

MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

NEWSLETTER

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In December the executive committee of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society met in Winnipeg. One of the recommendations which came out of this meeting was that the Historical Society begin a long-range project of collecting taped interviews of individuals who have experienced significant historical events.

One member of the executive noted that as a society we should be concerned with the fact that the information and stories of the early years of settlement in Canada, and of the immigration in the 1920's and later, is passing with each generation. Within our congregations we still have knowledgeable men and women who have been instrumental in the settlement of specific communities and in the organization and development of Mennonite Brethren Churches across Canada. The concern of the society should be to record, as soon as possible, the information many of our older brothers and sisters can relate to us. Without a concerted effort on our part much of this significant, valuable information, regarding our history will be forever lost.

To implement this project the Historical Society is working together with the Mennonite Brethren Archives (Center for M.B. Studies). The Society recommends that the following procedures be followed:

1. Society members from across Canada are invited to suggest the names of elderly individuals within their community, or elsewhere, who have information that would be of historical interest. These suggestions should be sent to the Archivist, Ken Reddig, together with a very brief description of the individuals particular area knowledge. Some indication should also be given of the approximate length of time (in terms of minutes) the interview would involve.
2. With the suggested names the Society member should indicate as to whether he or she would be able to conduct the interview. If it is feasible for the Society member to conduct the interview the Archivist will send the cassette tapes and explanatory materials required. If the Society member is unable to conduct the interview personally the executive of the Society will take the responsibility of finding someone who will be able to conduct the interview.

3. Together with the tapes the Archivist will send a brief outline on how to conduct an interview, type of tape recorder to use and how to set up questions to elicit pertinent responses. Once the interview has been completed the tape should be returned to the Archives where it will become part of the interview collection. Eventually these interviews will be transcribed and become a valuable resource for individuals involved in research.

The executive requests the help of all society members in this project. Even if members will be unable to personally conduct the interviews, they should feel free to suggest names of individuals to be interviewed. A project such as this provides the opportunity for all members of the Society to become involved in providing primary resources for future historical research.

A VILLAGE WEDDING IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA
by Ruth Bock

A wedding in the village! This was always an event which everyone, young and old, looked forward to. It was the gala affair in which everyone participated and enjoyed.

The wedding rites began with the announcement of the engagement two weeks before the wedding service. The engagement was announced in the Sunday morning worship service. It was the one occasion when it was acceptable for a male and female (the engaged couple) to sit together in church--on the men's side.

The afternoon of the announcement relatives of both the bride and groom would come together at the home of the bride for an engagement celebration. Most of the afternoon was spent visiting (men in the living room, women in the kitchen), children outside or in the barn, and the engaged couple...nobody knows). Part of the afternoon was devoted to a semi-formal religious service in honor of the bridal couple. Hymns were sung and a father (or a minister if there happened to be one among the relatives) would direct some sound pre-wedding advice to the young couple--combined with Scripture and prayer. The event was, of course, topped off by a traditional Mennonite Vaspa consisting of Zwiebach, homemade butter and jam, sugar cubes and fruit tarts, served with freshly brewed coffee and real cream from the cows.

The extended family played an important role in the lives of a young engaged couple. The time between the engagement and the wedding was spent visiting relatives--grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. It was a good way to keep the bridal couple occupied while plans for the wedding went ahead.

The bride's parents usually took the initiative in preparing for the wedding. Preparations were simple and uncomplicated by elaborate plans. Each wedding was more or less the same and little effort was made to outdo previous weddings in grandeur or style. Everyone knew what to expect and what was expected of him--often without being asked. Nevertheless, weddings were anticipated with great joy for it was a time of active socialization for villagers who ordinarily led fairly sedate lives.

Wedding invitations, always a headache for hosting parents nowadays, were dispensed in a very simple manner. The parents of the bride would have a member of the family carry a written invitation to the neighbor next door. This neighbor would, in turn, give the invitation to his neighbor, and so on till it had made the rounds of the village. Everyone was invited and everyone came.

On the Friday before the wedding (weddings were usually held on Sundays) mothers would send their little daughters to the home of the bride with a pound of fresh butter. This was to be mixed into the bun dough the next morning.

On Saturday morning the work for the women would begin. Each housewife would take her large dough mixing bowl and walk to the bride's home to join all the other village ladies in mixing and kneading the Zwiebach dough. After the dough had been prepared she would take a portion home with her to let it rise. Later in the day the dough would be formed into hundreds of piggy-back buns and baked in wood-burning ovens till golden brown. They would then be delivered back to the home of the bride where they would be dumped onto an already mammoth pile of Zwiebach. These wedding Zwiebach were extra good because of all the butter used to make them. Young and old anticipated savoring them the next day.

The evening before the wedding was known as Poltaovent. This was an evening where skits, poems, songs, usually on the lighter side, were performed for the benefit of the couple. Presents were also brought which the bride and groom unwrapped. These usually consisted of small household items like towels, spatulas, mixing bowls, etc. Sometimes the groom was remembered with a hammer or chisel. Occasionally from underneath innocent looking wrappings would appear a baby bottle. This would induce gales of laughter and merriment among the crowd but also a sheepish grin on the groom's face and a gentle blush on the bride's.

Weddings were always held on Sunday afternoon. The bride, dressed in white with a long veil and sprigs of myrrh in her head dress, walked up the aisle, together with the groom. In lieu of the traditional Wedding March, considered to be too worldly, a hymn or other sacred music was played. If there were any attendants they were usually limited to one bestman and one bride's maid. This couple, walking together, would precede the bridal pair down the aisle.

The ceremony could get quite lengthy. Often it lasted an hour and a half since two speakers were asked to serve at the ceremony. In addition to congregational hymns the village choir would provide special music. The marriage vows were then recited by the minister to which the couple responded by answering "yes".

After the ceremony the couple went outdoors and posed for everyone with a "Brownie" camera on the steps of the church. The newly married couple would then move to the church basement where tables had been set by the village ladies in preparation for the wedding meal. The menu was standard but the food was delicious. Zwiebach, sugar cubes, Pannasch Worscht (Penner's Sausage) and/or bologna was served with steaming coffee brewed in two cast iron cauldrons situated outside the church. Later, more prosperous years, saw sweets and salads added to the wedding menu. Even the traditional Zwiebach was replaced by buns from the Winkler bakery.

The meal was, of course, the highlight of the day--especially for the children. The men were seated at the tables first and as they finished eating and vacated their places, clean plates were set and the next hungry guests took the empty places. Children were permitted to eat only after the adults were finished eating.

The kitchen was staffed by the village women. Choir members served the tables and everybody helped with cleaning up dishes, benches, chairs and tables. Most of these services were unsolicited by the parents of the bride. It was merely a matter of seeing where you were needed and then pitching in. In fact it was considered a privilege to help at a wedding.

In the evening the entire wedding assembly came together once more for a program in the church. At this program little nieces lisped memorized poems, cousins sang trios and quartets, and minister uncles gave last minute admonitions and advice. Anyone who had not, as yet, had a part in the program could join the seemingly endless procession of marathon speakers and well wishers in the Freiwilliges section.

For many young people it was the time after the program that provided the climax to the wedding celebrations. The young and not so young would gather at the home of the bride for a social evening. Of particular enjoyment was the playing of folk games at this occasion. The highlight of the evening was playing Kranz und Schleier. This particular game began with the bridal couple being seated on separate chairs and then raised into the air, and not lowered, until they had kissed. The single girls would then form a circle around the bride who had been blindfolded. The bride would be turned by a cousin or relative until she had no idea as to which direction she was facing. She would then walk towards some "lucky" girl in the circle and present her the veil.

The same procedure was followed by the single young men in the group except that the groom would present his lapel flower to a lucky lad. Then these two "lucky" young people would be raised on chairs and not lowered until they had kissed. It sometimes took quite some time for the suitably shy and reluctant girl to permit the young man to kiss her. With much support from those beneath holding up the chairs, the gallant swain would succeed in kissing the girl.

All these activities brought much enjoyment to the onlookers, as well as, the participants. The older generation, seated in chairs around the fringe of the activity, looked upon the merry making with interest and not a little nostalgia-remembering days in the not too distant past when they were in the midst of the activities.

The younger ones, not yet old enough to participate in the fun, sat in segregated corners. The gangling, awkward Prince Charmings on one side of the room and the pretty young girls on the other side. They observed all that was happening, giggling and dreaming of the time when it would be their turn to join in the games. Ah yes, there is a time for everything--including a time to be married.

THE JOHN A. TOEWS MENNONITE HISTORICAL COLLECTION

As many of our readers are no doubt aware of, after the sudden passing of brother John Toews last winter, the Center for M.B. Studies in Canada decided to rename its Mennonitica library the John A. Toews Mennonite Historical Collection. This particular collection does not see its role as trying to compete with the library of the Bible College in collecting all works relating to Anabaptist-Mennonite history.

Instead the collection seeks to contain books and pamphlets that are either rare, unique, out-of-print, or of some other special importance to the history of Mennonites.

A rough estimate indicates that presently the collection has 600 books which fit the above stated categories. This is an excellent beginning for a collection of this nature. It is hoped, however, that members of the Society and interested individuals of The Mennonite Brethren constituency, will make it possible for this collection to continue to grow. The Center welcomes your involvement either by donating books which you think might fit the categories mentioned; or by donating money for the special budget of this collection. With your help this collection can be of significant help to historians in years to come.

ONTARIO HISTORY UNDERWAY

The basic research for a history of the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Conference is close to completion. Ed Boldt, a recent visitor at the Center for M.B. Studies in Winnipeg, reported that Anne Wiebe, who has been assigned the writing of this history, will begin working on the manuscript this coming summer. For the past months Miss Wiebe (a history teacher in the Kitchener area) has been gathering data and materials related to the writing of this history.

As a Society we encourage Miss Wiebe and the Ontario Conference in this exciting project. Our long-range goal is that Mennonite Brethren Churches in each province will take the initiative to begin work on their respective provincial histories.

CENTER SPONSORS SYMPOSIUM

The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada announces a symposium to be held November 21 (evening) and 22 (all day), 1980. The symposium will be held on the campus of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. The topic of the symposium will be "Influences on Mennonite Brethren Theological Thinking".

Four major papers directing their attention to various aspects of this topic will be presented. They are:

1. The Influence of Fundamentalism.
2. The Influence of Economic Factors.
3. The Influence of Prevailing Political Philosophies.
4. The Influence of the Charismatic Movement.

In general most of the papers will direct their attention to twentieth Century Influences. In addition to the papers a number of reports will be given and a banquet with a special musical/dramatic feature will close the symposium on Saturday evening.

The Center will be sending more information regarding registration for the symposium in early spring. The Center encourages those interested in attending to keep these two dates open and to make plans now to attend this special event.

JOHN A. TOEWS BOOK NEAR COMPLETION

Shortly after the death of brother John A. Toews last winter, the Historical Committee of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches assigned a special committee the task of publishing a volume of essays and addresses by brother Toews. Since that time this committee, composed of Abe Dueck, Herb Giesbrecht and Allen Guenther, has sifted through approximately 200 tapes and essays.

The selection of items to be published is almost completed. It is hoped that the volume will be available for purchase sometime before Christmas.

MANITOBA CONFERENCE TO WRITE HISTORY

The chairman of the Historical Committee, Dr. Helmut Huebert, has informed us that William Neufeld, most recently pastor of the North Kildonan M.B. Church, has accepted the assignment of writing the history of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Conference. Presently brother Neufeld is serving as interim pastor at the Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton, Alberta. He will begin his research and writing assignment in early spring.

The Historical Committee is very pleased that brother Neufeld has consented to write this history. From his years as a teacher of German and English literature to many years of service as a pastor, he will certainly bring to his assignment a sensitivity to the struggles and growth of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Manitoba.

RECENT ACCESSIONS OF THE CENTER FOR M.B. STUDIES IN CANADA

Below are listed some of the recent accessions to the archival holdings of the Canadian Conference of M.B. Churches. Besides these items many other items such as photographs, documents and books have been received. It is not our purpose to list all items received but rather to indicate the range and scope of accessions recently donated to the Archives.

1. Theological books, sermon notes and photographs of Rev. H.S. Voth. Donated by Mrs. Esther Enns. These materials cover the years from 1886-1920.
2. A small collection of sermon notes of Elder Heinrich Voth. Donated by Mrs. Esther Enns.
3. Sermon notes from Rev. Johann Warkentin covering the period 1906-1931. Donated by Miss Tien Warkentin.
4. Tapes of the 1979 Canadian Conference in Richmond, British Columbia.
5. Sermon outlines and itinerant preaching schedules of Rev. H.S. Rempel of Saskatchewan. Donated by Mrs. H.S. Rempel.
6. Documents, interviews, clippings and photographs concerning the development of community and church life of the Saskatchewan M.B. Conference. Donated by Harold Jantz.
7. Yearbooks of the Saskatchewan, Ontario and General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church. These yearbooks cover the years from 1885-1963. Collection comprises approximately 500 yearbooks. Donated by the Kitchener M.B. Church and C.J. Rempel.
8. 54 Mennonite, Historical and Theological books from the A.H. Voth collection. Donated by Ella Voth Guderian.
9. Periodicals from the H.H. Voth collection including Vereins-Herold, Zeugnis der Schrift, Jugend Herold, and Zionsbote. Volumes of these periodicals are not complete but portions of these periodicals cover the years 1905-1953. In addition to these periodicals a variety of smaller items such as letters, pamphlets and personal effects were donated by Ella Voth Guderian.
10. Yearbooks of the Bundes-Konferenz, Northern District, Pacific District, KMB Konferenz, Central District, Southern District together with reports, constitutions and confessions of faith were donated by Ella Voth Guderian. These items came from the H.H. Voth collection.
11. Diaries, letters, certificates and photographs of the Rev. H.S. Voth collection covering the period from 1880-1920, were donated by Mrs. Sarah Klippenstein.
12. Audiotapes of the German Bible-Conferences held in the Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg. Ten tapes, covering the years 1960-1964 were donated by the Church.
13. Eight Bibelkunde were donated by Kay Peters from the Isaak Peters collection. Approximate date is 1888.

SPECIAL NOTICES

If you, the reader, have special requests or needs that could be filled through wider publicity please sent them to the Editor for publication.

REQUESTS FOR FRIEDENSSTIMME AND ZIONSBOE

The MB Archives is attempting to complete its holdings of these two important Mennonite publications. If you have any back issues or know of anyone who has any issues in their possession please write to the Archives and indicate what issues you have or send them to us at the following address: Center for M.B. Studies in Canada, 77 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2L 1L1.

REQUEST FOR H.S. BENDER TAPE

At the Centennial observance of the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1960, the churches of Winnipeg invited Dr. Harold S. Bender of Goshen, Indiana to be one of the speakers. Dr. Bender obliged from all reports, with an excellent address evaluating the impact of the Mennonite Brethren Church over the past 100 years. According to numerous individuals present, this address was taped and possibly transcribed. However, Dr. A.J. Klassen of Fresno, presently doing research for a forthcoming book, has been unable to locate a copy of either the tape or the transcript. If you know of anyone who has a copy of Dr. Bender's speech please write to: Dr. A.J. Klassen, c/o Center for M.B. Studies, 4824 East Butler, Fresno, CA., 93727 or contact the Editor of the Newsletter.

GOVERNMENT PROGRAM FOR THE RETIRED

A federal government program entitled New Horizons is a funding agency to help retired men and women become involved in community programs, including those of an historical nature. The program will help pay for most of the costs involved in the research and writing of community, provincial or congregational histories. If you are aware of someone who is interested in preparing a manuscript of congregational or community interest, but perhaps does not have adequate funding available, contact the New Horizons director in your area. You may also write the Editor for more information.

HOW TO GET RID OF OLD PERIODICALS

A common concern of reading households is what to do with all the back issues of various periodicals that are so neatly stacked in the fruit room of the basement. ANSWER. Write the Archivist of the M.B. Study Center in Winnipeg. Describe your problem to him and chances are that if the periodicals are of a religious nature, and especially if they are in any way related to any Mennonite Conference or concern, the Archives can use them. Feel free to send the Archives those periodicals that you don't need.

BOOKS IN REVIEW

WIENS, A.K. AND GERTRUDE. SHADOWED BY THE GREAT WALL: THE STORY OF KRIMMER MENNONITE BRETHREN MISSIONS IN INNER MONGOLIA (1922-49). Hillsboro, KS: Board of Christian Literature, 1979. 120 pp. \$4.50.

SHADOWED BY THE GREAT WALL tells the story of pioneer missionary work of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference in Inner Mongolia, the southern division of the country. The Great Wall of China served as a boundary between China and Mongolia for centuries. To reach the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Mission field in Inner Mongolia, missionaries had to cross the Great Wall. On the other side, shadowed by this barrier, they began the task of breaking down walls to the message of the Gospel.

The Frank V. Wiebes, the first missionaries began the work in 1921 and returned to America in 1931. They were followed by the A.K. Wienses, the Peter Ratzlaffs, Sara Heinrichs, Elizabeth Hofer, Anna Klassen and others. In 1949 the Wienses had to leave when the doors to China closed because of the Communist invasion. (The KMB Conference merged with the Mennonite Brethren in 1960.)

SHADOWED BY THE GREAT WALL tells about the courage and devotion of these early missionaries as they evangelized, established indigenous churches, cared for the sick and built schools.

Rachel Wiebe Hiebert, daughter of the Frank V. Wiebes, first missionaries, and presently archivist at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, writes: "With the United States' reestablishment of diplomatic relations with China, it is increasingly important for us as a people to be informed concerning our denomination's history in that country."

"We, God's People, need to be made aware of his power manifest in our generation in just as significant and visual a manner as it was in the days of the early church. I have personally seen God express his presence in miraculous ways in China, and I have felt the power of Satan. . . . Although only a few of us have shared these experiences, yet, as we relive them through our missionaries' eyes, our faith grows and we dare to reach out for our own miracle."

The authors, A.K. and Gertrude Wiens, spent ten years in Inner Mongolia. Mr. Wiens was a graduate of Tabor Academy and held degrees from Fresno State University and University of Southern California. Before his death in 1977 he taught at Grace College of the Bible, Biola College, Southern California College and served as a pastor. Mrs. Wiens worked as a nurses aide for a number of years. She is a member of the Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Fresno.

RUTH, JOHN L. MENNONITE IDENTITY AND LITERARY ART. Focal Pamphlet 29.
Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978. 72 pp. \$.95

This little book is a plea for the articulation and communication of the story of the Mennonites by others besides administrators and curriculum writers, writing not fully accepted by Mennonites of all persuasions. He begs for more storytelling and discusses the scruples of Mennonites against the writing of imagination. He asks, "Let us remember that it was in terms of the story of a people that we learned about God's will in the first place. That salvation story is our identity. We must know how to hear and tell it, as it touches us to the quick."

"Ruth's comments represent the first sustained Mennonite effort clearly and systematically to understand the deeper meanings of our contemporary love-hate affair with the arts."--Mennonite Life

HARDER, Hans. NO STRANGERS IN EXILE. (Translated by Al Reimer) Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press, 1979. 123 pp. \$6.95.

This is the story of the terrible hardships endured by Mennonite men, women and children who were removed from their homes in Russia during the 1930s to labor in logging camps in the north. The courage and staunch faith of the peaceful Mennonites as they try to make the best of their bleak circumstances illuminate Harder's novel from start to finish.

BERG, WESLEY PETER. CHORAL FESTIVALS AND CHORAL WORKSHOPS AMONG THE MENNONITES OF MANITOBA AND SASKATCHEWAN, 1900-1960: WITH AN ACCOUNT OF EARLY DEVELOPMENTS IN RUSSIA. Doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Washington, 1979. 246 pp.

Reviewed by Herb Giesbrecht, College Librarian and Head Archivist at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (Winnipeg, Manitoba).

Wesley Berg's very recent dissertation surveys a significant aspect of Mennonite activity and achievement which has received very little attention among our own writers to date. This dissertation recounts, in well-ordered yet constantly interesting fashion, the story of choral music-making among the Mennonite people, especially as it developed on the Canadian prairies between about 1900-1960.

Berg traces the origins of our choral music-making right back to earliest choral endeavors among Mennonite congregations in the colonies of South Russia (from 1875 on). He effectively highlights the creative and inspiring influence of such Mennonite choral leaders as Franz Thiessen (1881-1950), Kornelius H. Neufeld (1892-1957), John Konrad (1898-1962), David Paetkau (1903-1972), and Benjamin Horch (1907-), who brought both their passion for, and knowledge of choral music, a knowledge first acquired in Russia, to our country.

His study also sets forth the distinctive contributions rendered by certain choral associations such as the "Northern Association of Mennonite Brethren Choir Directors" (a full set of the minutes of this association (1906-1923) are in the archives at our Center), and Conference youth organizations as well, in sponsoring and promoting Mennonite choral festivals and workshops on the Prairies.

A separate chapter examines, in broad strokes only, the choral music collections compiled by church music leaders (in Russia and in Canada) for our various Mennonite choirs. The principal choral collections examined are the following: Liederperlen (1890+), compiled by Isaak Born; Saengerbote, compiled by Aron Sawatsky; Evangeliums-Lieder (a translation, essentially, of the Gospel Hymns collection used by Moody and Sankey in their evangelistic campaigns), and Liederalbum fuer gemischte Choere (1945+), compiled by David Paetkeu. Berg points up the strong influence of both the Sankey-Bliss gospel song tradition and the German and Swiss folk-song movements of the early nineteenth century upon these choral collections. Original choral compositions by Mennonites themselves do not abound in these collections. The one notable exception involves Sawatsky's popular compilation, Saengerbote, in which 71 of 164 selections represent Sawatsky's own creations while a number of others were composed by other Mennonite hymn writers as well.

Berg contends, among other asserted conclusions at the end of the dissertation, that it was the Mennonite Brethren who were the most progressive among Mennonites generally (during these earlier decades), in introducing newer styles of hymns into church choral singing and in establishing choirs and promoting the further education of choir conductors as such. Another contention of the author, asserted in retrospect, is that it was precisely these "choral workshop and festival" endeavors which did so much to inspire, promote, and elevate choral and congregational singing in our Mennonite churches and communities across Canada, and that their gradual decline, in the last two or three decades- despite the vigorous and competent activities of our Mennonite college music departments- has been accompanied by a corresponding decline in choral music-making within our Mennonite churches generally. The latter contention is an intriguing and even challenging one. It is to be hoped that Berg's dissertation can be rendered accessible to a wider audience and that it will receive the sincere attention that it in fact deserves.

The Newsletter of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada is published three times a year, by the executive of the Society, at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, Winnipeg. All correspondence regarding the Society or the Newsletter should be addressed to:

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
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Executive of the Society: William Schroeder, Chairman, Helmut Huebert, V. Chairman; Ken Reddig, Secretary-Treasurer and Editor of the Newsletter; Abe Dueck and Harry Loewen, Members-at-large.

If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming a member of the Society please have them fill out the following form:

NAME: _____
STREET ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ Prov. _____ POSTAL CODE _____
PHONE NUMBER _____

Send form together with the yearly membership fee of \$5.00 to:

M.B. Historical Society of Canada
77 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, Manitoba
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