



# MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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September, 1982

## THE COMING OF THE MENNONITES—1875

Prior to their full-scale immigration to Manitoba in the 1870's, Mennonite inspectors came to view the potential of the land. In the fall of 1872 two men, Bernard Warkentin and Jacob Y. Shantz visited the newly established province. Bernard Warkentin was the son of a prosperous miller in Altonau, Molotschna Colony, who, along with three other young men, were touring the U.S. and Canada. Jacob Y. Shantz was a farmer and a successful merchant of Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, who became a tireless promoter of Russian Mennonite immigration to Manitoba. A description of their visit appeared in the "Manitoba Free Press" on Saturday, November 30, 1872. Excited by the prospect of more immigrants to the province the person reporting the visit of this delegation gives an upbeat "stamp of approval" to the prospect of Mennonite settlers. The article is reprinted in its entirety below.

## AN IMMIGRATION DEPUTATION

Our Province has lately been visited by Mr. Warkentin, a gentleman who is one of a deputation sent to America by the members of a sect known as the Mennonites (who are now residing in Southern Russia, in the neighborhood of Odessa and Sepastopol), with a view of finding a desirable location of a colony of their fellow believers. The circumstances which prompted the intended exodus from Russia are these:—The Mennonites are a German religious sect, who entertain much the same belief with our Quakers, and one of the tenets of their faith prohibits them from taking part in military or warlike matters. About seventy years ago the Czar of Russia succeeded in inducing them to leave their native land and take up their abode in his dominions, under the promise that they would be exempt from military duty, but the result of the late Franco-Prussian war has induced the Russian authorities to adopt the Prussian mode of military training, which compels every man over a certain age to serve in the army for a specified number of years. The Mennonites were given ten years—of which two have already passed—to fall in with this idea or leave the country. They chose the latter alternative, and hence the deputation. When the deputation left Russia, however, it was still an unsettled question whether the Mennonites would not be obliged to perform military duties during the coming eight years, and in the event of a decision being rendered that they shall be obliged to do so, a very extensive immigration may be looked for forthwith. The numerical strength of the sect is in the neighborhood of 40,000, and all these will, in a very few years, find homes on this side of the Atlantic, where their religious convictions exempt them from the distasteful occupation of warfare. The deputation had visited the Western States, and were on their way home, under the impression that they had seen all of the new world which was open to them, when they called on Mr. Schantz, at Berlin, Ontario, where a large number of the same sect have for many years been located. The facts were communicated to the Dominion Government, and Mr. Schantz received instructions from Mr. Pope, Minister of Immigration, to take the deputation, or a part of it, to see the great North-West. Messrs. Warkentin and Schantz arrived here about two weeks since, and accompanied by Messrs. Wagner, P.L.S., and Hart, Deputy Inspector of Surveys, made a tour of the Province, and returned on Thursday last, amply satisfied that they had found the place, above all others suited for the purpose. In the report of Mr. Warkentin are set forth many reasons why this country is preferable to the Western States. He also expresses himself agreeably disappointed and surprised at the quality and quantity of the cereals, roots, and vegetables grown here, which, he avers, are incomparably superior to anything he had previously seen. When it is remembered that the south of Russia has been classed as the great wheat growing country of the world, the value of his opinion on this subject will be appreciated. He infinitely prefers the light loamy soil of our higher lands to that of his own country, or anything else he has seen. The value of this prospective immigration cannot be too highly appreciated, for aside from the immediate accession of 40,000 of the most industrious and thriving people in the world, the attention which will be drawn to our country by the movement will have the effect of bringing here a great share of the steady immigration which for years has been filling up the Western States.

### ANSIEDLER VIEW OF INDIANS

Mennonites have not frequently commented upon the native peoples they replaced during their settlement on the North American prairies. One sad, but perhaps illustrative comment, on the new settlers view of the American Indians is provided in a short note in the June, 1878 Nebraska Ansiedler, page 2, Column 4. The following comment is given in the Wyoming Territory report:

"The Yellowstone Valley, where only two years ago the fierce battle against Sitting Bull and his Sioux was fought, and where Custer and his men fell, has apparently undergone marvelous metamorphosis. A huge tide of immigration has inundated the area. Now, where only a few years ago the Indian's wigwam stood, farm houses and even sizeable communities have, so to speak, mushroomed out of the ground."

Translated by Herb Rempel

### NEBRASKA ANSIEDLER INDEX PREPARED

As in the past several summers the Center for M.B. Studies (Archives) received a government grant to enable the Center to continue its project of indexing the Mennonitische Rundschau. As a part of this long-term project approximately one month was spent indexing the Nebraska Ansiedler, the forerunner to the Rundschau. Hired under this program was Herb Rempel of Winnipeg.

The Ansiedler was published monthly from June 1878 to May 1880. As its title indicates it was essentially "dedicated to the interests of the German population (not exclusively Mennonite) in the West. It had a strong agricultural orientation and gave less attention to religious topics and spiritual concerns than did the Rundschau. Many of its articles were reports on the booming West and of the prosperity yet to come, while other articles reported on the poor conditions in Europe, especially Germany and Russia, from where most of its readership came.

The subject index is essentially the same as that of the forthcoming Rundschau index, with several additions and modifications required by its unique nature. The index is patterned after the Bote index published by Canadian Mennonite Bible College Publications (Winnipeg) in 1976. Copies of the Nebraska Ansiedler index may be purchased from the Center for M.B. Studies at a cost of \$2.50/copy.

It should also be noted that the Ansiedler is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48106. The cost is \$9.60.

### M.B. HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

Each year during the sessions of the Canadian Conference the M.B. Historical Society conducts its annual meeting. On Saturday, July 10, 1982 the meeting was opened by Abe Dueck, Vice-Chairman.

Since elections are conducted only every other year the focus of the meeting was on an address by Dr. J.B. Toews of Fresno, California. Dr. Toews who presently serves as director of the General Conference (M.B.) Historical Commission, gave a powerful summary of the last 50 years of the M.B. Church in Russia. He noted in particular how the church in Russia, in spite of hardship and the persecution it suffered, grew not by means of special strategy, but by being faithful disciples of Jesus in all aspects of their daily lives.

In addition to Dr. Toews address, Ken Reddig, Conference Archivist, presented reports of the Historical Society and of the Historical Committee (Archives). These reports are reprinted below.

REPORT OF THE M.B. HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Three Hills, Alberta - July 1982

During the past year the Society has been involved in the production of the quarterly Newsletter and several special programs of an historical nature.

Due to the far-flung membership of the Society, presently numbering 79, the Newsletter is an important link with our congregations from B.C. to Quebec. This past year we have begun issuing the Newsletter four times a year, instead of the usual three, in order to provide more information on the historical activities of our Society and the Center for M.B. Studies.

In fall the Society sponsored a "Ben and Esther Horch Appreciation Evening," honoring their many years of service to the conference, particularly in the area of music. Over 200 persons attended this fine evening. At this special event the Center inaugurated a Ben and Esther Horch musical collection, in honor of the Horch's, which is housed in the Archives. The collection contains hymnals, tapes and various materials related to Russian-Mennonite music.

In spring a special evening tracing the development of Mennonite care for the elderly was sponsored by the Society. Three papers tracing this involvement in Prussia, Russia and Canada were presented. Both the Horch evening and the program on the elderly are available from the Archives on tape. Cost is \$4.00/tape.

Financial Report of the Historical Society

July 1982

Balance as of June 1, 1981		\$880.67	
Membership Receipts for 1981-82		<u>230.00</u>	<u>\$1,110.67</u>
Cost of Producing and Mailing Newsletter	\$472.86		
Special Events (2) - Coffee and Advertising	<u>80.94</u>	553.80	
Balance, May 31, 1982		<u>556.87</u>	<u>1,110.67</u>

REPORT OF THE HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

July 1982

The past year has been a busy one with many researchers, both students and constituency, using our holdings for their research projects. As a Committee we are grateful for the support and cooperation of congregations, groups and individuals. While the collecting of relevant Conference material is never-ending, our major task, at this time, is the proper classification of conference documents. Much more material has come in than we can adequately or quickly handle. Therefore, for the next several years we will have to concentrate on classification of these materials.

The following items, in brief, give an indication of some of the projects outside of the daily routine of archival work.

1. Volunteers this year have included: Erica Voth, Goldie Pankratz, Adelheid Fast, and Gerald Regehr.
2. We obtained another grant, at the last moment to permit the hiring of Herb Rempel to continue indexing the Mennonitische Rundschau. This grant comes from the Provincial Government of Manitoba. Presently we have completed indexing the years 1920 - August 1932.
3. Hilda Dueck, presently of Tofield, Alberta, completed a background study of procedures, questions and possible persons to interview regarding Mennonite Music in Canada. If we receive a grant from the Multi-Culturalism Branch of the Federal government, we hope to begin this interview project.
4. The archivist, Ken Reddig, has been heading a committee of BOMAS, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and MCC individuals who have recently completed translating into German the first booklet of the "Wenger Faith Series," How Mennonites Came to Be. This will be for distribution among the Umsiedler and Kanadier.
5. Projects presently in the manuscript form and in the editing stage include:
  1. The "D.B. Wiens Biography" by Erich Ratzlaff
  2. The "Manitoba M.B. History" by William Neufeld
  3. The "Ontario M.B. History" by Anne Wiebe
  4. The A.H. Neufeld "Autobiography of Herman A. Neufeld"
6. A symposium is being planned for November 11-12, 1983. The title is to be "Inter-Mennonite Relations: M.B.'s and G.C.'s in Canada." Presentations will be given in the following areas: Education, Church Relations, Music, Inter-Mennonite Organizations and Theology.
7. A meeting of the Historical Commission of the M.B. General Conference was held in Fresno in May. At the same time the M.B. Archivists from Hillsboro, Fresno and Winnipeg met for consultation. Items discussed were:

1. Uniformity in classification
  2. Exchange of materials
  3. Herb Giesbrecht's re-working of the M.B. Bibliography
  4. Numbering of microfilm reels
  5. Ken Reddig's pamphlet, "How to Write Minutes"
  6. Cooperation in publications between the various Centers
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8. Beginning with the January 1982 edition of Direction, Ken Reddig has been editing a page entitled, "Historical Endnotes."
  9. The poems of Abram Willems of Coaldale, Alberta, were recently micro-filmed in the Center. They comprise a collection of 3,700 pages.
  10. The Langley M.B. Church records were recently microfilmed.
  11. The "Mennonite Mirror" was recently microfilmed.

Submitted by  
Ken Reddig  
Conference Archivist

#### C.A. DEFEHR EVENING PLANNED

In keeping with the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews "we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses," the M.B. Historical Society has planned a special evening, October 29, 1982, to remember the varieties of service rendered by C.A. DeFehr.

DeFehr, who died on February 11, 1979 at the age of 97, was a business man who always had time for involvement in church activities. Beginning his career in Millerowo, Russia as an industrialist, he survived the tragedies of the post WWI revolution, losing his entire estate, and upon immigrating to Canada founded a successful importing and distribution company which is still thriving today.

On top of the demands of his business career DeFehr gave himself generously to service within his home church, the M.B. Conference and through Mennonite Central Committee (and its predecessor Boards in Canada) to the larger Mennonite brotherhood. He took part in the building up of the MCI at Gretna, MBCI in Winnipeg, the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, the work of the Gideons, the Canadian Bible Society, the Christian Press and numerous other church causes. In 1974 and for a number of years after he was intimately involved in the development of new settlements for Mennonite refugees from Europe to Paraguay.

Planned for the evening are three presentations on aspects of C.A. DeFehr's involvements. His son, Mr. Abe DeFehr, will present a brief biography followed by a grandson, Dr. B.B. Fast, who will give a synopsis of his business career. A long-time friend and co-worker, Dr. J.B. Toews of Fresno, California, will speak on the church involvements of C.A. DeFehr.

Everyone is invited to attend this special evening on October 29, 1982. Location will be in the auditorium of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and the time is 8:00 P.M.

# PEOPLE OF THE WAY

*Selected Essays and Addresses*

by

John A. Toews

Edited by

Abe J. Dueck

Herbert Giesbrecht

Allen R. Guenther

Published by

Historical Committee

Board of Higher Education

Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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

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1. MENNONITE CEMETERIES IN MANITOBA by Herman Rempel for the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.
2. ERLEBENISSE UND ERINNERUNGEN by Abe Martens. Donated by Dr. John Martens.
3. FURROWS IN THE VALLEY: History of the R.M. of Morris, Manitoba 1880-1980, edited by Lenore Eidse.
4. PLETT PICTURE BOOK: A Pictorial History of the Children and Grandchildren of Cornelius Plett (1820-1900) and Sara Loewen (1822-1903), by Delbert Plett.
5. DAUT STRAUME SCHALDUEK: Satire on Mennonites in Canada a la "HMS Pinafore". Recorded on tape by Peter Paetkau November 3, 1979.
6. Sundry publications by Dr. Peter Penner since 1956.
7. B.B. JANZ SERMON on tape donated by Rev. Rudy Heidebrecht.
8. LEKTIONSHEFT, ADULT QUARTERLY FOUNDATION SERIES, MEMBERSHIP MANUALS, ETC., donated by Dr. John Unger.
9. HISTORY OF THE VINELAND MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH 1932-1982. Donated by the Vineland M.B. Church.
10. TAPES OF THE JUBILEE WEEKEND OF THE VINELAND M.B. CHURCH (50th Anniversary), May 22-23, 1982.
11. TAPES OF THE M.B.B.C. MINISTERS COURSE with David Schroeder and Grant Osborne March, 1982.
12. MENNONITISCHE RUNDSCHAU (1958-1965), donated by Rev. A.A. Unruh.
13. TAPES OF REV. A.A. UNRUH AND REV. A.H. UNRUH, donated by Walter and Peggy Regehr.
14. SOUTH LANGLEY M.B. CHURCH CONGREGATIONAL RECORDS (microfilm).
15. PHOTO ALBUM OF THE EARLY YEARS OF M.B.B.C. Found and donated by Harry Olfert.
16. FUNERAL OF DR. A.H. UNRUH, January 20, 1961 (2 tapes).
17. REFLECTIONS: A HISTORY OF ARELEE, SASKATCHEWAN. Compiled by the Arelee and District Historical Association.
18. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF SAINT ELIZABETH, MANITOBA YEARBOOK, 1974-1980.
19. MENNONITEN IN BRASILIEN by Peter Pauls, Jr.
20. PLUM HOLLOW SCHOOL DISTRICT #549, 1888-1962.
21. HEALING WATERS: History of Harrison Hot Springs and Port Douglas Area by Belle Rendall.
22. ON THE FRONTIER: Photographs by the Geological Survey of Canada, 1982.

23. WHEN YOUR CHILDREN SHALL ASK: A History of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Edited by Ed Boldt.
24. QUO VADIS: Alberta Mennonite High School Yearbooks. Donated by Anne Kornelsen.
25. MINUTES AND REPORTS OF CAMP EVERGREEN (Alberta). Deposited by Norbert Bargaen.
26. 23 LETTERS BY H.S. VOTH (1918-1921). Donated by Mrs. Esther Enns.
27. 157 LETTERS BY JOHN H. AND MARIE VOTH (1909-1929). Donated by Mrs. Esther Enns.
28. SAPOROSHIE MAP (Russian, 1980). Donated by William Schroeder.

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 Studies in Canada, Winnipeg. All correspondence regarding the Society or the Newsletter should be addressed to:

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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 receiving 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.