



MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 4, No. 3
March, 1982

THE MANY CONTRIBUTIONS OF BEN AND ESTHER HORCH

On November 13, 1981, the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society sponsored a "Ben and Esther Horch Appreciation Evening" recognizing their many contributions to the Mennonite communities across Canada. Among the many featured portions of the program was an interview of Ben and Esther by William Baerg and; perhaps most interesting, a half-hour of Ben conducting the audience of over 200 friends and former students, in the singing of favorite Kernlieder.

For those less familiar with the many activities of this well-known couple Peter Klassen, instructor in music at MBBC for many years, presently church organist and builder of creative stonework, presented a brief synopsis of the Horchs many years of service to the community. It is presented in its entirety below.

Dear Friends,

It is a privilege for me to say a few words about our honoured guests this evening. Having known Ben and Esther Horch for 40 years doesn't make this pleasant task any easier, however. Nor does the knowledge of the fact that many of you know them quite well, too. It is a comfort for me to realize that people become forgetful as they grow older. Since you have been doing just that the last few years, perhaps it is in order to refresh your memories with a few selected comments about Ben and Esther Horch.

Although Benjamin Horch has spent most of his life in Winnipeg, he was nevertheless born in 1907 in a village called Freidorf, near Odessa. His parents were also born in Russia, but belonged to the German Lutheran Pietists who had settled in Russia in similar fashion to that of our Mennonite forefathers.

Ed Horch, the father, was interested in music and the arts. There were many musical instruments in the home. When the family moved to Winnipeg in 1909 Ed worked for the Mellow Tone factory and brought all kinds of classical and sacred recordings into the house. These musical interests were actively pursued and nourished by various members of the family. Some of you remember Richard Horch (son of Ed Horch, Junior) who was organist in the Portage Avenue M.B. Church for many years. Ben's brother, Emmanuel and Albert, are well known in the city as performers and teachers of the violin and flute respectively. Albert was a member of the Winnipeg Symphony for over 25 years. Their children are carrying on the musical tradition in various capacities.

Benjamin completed high school in Winnipeg, during which time he became involved as a singer and actor in various musical and dramatical productions. He was a recipient of several private scholarships and also won the Baritone class at the Manitoba Music Festival. It was also during this time that he got to know Esther.

Esther was born in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, the daughter of Rev. and Mrs. C.N. Hiebert. Her father had spent many years as a "kolporteur"—a seller of Bibles and religious literature. He was well known in M.B. circles as a preacher, along with his brother and missionary N.N. Hiebert. The pastorate at the Winnipeg North End M.B. Church was his first. Esther was the oldest child in the family and is presently the only Canadian amongst them. She still has a very strong affinity for her United States homeland. In fact she lived in Canada over 30 years before she became an official Canadian citizen (in 1962).

After completing high school Esther attended the Normal School and taught one year in the country and then in Winnipeg for two years. She was the first Mennonite woman teacher in the city. In 1932 Ben and Esther were married, and she had to stop teaching because married women were not allowed (by law) to teach, except in cases where the husband was incapacitated. Women teachers were also paid less than male teachers in those days. So she started a kindergarten in the North End Church basement and carried that on for several years—in German. The kindergarten was sponsored in part by the German Consul. In the meantime she also continued studies at the University of Manitoba and eventually completed the third year, with a major in English.

After the marriage in 1932 Ben was busy making music. He was appointed the first full-time music director at the Winnipeg Bible Institute (now the Winnipeg Bible College at Otterburne), and continued in that capacity for seven years. In 1939 the Horchs left for further studies at BIOLA (in Los Angeles, California) and stayed there for four years, taking the Sacred Music course. He was conductor of a Baptist church choir during this time. He attended symphony concerts regularly, as well as various music programs at UCLA and USC. He attended concerts where Stravinsky conducted his own works. Schönberg was also in the city, and so was Rachmaninoff (retired) along with other famous men of music.

In 1943 the Horchs returned to Canada, and Ben became chairman of the Music Department at the Winkler Bible School. He also conducted the local oratorio choir

and the orchestra in the high school. Even though he left for Winnipeg in 1944 he kept up his contacts with the orchestras and choirs of Winkler, Morden and Altona for many years.

In 1944 the Mennonite Brethren Bible College was founded in Winnipeg, with Dr. A.H. Unruh as President. Rev. A.A. Kroeker, a member of the Board, was instrumental in having a Music Department established at the College, and Ben Horch was asked to become chairman of the department. For the next eleven years he devoted his time and energies to the service of MBBC and to the training of the music students in particular. In the early years he taught voice, theory, conducting and history, but always the impact of the A Cappella and oratorio choir was crucial, both at the College and in the larger constituency. Those were the years when the Messiah performances were annual highlights and the A Cappella tours in the provinces helped to attract many students to MBBC.

Esther taught remedial English at MBBC as well as English II for seven years. Her main contribution, however, was in teaching the Hymnology course and singing the soprano solos in the Messiah in the early years and singing in the A Cappella choir. She also served for several years as Dean of Women.

In 1955 the Horchs left Winnipeg and spent one year teaching at the Academy in Reedley, California. The following year Ben became director of the radio programming of classical music at KWSO in Wasco, California, a station owned by Ed Peters.

Then in 1957 the Horchs came back to Manitoba and civilization. A new outlet of cultural and agricultural pursuits had come to exist at Altona and radio station CFAM. Ben was program director of classical music there for two years.

In 1959 Ben accepted a position with the CBC as producer of various series of live music (including school broadcasts). Amongst these were various artistic recitals (many of them by leading members of the Winnipeg Symphony), Prairie Choirs, commissioned works and broadcasts of the Winnipeg Symphony. A number of outstanding Mennonite artists also received a hearing. Ben says this time (till 1971) was an exciting period, a stimulating experience, working with excellent musicians.

An important part of Ben's contributions in music besides what has already been mentioned was his work as Kurseleiter all across Canada. This work had already begun before the move to BIOLA, but in 1943 it became a systematic tradition on a Canadian level for about five years. Since the Winkler Bible School year lasted for five months only, Ben was asked to travel across Canada for four months during spring and summer, doing Kurse work with the conductors during the day (where feasible) and giving practical demonstrations with the choirs in the evenings. Each session would normally close with a Saengerfest. Let me mention here that in B.C. we looked forward with great pleasure to these annual musical highlights. We became familiar first hand with an accomplished musician and were introduced to all kinds of new repertoire. The direct appeal of the musical experience was enhanced by Ben's charismatic personality, his ever-present wit and his ability to entertain as well as to educate. (K.H. Neufeld had similar abilities, though probably of a lesser order.)

In 1951 the Horchs spent a sabbatical year in Detmold, Germany. Since then many other Canadian Mennonite musicians have made a similar pilgrimage.

Both Ben and Esther were also involved with the production and publication of the "Gesangbuch", which appeared in 1952. Ben served as music editor and Esther as researcher and consultant. She also assisted with the English version published in 1960.

Ben's involvement with the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra over the years has been an important facet of his musical contributions in Winnipeg and in Manitoba. Many budding orchestral players had opportunities to perform at various programs and to accompany the Messiah and other oratorios. (I have often admired Ben's patience and endurance in those years.) More recently he was also largely instrumental in the revival of this orchestra under the new name, "Mennonite Community Orchestra".

Ben has also served on the boards of various musical organizations such as the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and as music consultant. Several years ago he received an honorary Doctor of Music degree from the University of Winnipeg.

During these years Esther was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. She became involved with social work at Logan Neighbourhood House (for 6 years) and at Marymound (for 9 years). During this time she also completed a number of courses in social work at the University of Manitoba. When they were in Altona she also participated in radio work at CFAM. She was in charge of the ladies' program and a 6-year series of weekly programs entitled "The Story of Our Hymns". She also contributed many articles on Hymnody to the Canadian Mennonite on a regular basis. More recently she completed a book called "C.N. Hiebert was my Father." This biography is very interesting and has been well received. You should also know that Esther has kept up a considerable correspondence over the years and that her voluminous files are in decent order.

My life has been enriched by the Horchs over these many years. They are a friendly couple, given to hospitality and a concern for others. Ben has helped to encourage a great many Mennonite young people to become seriously involved with music. He is still full of ideas and visions. I believe the Horchs have lived a full, rich life and achieved a certain grace and serenity that all of us might wish to emulate.

However, life has not been only sunshine and music for them. Their one daughter and only child, Viola (whom many of us remember as a very fine singer) was killed in an automobile accident near Elkhart, Indiana. Her husband, David Falk (now a professor of music at Wilfrid Laurier University) was also seriously injured. This summer the David Falks lost a daughter to Leukemia. I admire Esther for being able to do more with one hand than most people can do with two.

We wish the Horchs good health and the Lord's blessing for the coming years.

"Sing to the Lord a new song,
Sing his praise in the assembly of the faithful."

Peter Klassen
Winnipeg, Manitoba

A PASTORAL WORD FROM A LIBRARIAN

I have been requested by the editor to recommend, and comment very briefly upon, several books which pertain to the historical experience of our people and their distinctive concerns as a Mennonite Brethren Church. I fulfil this request willingly but not without some apprehension about the response which may arise within my brethren in the churches. Will they box me in as an over-zealous Mennonite

Brethren propagandist when they look over my specific recommendations? I certainly hope not, for my interests and concerns do extend considerably beyond the confines of Mennonite Brethren thought and experience as my article contributions to DIRECTION and to the MB HERALD (over several years) may indicate.

I want to begin with a reference to John A. Toews' A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers (1975). The late John A. Toews, it is fair to say, devoted his life's energy to the enlargement and sharpening of our vision as a Brotherhood for that which we have inherited (both historically and theologically) and for what we might do to render the commission of Christ vital and compelling within the context of that inheritance. Toews' History is a popular and yet essentially accurate survey of the historical beginnings and growth of our Church and its varied ministries, at home and abroad. It should be required reading, I suggest, for all MB pastors and indeed should be warmly and steadily commended by them to members of their congregations as well as to others who may ask questions about the history of, and faith confessed by our Brotherhood.

The recently published collection of essays and articles by the same author, entitled People of the Way (1981), also deserves attention and can offer revealing and stimulating insights to pastors about specific facets of MB thought and practice. How can a pastor within our own tradition exercise a leadership/teaching function and ministry without displaying at least some understanding of, and enthusiasm for the religious pilgrimage of his own people? This is a question which needs to be asked with all seriousness in our day and one which calls for a satisfactory answer on our part.

For those who need to acquaint themselves more fully with decisions reached by our MB Churches across the years, specifically at the General Conference level, the compilation entitled We Recommend: Recommendations and Resolutions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (1978) is a useful aid. This reference aid is not intended as "bedtime reading for weary pastors who cannot sleep nights" (though some readers, I am told, have enjoyed a hearty laugh or two in pondering certain Conference decisions of earlier years), but it can provide background and stimulus for further reflection on specific issues and concerns which are with us still.

For pastors in our churches who can still manage the German language, the recent reprinting of "selected sermons" by one who was a powerful preacher and penetrating exegete (as well as missionary statesman) among Mennonite Brethren, and other Mennonites as well, in both Russia and West Germany during the first half of this century, entitled Es Gibt ein Volk, Zerstreut und Gesondert (Haenssler Verlag, 1977), should evoke both curiosity and appeal. This collection of twelve compelling sermons by Jacob Kroeker (1872-1948) conveys something of the tremendous potential for good of expository preaching at its best. Helpful studies concerned with the art of expository and life-situation preaching are, of course, readily available to us. Paul Scherer's The Word God Sent, Halford E. Luccock's Communicating the Gospel, Clyde E. Fant's Preaching for Today, Henry G. Davis' Design for Preaching, R.E.C. Browne's The Ministry of the Word, and Gardner C. Taylor's How Shall They Preach are among the best—but here in Jacob Kroeker we have a sampling of first-rate expository and life-situation preaching by one of our own brethren! Such a richly-laden basket of sermons should delight and challenge our own preaching brethren no end, should it not?

And we cannot overlook Peter M. Friesen's monumental survey of Mennonite (and MB) experience and reflection, now available in a second English edition (1981): The Mennonite Brethren Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910). P.M. Friesen's work is not one to be run through at a brisk jogging pace; it is a book to be pondered leisurely and to be savored with all of the historical, and finely-tuned religious sensibilities which one can bring to it. A pastor deeply moved and influenced by its historical and theological insights will not quickly forget the experience, nor the ongoing challenge of that experience with respect to his own teaching ministry!

And finally, may I recommend the inter-institutional journal, DIRECTION (issued jointly by the faculties of our MB Seminary and two Colleges), without being misunderstood or maligned?! This journal, taken in conjunction with its predecessors, The Voice, has addressed itself to a surprisingly wide range of doctrinal, ethical, and sermonic themes which have practical relevance, of one kind or another, for our churches and their leaders, during its nearly 30 years of publication (1952-1982). Surely DIRECTION deserves more than a nodding or merely shrug-of-the-shoulder acquaintance among those who profess to be leaders in our Brotherhood.

Herb Giesbrecht
MBBC Librarian

CONFERENCE YEARBOOKS AVAILABLE

The Archives maintains a complete collection of Yearbooks of all three levels of Mennonite Brethren activities. This includes provincial, Canadian and General Conference work.

In the course of receiving collections of documents and books from donors we receive many more yearbooks than we can possibly use. These extra copies are kept in storage and are available for other Mennonite Brethren institutions, churches and church leaders upon request. However, we request payment for postage and a handling charge of 50¢/copy, maximum of \$5.00.

We also have many copies of Canadian Conference Resolutions and Recommendations available at \$1.00/copy. These include: Beschluesse und Empfehlunger 1910-1960 (German) and Resolutions and Recommendations 1961-1975 (English). Both are compiled by Dr. Frank C. Peters.

DIRECTION UPDATE

DIRECTION, a quarterly publication of North American Mennonite Brethren Schools has begun a new feature entitled "Historical Endnotes." Beginning with the January 1982 issue the inside of the back cover will feature items of historical interest to its Mennonite Brethren readership. The person responsible for putting together this page will be Ken Reddig, Mennonite Brethren Conference Archivist in Winnipeg.

Subscriptions to DIRECTION are still only \$6.00/year, and may be purchased by writing: DIRECTION

77 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2L 1L1

RUNDSCHAU AVAILABLE ON MICROFILM

The oldest Mennonite periodical published continuously under one name is now available on microfilm. Word was received on April 2, 1982 from University Microfilms of Ann Arbor, Michigan, that they had completed the filming of the Mennonitische Rundschau totaling some 66,500 pages.

The Rundschau, as it was more popularly known, was first published on June 5, 1880. However, several years previous, June 1878, John F. Funk of the Mennonite Publishing Company of Elkhart, Indiana began a small paper known as the Nebraska Ansiedler to serve the newly established Russian Mennonite communities in the prairie states and Manitoba. The Rundschau was the direct successor to this initial effort, and soon became the most popular paper of the Russian Mennonites.

Over its hundred year history the periodical has been published in several different places. Until 1908 it remained in Elkhart, Indiana. When, in that same year, the Mennonite Publishing Company was moved to Scottdale, Pennsylvania the Rundschau was brought with it. On October 17, 1923 it was purchased by Herman H. Neufeld and moved to Winnipeg from where it has been published ever since.

In 1945 the Rundschau was purchased by a group of Mennonite Brethren business men and slowly it began to become a periodical with more of an M.B. character. In 1960 the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches purchased the paper and it has been published by the Conference since that time.

Editors of the Rundschau have included Mennonite Brethren from the very beginning. The first editor, John F. Harms (editor from 1880-1885) was a well-known educator and preacher who helped found Tabor College, the Herbert Bible School and later the Mennonite Brethren periodical the Zionsbote (1884 in Hillsboro, Kansas). Coincidentally he is the step Great-Grandfather of the Canadian Conference Archivist, Ken Reddig.

Other editors include a prominent K.M.B. pastor, M.B. Fast (editor from 1904-1910), and Herman Neufeld (editor from 1923-1945), who was the son of well-known Reise-prediger, Herman Neufeld, in Russia and later in Manitoba. More recently editors have been Henry F. Klassen (editor from 1945-1967), Erich Ratzlaff (editor from 1967-1979) and presently Abe Schellenberg.

The microfilming of this periodical now makes available the first 22 years of the periodical, which before this were only available in the Goshen College and Bethel College historical libraries. The periodical, however, is not as yet complete. Some 27 separate issues, and the entire year of 1897, as yet have not been located. But according to Ken Reddig, Canadian M.B. Archivist, every effort was made to locate missing copies both in North America and Europe without success. Therefore, it was decided to microfilm what was available and should additional copies eventually be located, they would be added to what has already been microfilmed.

Microfilm copies of the Rundschau may now be ordered from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106.

SOME RECENT ACCESSIONS OF

The Center for M.B. Studies in Canada
77 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2L 1L1

1. DER BOTE (Periodical of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada), 1924-1980 on microfilm.
2. WALDHEIM REMEMBERS THE PAST, Waldheim History Committee, \$25.00.
3. DR. A.H. UNRUH MATERIALS. Sermons, notebooks and course outlines of Dr. Unruh. Donated by A.A. Unruh.
4. ISAAK FAMILY GENEALOGY MATERIALS. Donated by Kay Peters.
5. BOARD OF EVANGELISM MINUTES AND REPORTS, Canadian M.B. Conference. Five linear feet of materials.
6. LEO DRIEDGER PUBLISHED PAPERS, includes bibliography of all publications to date. Donated by Leo Driedger.
7. ELMWOOD M.B. BIBELBESPRECHUNG, tapes of the 1981 sessions with John Wall and John Regehr.
8. 1977 & 1980 DIRECTORY OF THE EAST ALDERGROVE M.B. CHURCH.
9. ALBERTA MENNONITE HIGH SCHOOL, MBBC, MBI YEARBOOKS. Donated by Katherine Loewen.
10. MEMOIRS OF WILHELM SCHROEDER and various other materials. Donated by William Schroeder.
11. MOLOTSCHNA MAP (1910?). Purchased from CMBS, Fresno, California.
12. MB HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN OF THE WEST COAST, 1978 - Present. Donated by the Society.
13. DOCUMENTS OF THE ALBERTA MENNONITE HIGH SCHOOL, 1943-1958.
14. MB HERALDS (1962-1978), and other periodicals. Donated by Cornelius Klassen.
15. MB HERALDS (1962-1968) and KONFRENZ-JUGENDBLATTs. Donated by Kay Peters.
16. RUNDSCHAUS (1975-1982), RUNDSCHAU-KALENDER AND HAUSFREUND (1931-1934). Donated by Katherina Sawatsky.
17. MENNONITE RELIEF COMMITTEE MINUTES AND CORRESPONDENCE. Donated by J.J. Wall.
18. FIRST MENNONITE VILLAGES IN RUSSIA (19789-1943). Published by N.J. Kroeker.
19. MANITOBA EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP MINUTES AND CORRESPONDENCE. Deposited by Harold Jantz.

20. COLLEGE COMPANIONS AND MBBC RAINBOWS. Donated by Lillian Stobbe.
1. YOUTH WORKERS (1952-1978), THE VOICE (1952-1971), DIRECTION (1972-1981), JOURNAL OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY (1965-1970) AND MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE BOOKS. Donated by Dr. John Unger.
22. GESCHICHTE LIEBENAU (1823-1981). Donated by Jacob Rempel.
23. YEARBOOKS OF VARIOUS M.B. CONFERENCES. Donated by Dr. John Unger.
24. MENNONITISCHE MAENNERCHOR VON WINNIPEG (6 Recordings). Donated by the Mennonitischer Verein zur Pflege der Deutschen Sprache.
25. MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE. Donated by Katie Loewen.

This NEWSLETTER of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of Canada is published four 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
M.B. Historical Society of Canada
77 Henderson Highway
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2L 1L1

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

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

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____
Province: _____

Send form together with the yearly membership fee of \$5.00 to the Society Secretary in care of the above stated address.