

MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

NEWSLETTER  
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This particular issue begins by including the minutes of the annual meeting of the historical society, held during The Canadian Conference in Richmond, B.C., this past summer. Also included is a report from Bill Schroeder, chairman of the historical society, on highlights of his trips to Russia over the past three summers. A report from The Archives notes some of its latest acquisitions and briefly describes the seminar "Discovering Your Heritage", which it is presently conducting. The Newsletter concludes with a new feature, a review of books of general historical interest.

The editor of The Newsletter would like to hear from you the reader. If you have any comments, items of interest or request for help in research you are presently conducting, please send them to the editor in order that they may be included in the next Newsletter. Mail your responses to the Center for M.B. Studies, 77 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2L 1L1.

-Ken Reddig

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF CANADA

NO. 1  
July 11, 1979, 12:45 p.m.  
Richmond, B.C.

Chairman: Helmut Huebert  
Present: Approximately 22 members and interested participants.

1. John H. Redekop began the meeting with prayer.
2. The minutes of the 1978 Historical Society meeting in Three Hills, Alberta, were accepted.
3. The amendments to the constitution suggested at the Three Hills convention, and included in the final draft, were approved. A copy of the final draft of the constitution was included in the June, 1979 edition of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Newsletter.

4. The financial statement of the Historical Society for 1978-79 was presented.
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|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Balance on hand June 1978         | \$ 74.00 |
| Contributions and Membership fees | 126.50   |
| Disbursements: Ontario conference | 100.00   |
| Balance on hand June 1979         | 100.50   |

The financial statement was accepted.

5. The question was raised as to whether contributions to the Society are tax deductible. It was reported that they are and that donations should be made by cheque to the Canadian Conference of M.B. Churches. Receipts for all donations will be issued.
6. Elections were held for the Executive Committee of the Historical Society. A list of candidates had been prepared by The Executive Committee and its board members. This list was approved as presented below:
- Chairman: Bill Schroeder (Wpg.)
  - V. Chairman: Helmut Huebert
  - Secretary-Treasury: Ken Reddig
  - Member-at-large: Abe Dueck  
Harry Loewen
7. It was noted that The Historical Society has been having difficulty in achieving its full complement of board members from the various provinces. A suggestion was presented and approved, that the executive request of the provincial conferences they elect board members to the society at their annual provincial conventions.
- 7.1 As a guideline it was recommended and approved that two board members be elected from each province and two members be elected from Eastern Canada.
8. A suggestion was made that the Historical Society write several inserts to be placed in Church bulletins. These inserts would be on an historical personality or theme and help in publicizing The Archives/Study Center as well as the Historical Society. It was suggested that The Historical Society apply to The Board of Christian Literature for money to develop this idea.
9. It was noted that the Study Center is encouraging the various provinces to begin writing their provincial histories. In order to facilitate the writing of these histories it was suggested the respective provincial conference executives form a committee from the ranks of the church historians of each congregation to begin initiating this project.
10. The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ken Reddig, Recording Secretary.

#### TOURING RUSSIA

During the past three summers I have had the pleasure of guiding Mennonite Tour groups to Russia. The objectives of these tours, besides seeing the Soviet Union, is to visit relatives and see the former Mennonite Colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna. On two of my trips I have also had the pleasure of going to Bergthal the first daughter colony of Chortitza.

Our tour of the Soviet Union includes Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev, Zaporozhye, Tashkent and Alma Ata. When in Azporozhye one of the days is spent visiting the Molotschna colony. Many of the former landmarks can still be recognized; in Halbstadt the Zentral Schule and the Mädchen Schule, the Willms home and the old steam mill, the wind mill in Alexanderkrone, the M.B. church in Ruckenau (see Mennonitische Rundschau Dec. 14, 1977), the Zentral Schule in Gnadenfeld, the churches in Petershagen, Schönsee and Landeskrone etc.

In Rosenthal, Chortitza, the tourists see the former Mädchen Schule and Lehrer Seminar. They also see the famous oak which provided shelter for the first Mennonite immigrants from Prussia in 1789. Earlier as a symbol of long life, the tree was used as an object of worship by the Cossacks. This magnificent bur oak is now a state historical monument and a popular tourist attraction. The tree has a height of thirty - six metres (115 ft.), and the crown has a diameter of forty - three metres (137 ft.). The trunk has a circumference of six decimal three metres (20 ft.). The age of the tree is estimated at six or seven hundred years.

Members of the tour groups generally may not go to the homes of relatives, but the relatives may come to intourist centers where the visit may take place. Over the years I have witnessed many emotional reunions. A few examples may serve to illustrate this point. Identical twin brothers had been in jail together during the Second World War; both had managed to escape their confinement. One brother was immediately recaptured and served eleven years in jail, while the other managed to escape to Canada. On a recent tour I saw the 76 year old twins greet each other in a Moscow airport and spend a few delightful days together. Again, during the last days of German occupation of the Ukraine, a young mother left her three year old daughter with the grandmother, while she went to the field to work. During the day the German front retreated and the young mother had to go along. The grandmother and grand-daughter were taken east. After the war, the mother came to Canada with many other displaced person. Years later contact between the two was established with the help of M.C.C. and the Red Cross. I saw the mother and daughter reunited, after thirty two years of seperation, holding hands and crying. The mother could speak only German, the daughter only Russian.

The Russia tours are not always easy. Luggage can and does get lost. Intourist exercises the right to change the itinery without notice. The scrutiny of the customs officals can be a test of endurance. In spite of all this for most of the members participating in these tours, it is an unforgettable experience.

-Bill Schroeder

#### REPORT FROM THE ARCHIVES

Since beginnning employment in the Archives July 1, 1979, I have been continually impressed with the interest shown by a broad spectrum of individuals in their family and spiritual heritage. This interest is evident from individuals both within and without the Memnonite Brethren Church who come to look over the new facilities of the Archives, check for information relating to their family history or see if we have any materials relating to the history of their particular congregation.

Besides these casual visitors there are an increasing number of individuals interested in engaging in research of a more serious nature. Presently several people come on a regular basis, to research projects relating to congregational life in Eastern Europe and Manitoba.

As the research center for Mennonite Brethren in Canada we encourage these individuals as they pursue their research interests. We also extend an invitation to others interested, to come make use of the improved facilities and resources of the Archives.

In order to give interested individuals the opportunity of researching topics of special interest the Archives has initiated an evening seminar entitled, "Discovering Your Heritage." This eight-session seminar has 9 participants from local churches. This group meets once a week to discuss proper researching techniques, engage in actual research and share in the joy of discovering their heritage. Research projects being developed by participants range from family genealogies to writing congregational histories. The fruit of this seminar will, hopefully, become evident in the next few years as several of the participants publish their research.

The task of collecting and cataloging books for J.A. Toews Memorial Rare Book Collection has begun. Presently the Archives is searching for additional song-books, histories, pamphlets and unpublished manuscripts to be included in this collection. The general guideline for the collection is that materials relate to the general field of Mennonite History and that they be either unique or rare materials. We encourage members of the society to help us locate materials that would fit into this general category. If you have materials, of the nature described above, or if you know of the availability of such materials, please contact the Archives since we are prepared to purchase items fitting into this category.

This summer the Archives has received a number of booklets and brochures on the anniversary celebrations of churches across Canada. We continue to encourage members of the society to send us these bits and pieces since they often fill gaps in our present holdings.

In August the Christian Press decided to clean out its attic. In the process the Archives benefited by receiving a complete set of the Mennonitische Rundschau, 1907-present, as well as, numerous smaller periodicals, books and pamphlets. We express our thanks to the Christian Press and the Mennonitische Rundschau for having thought of us when they did their house-cleaning. We hope others will keep us in mind as they come across materials that would expand the resources of the Archives.

-Ken Reddig

#### BOOK REVIEWS

In this section of the Newsletter we hope to keep you, the reader, informed about the wide variety of books, presently being published, relating to historical and genealogical interests. With each Newsletter we plan to include one full-length review. In addition, we will list books of general interest to members of the society together with comments on their usefulness and availability.

LONG, JAMES. THE GERMAN-RUSSIANS: A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RUSSIAN MATERIALS WITH INTRODUCTORY ESSAY, ANNOTATIONS, AND LOCATIONS OF MATERIALS IN MAJOR AMERICAN AND SOVIET LIBRARIES. Santa Barbara, CA: American Bibliographical Center (Clio Press), 1978. 136 pp. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Herbert Giesbrecht, College Librarian at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (Winnipeg, Man.).

The German-Russians constitute an ethnic group of German-speaking peoples who immigrated to Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and settled in colonies, mainly in the lower Volga area and along the Black Sea littoral. Czarist and, later, Soviet policies inimical to the fundamental religious (and also social and economic) interests of descendants of these colonists resulted in several extensive migrations, especially during the period between 1870 and 1930, to the West (mainly) and (sometimes) to other parts of the Russian empire. Today German-Russians are to be found in many widely-separated places throughout the world. Those of our Mennonite readers whose immediate ancestors emigrated from southern Russia during the 1920's will be very much aware of this fact.

What strikes historians, and most of us ordinary folk as well, as noteworthy about this particular ethnic group is its strong and vital sense of identity, and its continuing interest in the rediscovery of its historic roots. One American organization which provides very recent evidence for the validity of this assertion is the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, a very active lay organization with headquarters in Lincoln, NE and chapters in many parts of the US and Canada. But earlier, and continuing evidence for this assertion resides in the extensive research directly presided over, or collected by, the Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland and the Institut fuer Auslandsbeziehungen, both in West Germany. Indeed, much of the research writing done on the German-Russians thus far is based directly upon German sources as the bibliographic works of Dr. Karl Stumm (see his Das Schrifttum Ueber das Deutschtum in Russland and The German-Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering) render all too obvious.

The great merit of James Long's new bibliography, The German-Russians, is its exclusive concentration upon Russian language materials bearing upon this one ethnic group. Long has divided his bibliography into four sections: (1) general bibliographies, (2) books and official publications, (3) articles and statutes, and (4) newspapers, and has numbered the entries consecutively, adding the English title in each case, and also brief annotations for most of the entries. Each entry is also followed by a location symbol which indicates where the item is available in terms of eight major libraries (Hoover Institution on War, Peace and Revolution at Stanford; Yale University; University of California; Library of Congress; Lenin Library (Moscow); Duke University; New York Public Library; and Columbia University).

The 438 entries include some 27 which pertain, either exclusively or in large part, to Mennonite colonies and developments in South Russia. Unfortunately, most of these 27 entries are restricted to the time period before 1900 (between 1810 and 1900). Nevertheless, a cursory check of Long's bibliography against Patricia K. Grimsted's very extensive directory of archival resources in Russia generally, Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR (Princeton University Press, 1972), reveals that Long has uncovered materials which are not included in Grimsted's work, insofar as one can infer from the annotations at any rate. Grimsted's directory, despite its very large scope, seems to bypass nearly all materials which pertain more directly to the German-speaking peoples in Russia.

In an introductory essay Long not only clarifies the precise scope of his own bibliography but also comments upon the relative ignorance among Russian citizens about the experiences of its German-speaking minorities and upon the relative inaccessibility, still, of Russian primary sources (especially those pertaining to the post-1930 period) to foreign researchers. Long contends that "serious research on the Germans is still insignificant and forced into the strait jacket of Marxist interpretation or buried in the works dealing with less sensitive topics." Still, he ventures the hope in this essay that "perhaps some time when the German issue is politically defused, Soviet authorities will sanction an extensive research effort on the Volga German and Black Sea German regions."

The usefulness of Long's bibliography is, of course, largely restricted to those researchers who can readily navigate the Russian language. And, as we all know, that number who can read Russian even among our Russian-Mennonite readers is diminishing with every passing year. Nevertheless, the very fact that American researchers now have fairly ready access to many German-Russian materials (many of them also available, in copy, in American libraries) is reason for gratitude. With a little hard work and possibly the willing assistance of older acquaintances who still have some hold on the Russian language, Mennonite scholars and researchers should be able to dig out historical riches hitherto unavailable, or unknown, to them.

Janes Long is presently Associate Professor of History and a staff member of the Germans from Russia in Colorado Study Project at Colorado State University.

WIEBE, KATIE FUNK. GOOD TIMES WITH OLD TIMES.  
Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979. 175pp. \$6.90

This book written for a general readership intends to stimulate interest in and give guidance to persons wanting to write their memoirs. It is informative in a practical way and because of the inclusion of anecdotes and personal experiences, it will keep the reader entertained throughout its pages.

HELMBOLD, F. WILBUR. TRACING YOUR ANCESTRY: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY.  
Birmingham, AL: Oxmoor House, 1976. 210 pp. \$4.95

A helpful, practical book to get you started in tracing your family tree. It gives guidance on how to begin, developing proper charts, keeping reasonable order of the information collected, how to write up your findings and how to proceed in getting your family tree published. If you don't know how to get started in tracing your family history I suggest you use this book as a guide.

EPP, FRANK H. STORIES WITH MEANING: A GUIDE FOR THE WRITING OF CONGREGATIONAL HISTORIES.  
Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Historical Society, 1978. 32 pp. \$2.00

Frank Epp has had much experience in writing about Mennonites in Canada. He shares his approach to writing history, especially congregational histories, in this booklet. Intended to guide churches both large and small in the writing of their respective histories, it should certainly be a resource for any congregation beginning such a project. The Mennonite Historical Society is sending a copy of this booklet to every Mennonite Church in Canada. If it is not available in your church library you may order it directly from the Mennonite Historical Society.