreign and domestic visitors alike, including the Russian nobility on their way to their fashionable Black Sea spas. Eventually there would be 400

Mennonite villages dotting the Russian plains from the central Ukraine to Siberia. By the end of the last century the Mennonite private school system was one of the best in Europe. Mennonite entrepreneurs were fanning out in all directions with flour mills, great estates, and a farm machinery manufacturing industry that produced 10 per cent of all the farm machinery in the Ukraine. Hospitals and other social institutions were established, and the Mennonite church, remaining determinedly German, flourished as never before.

What I have just described has become the "received" version of Russian-Mennonite history as the survivors of that world wish to remember it and have it preserved. It's the version so lovingly celebrated in the film **And When They Shall Ask**. But such an idealized view of history is always one-sided and uncritical and cries out for a more realistic and critical anti-history. To suppress or deny the anti-history is to risk losing the essential truth of the past. The Russian-Mennonite anti-history, the other side of the historic coin, is a record of inequities, ugly tensions, greed and hypocrisy. From the earliest years of settlement, for example, Flemish and Friesian Mennonites stubbornly carried on a debilitating feud that caused much frustration and unhappiness on both sides. Then there was the breakaway Kleine Gemeinde church movement, which was harassed and persecuted for a whole generation before finally being accepted as a necessary evil. A wider issue was the bitter struggle in the 1820s and 30s between church authorities (the Eltester) and the civic authorities (the Oberschulzen), a struggle ultimately won, at least in the obvious sense, by the civic authorities.

Even worse strife came in the middle decades of the century when thousands of landless Mennonites tried to wrest the crown land that should rightfully have been theirs from the greedy grasp of landowners who were using it for their own purposes. The struggle was resolved only when the colonies, under direct pressure from the government, finally decided to purchase new land in other areas to establish daughter colonies. Another highly controversial issue was the formation of the Selbstschutz, the Mennonite fighting militia which violated a Mennonite peace position four centuries old.

The truth is that in Russia the Mennonites developed an ethnic and cultural self-confidence that in all too many

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