

# Mennonite MIRROR

volume 18 / number 5 / january, 1989



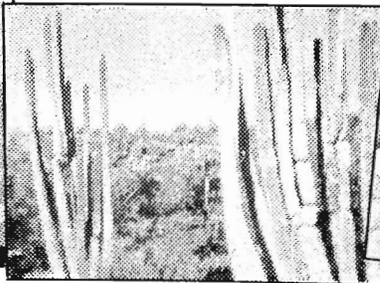
- Edith Wiens: Soprano, whose singing awes an international audience

- Low-German a look at its origins and future

- Family memories, in familiar photos

- Old technology becomes a reliable friend

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# Mennonite MIRROR

volume 18 / number 5  
january, 1989

## ForeWord

Low German is a language that most Mennonite of European background have at least heard about, even if they no longer have a speaking knowledge of it. One does not set out to "invent" a language, it naturally evolves in response to social, geographic, and other influences. The extent to which a language develops depends on how important it is to communication. In the opening article in this edition, Reuben Epp, who is well-known for the quality of his Low German, explores the origins and development of Low German. While no one "invented" Low German, one can, nevertheless see a trail of evidence showing where it came from and what influenced its use, first in Europe and then across the Atlantic.

Our cover story is about a Canadian, now resident in Europe — Edith Wiens. Those who listen to "serious" music on the radio will, in recent years, have heard Ms. Wiens at least once. Her popularity as an opera singer and in solo recitals continues to grow. Of Mennonite background and raised in western Canada, she left the country for music studies in Europe and there she established her singing career. Ms. Wiens is coming to Winnipeg at the end of January as a soloist in the two-college presentation of *Elijah* under the direction of Helmuth Rilling. The colleges continue to put themselves on the musical map by organizing church music seminars drawing on talent of the calibre of Wiens and Rilling.

All of us have paged through family picture albums and wondered whether there are stories to go along with the pictures. J. Braun has assembled a number of "family photos" of the type we are likely to find in our own albums — and then has taken things a step further by using his experience and imagination to create a "story" to go with it.

The centre two pages contain eight poems by a number of writers in this month's poets word.

Many people can remember calling older adults they respected "aunt" or "uncle," regardless of whether they were related to them. Peter Ralph Friesen recalls some of the men he called "uncle" in his youth and the way contact with them affected his later life. While they are all now gone from this world, he believes his life was richer for it.

Those people who, for one reason or another, fail to adapt to personal computers, the "fax" machine, and the telephone answering device, are regarded by many as "illiterate." This perception, however, fails to ask whether such people get the job done. Dana Mohr recalls her "bad" experience in trying to become "computer literate" so she could be a "modern" writer, only to find it a "user unfriendly" environment. Returning to the trusty typewriter, she found that "old" technology does not impair the creative spirit.

Marylou Driedger explores Christian Service Brigade, a boys program that is well established in Manitoba and which is popular among Mennonite churches.

While Vic Penner looks over the prairie with a decidedly Barbadian perspective, Roy Vogt decided this month to take a rest along the way. His column will return next month.

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Publisher, Roy Vogt

Editor, Ruth Vogt

Managing Editor, Edward Unruh

Associate Editors: Al Reimer, Harry Loewen,

Victor Doerksen, Mavis Reimer

Writing Staff: Andre Oberlé, Paul Redekop, Dana Mohr, J. Braun, Tim Wiebe, Sarah Klassen, Agnes Wall, Mary Lou Driedger, George Epp, Vic Penner, Dora Dueck, Dora Maendel; Mirror Mix-up, Bob Matsuo.

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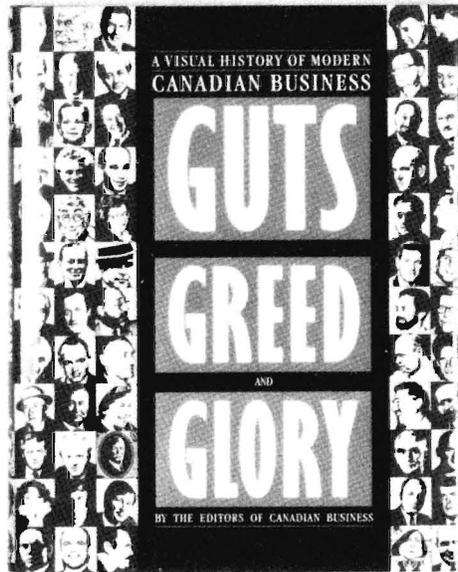
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# Low German: Where it came from; and where it's going

by Reuben Epp

Some people are confused as to what is meant by the term *Low German*.

*Encyclopedia Britannica* indicates that Low German is a language with two main branches: Low Franconian and Low Saxon. The Low German (Plautdietsch) of the Netherlandic/Prussian/Russian Mennonites is a dialect of the Lower Saxon branch of Low German, more particularly one of the dialects of the former West Prussia.

In German this language is called Niederdeutsch (Nether German), Niedersächsisch (Nether Saxon) or simply Plattdeutsch. The Low German of the Flemish people of Belgium is part of the Lower Franconian (Niederfränkisch) branch of the language. Although there are differences between Lower Saxon and Lower Franconian they are not so great as to seriously hamper spoken communication between them. Canadians of Mennonite background who have visited Flanders attest to the ease with which they spoke to the Flemish in Plautdietsch and were answered in understandable Flemish (Flaams or Vlaamsch).

In Germany Low German is spoken mainly north of an unmarked, irregular line running east and west in the vicinities of Gottingen and Dusseldorf. In the North it is usually referred to as Plattdeutsch in German and as Plattdütsch in Low German. In southern Germany the term *Plattdeutsch* becomes ambiguous because it is frequently used in reference to local dialects that are not part of the Low German language.

Nether Saxon Low German is also spoken in East Germany and other East Block countries. During the heyday of the Hanseatic League the Low German of the Hanse was in widespread use in northern Germany, London, Brugge, the Scandinavian countries, the Baltic states and in Novgorod, Russia. It was then the language of business, of diplomacy, of authority, of history and of literature long before High German. When the fortunes of the League declined and collapsed in the sixteenth century, the use of written Low German also declined and practically disappeared.

Upon the failure of the league, its business connections and influence were

taken over by other countries and by people of other languages, including the High German South. The Low German people of the North, seeing their economy, culture and language disintegrate, became receptive to the influences of the economically more successful South. Among northern families with economic, social or cultural ambitions it was increasingly perceived that success for their children could best be assured by sending them to southern universities to be trained in High German. This attitude, coupled with others less subtle and more negative toward Low German, suppressed the use of it in public for centuries and paved the way for the entrenchment of High German as the national language. For millions of people Low German was relegated to the home and perhaps to the workplace, but business and social success depended on competence in and use of High German.

It is difficult to evaluate to what extent the Netherlandic Mennonites were affected by these negative attitudes toward their mother tongue at that time. Benjamin Unruh has stated that the original Mennonites of the Netherlands by and large spoke the Low German of the Dutch province of Groningen and the German province of East Friesland, but that they wrote mainly in Dutch. He further states that Low German was widely and erroneously regarded as an inferior language. Although it is evident that some Mennonites still hold this view, it was apparently not shared by Menno Simons who wrote extensively in the Low German of Groningen and East Friesland and in his later years wrote the rewrote many of his works at Fresenburg in the Low German of Holstein.

When the Mennonites migrated from the Netherlands to West Prussia they settled into an area in which the population already spoke Low German, albeit a different dialect. During their sojourn of over two centuries in Prussia, the Mennonites adopted the manner of speech of their neighbors but imparted to it a number of Netherlandic expressions and words. This dialectical amalgam known as Plautdietsch was carried with them to Russia, to America and to other parts of the

world.

It is interesting to note and not well known that there are Low German Mennonites who speak dialects other than Plautdietsch. One of these is the Karolswalde dialect, named after the Karolswalde colony of Volhynia where Mennonites from the region of Culm in southern West Prussia founded several colonies at about the time that a larger contingent of Mennonites began settling the Chortitza colony. Descendants of the Karolswalde group today live in South Dakota and Kansas where their forefathers settled in 1874.

Another dialect is that of the Elchniedrung of northern East Prussia and Lithuania where the Mennonite church of Bumbinnen in 1925 had about 500 members. This settlement was wiped out by the events of 1945 when they were forced to flee west. The dialect is represented in the speech of Trude Janz of Wedel, Germany. Her stories and poems were transcribed from recordings by Prof. Ulrich Tolksdorf of the University of Kiel in a book entitled *Eine Ostpreussische Volkserzählerin*, published by Elwert Verlag, Marbur in 1980.

The original Low German of the Netherlandic Mennonites of Groningen and East Friesland is still spoken there by Mennonites and descendants of Mennonites who did not make the trek to Prussia or who were among those that returned to the Netherlands.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Low German literature has resurged in an atmosphere of increasing tolerance and greater appreciation of its worth. This renaissance was set into motion by Fritz Reuter, Klaus Groth and John Brinckmann in the 1850's, and it has not stopped. The Institut für Niederdeutsche Sprache in Bremen annually lists new publications in or about Low German. These include novels, booklets, stories, poems, plays, recordings, religious literature, magazines and calendars, numbering several hundreds annually.

A number of northern German universities now have chairs of Low German studies. A scholarly handbook covering numerous aspects of the study of Low German and containing works by some twenty learned authors was released by Gerhard Cordes and Dieter Mohn in 1983. This book appears in German under the title *Handbuch zur niederdeutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, published by Erich Schmidt Verlag of Berlin.

Most northern German cities enjoy active Low German theatre groups and a number of radio stations broadcast reg-

ular Low German programs. Radio NDR of Hamburg alone records a regular audience of one million, occasionally two million, listeners to its Low German broadcasts.

An answer to the question as to how many people still speak Low German was provided for West Germany by Prof. Dieter Stellmacher of the University of Gottingen in his booklet *Wer spricht Platt*, published by Verlag Schuster, Leer in 1987 under the auspices of the Institut für Niederdeutsche Sprache. This book reports the findings of a 1984 survey undertaken in northern West Germany, in which 2,000 persons were interviewed among a population of some sixteen million. It was found that 35 per cent or 5.6 million of the inhabitants spoke good to very good Low German. He also reports that the figures for the 1980's are some four per cent higher than those of a similar survey in the 1960's. He adds that the number of speakers may not have increased but that more people are now willing to state that they speak Low German because of greater tolerance and perhaps because of the positive influences of the *Dialektwelle* of the 1970's which sought return to simpler and more wholesome ways of life.

Similar information for East Block countries and the Americas is not yet available. The total number of speakers of Nether Saxon Low German world wide can only be guessed at but must be at least several million more than the 5.6

million reported, perhaps double that number. Stellmacher concludes that Low German cultural work stands on firm ground and needs not fear loss of substance.

Among Mennonites it is fairly common to regard speakers of other dialects as speakers of another language. But Low German exists only in the form of dialects — it has no standardized form — and Plautdietsch is only one of those dialects from among several of them spoken in West Prussia. To some of us dialects of Low German in Germany at first sound strange and we find them difficult to understand. But then this is also true of the way English is spoken in different parts of Britain and in other parts of the world.

An article in the *Mennonite Mirror* of March 1988 suggests that there are 80,000 Mennonites world wide who still speak Plautdietsch. This estimate seems low but in any event the numbers would not likely exceed double that figure. When we compare that with 5.6 million in West Germany alone who speak Low German, it becomes evident that at least numerically Plautdietsch is a minor dialect. If the use of Low German is declining among Mennonites, perhaps those of us who still love and appreciate the language could well learn something from the many others who still speak it, hear it, read it, study it and write it and whose numbers have not declined in the past 20 years.

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## EDITH WIENS: SOPRANO

**Her singing impresses audiences around the world**

On January 27, 28 and 29 Winnipeg will welcome a singer who in the past several years has become internationally known and loved — Edith Wiens. Since her departure for Europe some years ago she has already sung in Toronto, Ottawa and Calgary in her homeland, but in a sense her coming to Winnipeg will be a homecoming for Edith Wiens, according to William Baerg.

She will join the combined choirs of the two Mennonite Bible Colleges in two performances of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, conducted by the internationally known choral conductor, Helmuth Rilling. In

addition she will sing a recital of Lieder and hymns at the MBCI Jubilee Auditorium, accompanied by Irmgard Baerg. There is a good likelihood that these songs will be recorded later in Toronto, possibly on a CBC compact disc.

William Baerg, who has been instrumental in bringing Edith Wiens to Winnipeg for the bi-annual Church Music Seminar of the two Mennonite colleges, tells of first hearing the singer when she

sang several hymns to accompany her father, the late, well-known minister D.B. Wiens at a Sunday evening service in the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church. That he has not forgotten that evening many years ago testifies to the effect that her singing had on a musician who hears hundreds of young, promising singers every year.

Edith Wiens went on to study in Hanover, Germany, at Oberlin College in the U.S. and then in Europe again, where she won the Robert Schumann Lieder Competition, which brought her first recognition. Since that time her rise in the

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by Victor Doerksen

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international musical world has been phenomenal. She has been much sought after, especially in the field of oratorio. For the occasion of the tricentennial celebration of Johann Sebastian Bach, which took place in Leipzig, Edith Wiens was chosen to sing the *St Matthew Passion* with Peter Schreier and the Leipzig Kantorei. She has since become well-known in the DDR (East Germany) and was recently featured in a cultural magazine published there.

Ms Wiens has been able to choose her repertory from among the great composers and works, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Mahler in addition to Lieder by various composers. She has sung Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* with the great Jessye Norman and is part of the very successful recording of the *Eighth Symphony* ("of a Thousand") by Klaus Tennstedt (on EMI). Until now Manitoba Mennonites might have heard her in these performances, in a recent Ottawa performance of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, as well as in conversation with Peter Gzowski on the CBC's "Morningside."

In that interview Wiens acknowledged her debt to a family life which included the singing of songs and hymns. What sets her apart as an extraordinary artist is perhaps the feeling that she brings to the music she chooses, feelings which are rooted deeply in her own experience and which she has a way of conveying to an audience.

Edith Wiens and her husband, Kai Moser, a cellist, make their home in Munich. They have two children who often accompany their mother on her extensive tours.

Her performance calendar for the present and coming years reads like an "around the world" adventure tour of the best kind, with dates in London, Moscow, Vienna, Madrid, Amsterdam, New York, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Paris, Prague and Tokyo, to name just some. Her program still leans to religious works, with the major masses and oratorios of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, although with the Figaro opera she has entered into another sphere of musical activity in which her dramatic gifts would be called upon. One can certainly imagine Edith Wiens as a superb Marschallin in Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*.

With Edith Wiens the journey upon which her grandfather, B.B. Janz, set out from southern Russia in the 1920s has come a long way, if not full circle. Those who remember the stern patriarch with the gnarled huge hands curled around the pulpit can almost visualize the rural community which Janz and his people at-

tempted to set up in the prairie provinces of Canada, struggling to maintain the religious fellowship by discipline and clear distinctions.

Edith Wiens' father, the preacher and evangelist D.B. Wiens reached back in his later years to the Mennonites of the Soviet Union by radio and kept in touch with a religious community which also subscribed to the tenets of an earlier and simpler lifestyle. Many children of that generation have removed themselves completely from the "Mennonite world" and that is not surprising in the radical change that has occurred as Mennonites moved to the cities and to other kinds of work and life.

Music has been an exceptional avenue in this development. Not only were the simple *Kernlieder* taken over into the new world, but from our early times in Canada there has been music-making which has reached beyond the gospel song. Our music historians tell us of early performances in Saskatchewan and Manitoba of *St Paul* by Mendelssohn, for example, conducted by Rev. Franz Thiessen and the pioneering efforts of the likes of Ben Horch.

Musical expertise has increased rapidly, while other art forms were seriously frowned upon. While Mennonite writing and poetry is still today in a sense in its infancy in Canada there have

already been several generations of Mennonite musicians.

The tradition of *Sängerfeste* and four-part singing in the churches has in many ways prepared the way for the explosion of talent in the musical world, of which Edith Wiens is perhaps only the most spectacular example. Across Canada Mennonite singers regularly are featured in operas as well as in oratorios and concerts. Instrumental musicians have also made their mark, as have conductors and accompanists.

So, in a rather profound sense, the appearances of Edith Wiens in the "Mennonite capital of the world" will be a homecoming for this great singer as it will be a celebration for Manitoba Mennonites of decades of growing musical talent and a decade of co-operative choir performances by the two colleges.

It is hard to think of a more fitting work than Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which will be sung in German, to celebrate this event. In the collective memory of the Manitoba Mennonites this oratorio ranks close to Handel's *Messiah* in its resonance. The quality of the performance will be assured by the large choir, prepared by George Wiebe and William Baerg, and soloists Peter Lika (Elijah), Catharine Robbin (contralto), Glyn Evans (tenor) and of course, Edith Wiens (soprano). **mm**



# MIRROR MIX-UP

## LOOKING OVER THE PRAIRIE

A November View of warmth  
and other life in The Barbados

by Vic Penner



When we ducked into Cave Shepherd to escape the heat the mercury on Broad Street stood at 30 degrees Centigrade and a small shower was underway. You can imagine what the humidity was like. What with the drought at home, where the humidity rarely reached 30 all summer, the combination of showers and 30-degree temperatures almost snuffed us out our first few days in Barbados.

I always have trouble keeping the calendar straight in my head any time we take a winter holiday and trade snow-covered driveways for baked sandy beaches. That's why I asked my wife if that was really "O Little Town of Bethlehem" they were playing on the Muzak. She, who has a far better grasp of time, directions, and the delights of duty-free shopping than I have, explained that of course it was, and that it was natural for Cave Shepherd (Cave Shepherd is to Bridgetown what Eatons is to Winnipeg) to play Christmas songs a month before Christmas. I tried to hide my confusion by a careful study of duty-free prices on some of Scotland's best.

We like Barbados and this wasn't our first visit there, although it was the first time we'd gone in November. Quite frankly, we chose November because it is the last month of the summer tourist season. In December hotel prices double. Besides my tightwad reason for choosing November, there was also the assurance (?) that the hurricane season was past, and the rainy season brings only occasional daytime showers — but plenty of rain at night.

And we were far from alone in choosing Barbados in November. Our hotel was fully occupied throughout our three-week stay.

The first week we are joined by a couple from Toronto and another from Montreal. The remainder of the guests are Europeans. The second and third weeks we are the only English-speaking tourists at our hotel. We have trouble

identifying the language all around us, and we finally ask at Reception who all these strange-sounding people are. It turns out they are Swedes. It seems they are abandoning their cross-country skis by the hundreds for the warm, clear water of the Caribbean. Mostly they are beautifully fit specimens of humanity attired in the scantiest beachwear available — available, I suspect, only in Sweden. I've never before seen women dressed so skimpily. After an hour on the beach my stomach muscles ached from being constantly sucked in as one bikini-clad form after another strolls by, swinging various parts of their anatomies.

There were a good number of Canadians on the island as well. While waiting to buy milk at Goddard's Food Store (there was a shortage because the cows at the biggest dairy were calving) I met a young man from Winnipeg. I only needed a litre for my corn flakes but he was going to buy as much as they'd sell him. "I've got a two-year-old daughter and a pregnant wife," he explained, "and they suck up a lot of milk." He and his family were in Barbados for their eighth visit. They had tried Ha'wāii (twice), Florida and Antigua, but kept coming back to Barbados.

We also met a former nurse from Winnipeg. Cheryl had once been a nurse at the St. Boniface Hospital but now had a job in Barbados. She helped us decide against buying blood sausage at Big Bee Supermarket and then drove us home, with me squeezed into the back seat of her little Daihatsu amidst snorkling equipment and hospital schedules.

At Rosebud's Restaurant we met Connie, an Air Canada employee who was on her 30th visit to Barbados. She liked to come for weekends. This time she was taking a small side trip on her flight back from Dusseldorf. At Toronto she had decided that, since she still had a few days of vacation left, she would spend them in Barbados instead of flying directly home to Winnipeg.

Canadians are well received in Bar-

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From the entries to the November puzzle, Hertha Neufeld, of Roslyn Road, Winnipeg, was selected winner.

Answers to November are veil, needy, sever, horse, adorn, and donee.

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 to the right provides a clue.

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bados. Most of the natives can spot a Canadian accent very quickly and extend a warm welcome. Every taxi driver we hired spoke glowingly of the Canadian firm that is building a major highway from Grantley Adams Airport to the West Coast. At the island's 21st birthday celebrations last year we were told our governor-general, Madam Sauve, was the only dignitary to be invited from outside the Caribbean. One driver even hoped that someday Barbados would become Canada's eleventh province. Of course it was all blarney — and he wasn't even Irish.

We were again impressed with the high level of education. The literacy rate is 97 per cent and school is compulsory to the age of 16. The radio in our apartment is permanently tuned to the government frequency and we hear panel discussions on such topics as Respect and Attitude. Their importance was strongly emphasized, and it is up to the home and the school to imbue these qualities into the young people of the island. In the evening teachers and students from high schools would go on the air and discuss lessons, study methods and examination problems. In the forenoons there were school programs. Olly was particularly interested in a children's program that came on Saturdays. It was even called Children's Party — the same as the one she used to host on CFAM.

To our Canadian minds the incongruity of 30-degree weather and Christmas was hard to handle. Poinsettia trees were in full "bloom" — it's the leaves that turn red, of course, but to us it was still a matter of blooming. Carl, the taxi driver who took us to Harrison Cave and the Flower Forest, was a native Barbadian and he couldn't understand the importance to us of snow at Christmas. The closest thing to snow they had was a bush called Snow on The Mountain. It blooms white for Christmas and anyone who has such a bush decorates it with little lights. "It's beautiful", he said. The white flowers and the lights please his wife and little daughters no end at Christmas. Still in a recipe collecting mode from her radio days, my wife wants to know about Barbadian Christmas cakes. Carl doesn't know much about baking but he knows this much, "You start soaking the fruit in rum in July," he says, "and bake the cake in October. If you forget to soak the fruit you just pour a bottle of rum over the cake. It keeps well."

Eventually, of course, we have to go home. Not that it's such a great hardship either. We long to see our children and grandchildren, and they seem glad to see

us too.

Our littlest granddaughter, however, gave us a dubious look when she saw us.

"You don't look like you used to, Grandma," she said. "You should go outside and get white again."

We assured her that by Christmas our tans would probably have washed off.  
**mm**

## Discover South America

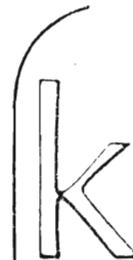
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**C'** mon c'mon c'mon hey babe hey babe c'mon no hit no hit c'mon big tater chuck 'er in there c'mon c'mon bad eye bad eye yeah yeah yeah smoke it c'mon c'mon yeah...

The Uncles did not do well versus the Nephews at this year's Annual Lowe Farm Family Reunion Sunday Afternoon Generation Gap Softball Game. Nevertheless, it was a good game, a game to savour in memory, a game heralding the end of a long lazy and magnificent autumn: the last baseball game of the season before we all go home to get serious and study winter. All the afternoon, under a hazy midday sun, the score jostled back and forth. The Uncles hefty early lead was tied by the third and sunk in the fourth; it was only after Uncle Cornie drove up in his Chevy and joined in to assist a recovery in the fifth with a grand slam over the barbed wire into the dike that things began to get serious and Cousin Ronnie, on the mound, realized he would have to pull out all the stops, which he did. The *Schoddanas Slider*, the *Draschmaschiener*, and the *Binja-baunt Groove* in the next and the next sent the Uncles scurrying for the corners, so by the seventh-inning stretch it was clear their gumption had all gone to borscht. The Cousins sneaked up to a two-run lead in the eighth and the ninth and when the Uncles took to their final bat to end the game you could tell they were nervous. You could tell by the way the on-deckers sat on the bench and sipped their Kool-Aid, the way they look down hard at the ground, the way you could hear them not breathing. Uncle Ben stepped to the plate with quiet resolve but got caught looking, and after Uncle Ed singled on a fumble and Uncle Pete doubled to deep centre, Ronnie dug in with his left toe and delivered his Special: a woundup windmill pitch wherein the ball actually decelerates rapidly halfway to the plate — a breaking ball — and that is when the fat lady sang: a blooper along the first base line chucked back to catch Uncle Ed kicking up the dust at home.

After a round of handshakes the Nephews hung around the backstop to spit seeds and bask in their glory—this line drive into left, that slide into third which wounded Uncle John, and the unforgettable triple play of '86. The Uncles went in for first pickings at *faspa*, their heads hung low, ashamed for having wasted an otherwise pleasant Sunday afternoon.

By J. Braun

## Family memories, familiar photos

*Any one who really "looks" through a family album, or any other collection of photographs, inevitably wonders whether there is a "story" behind the photos.*

*If someone is around who recognizes the scene and the event, the story can come out and lead to a fascinating conversation.*

*J. Braun assembled a number of photos from varied sources. He has put his imagination to work to write us plausible stories to go with the pictures.*

*This and the next three pages are the pictures and the stories behind them. You are, of course, welcome to use your own imagination to create your own stories...*



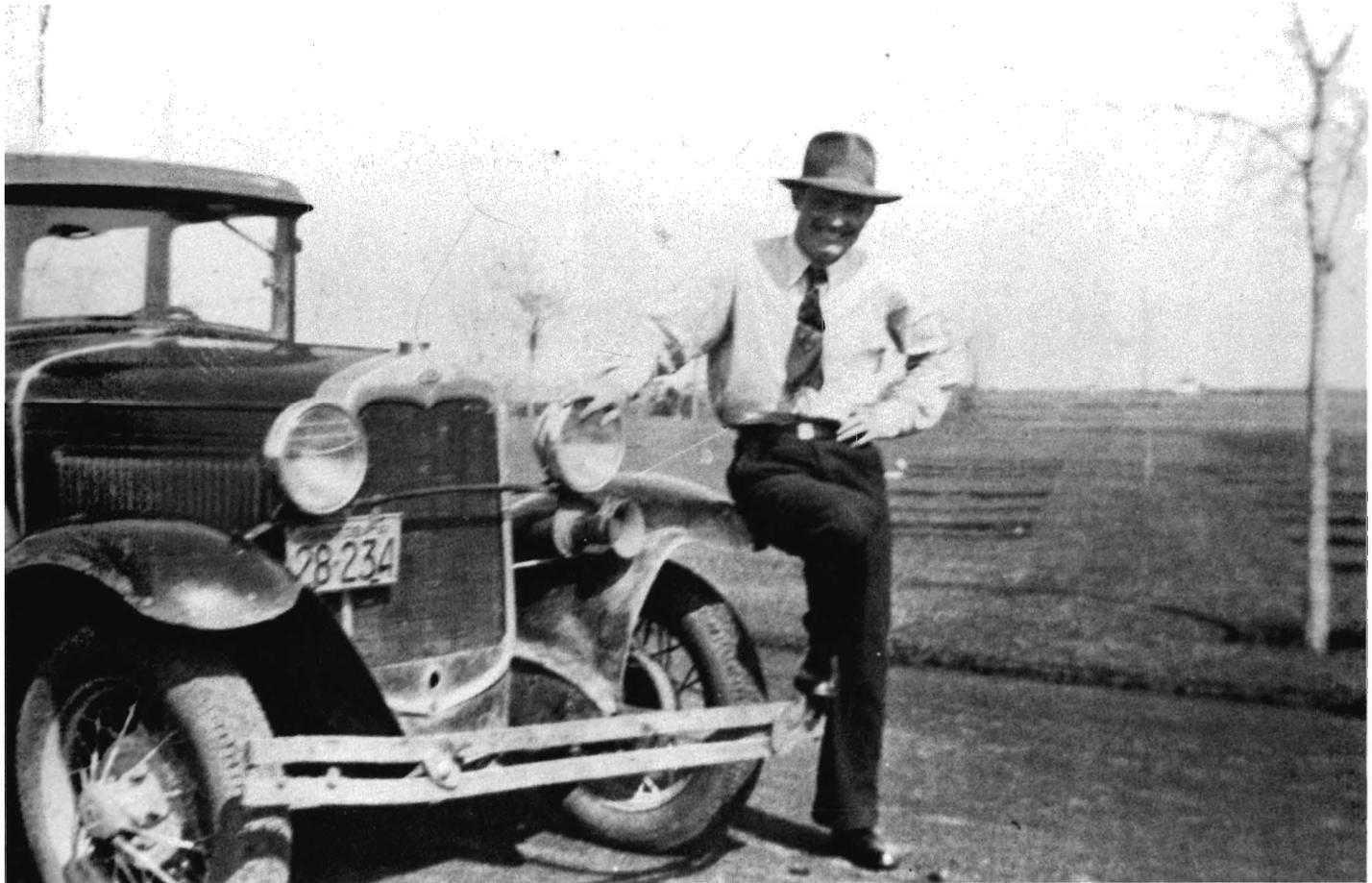
**T**he interesting thing about this picture is, first of all, if you look at the husband and wife you'd think they were in their fifties. But they're not. They are actually in their mid-thirties. It was a hard life, pioneering was; a hard hard life, being farmers. People nowadays think they led a simple life but it isn't so. That's a terrible disservice to them to think that. They never had it easy, not any of them. Don't ever forget that, what they did for you.

"The second thing is that girl, the tall girl in the back there. That is your grandmother. She would have been about 15 when this picture was taken. The woman on her left, she is not that girl's mother. She is her stepmother. Her mother — her real mother — died young of tuberculosis and the father — your great-grandfather — married this woman who herself was a widow with a son of her own. That would be your Great Uncle Abe sitting there who died three years ago in Saskatchewan where he met and married Aunt Millie and worked as a miller for 28 years. For years Aunt Millie — she was very kind to us — gave me Grace Livingston Hill books for birthdays and Christmas. I still have them.

"Then her father died — your grandmother's father — in a threshing accident on their neighbor Wienses' farm. He was out in the field with the crew and left his shirt cuffs undone and they got caught in the belts on the side of the thresher and Mister Wiens had to scrape him off, no one else would do it. What a tragedy that was.

"So that woman was a widow again and she married a single man who had just come over from the Old Country. He is that man there. They had two girls of their own. The younger one — the one with the cap on in her father's arms — is my mother. She was the baby of the family. The other little girl with the ribbon in her hair — that is your Great Aunt Mary who married Uncle Frank from Hochstadt and they retired to Blumenort. Their daughter Arlene taught school in Winnipeg and their son Melvin was a doctor in Toronto.

"So, in this picture, that girl is not a sister to any of these children. That woman — her stepmother — she was a Wiebe. That man is a Penner. This girl is a Reimer — you come from the Reimers originally. No, that girl — your grandmother — is not related to anyone else in this photograph."



"Yes, yes, that's the one, that's him. Oh yes, I remember him well. My, but he was a dapper gent in his day. Gatsby, we used to call him. You've never met as nice a man. Certainly the most generous man I ever met. Quiet, softspoken, yet always with that infectious smile — it rubbed off on everyone. I always remember he drove a gleaming blue car — 'Not a car; it's an *automobile*' he would always insist — which he polished up every Saturday morning, he was so proud of it. It was such a joy to ride in it with him. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons we would go out darning in it with him, just for the fun of it. I only did sometimes. Most times there was this other girl on the passenger side, a girl he met in school. Chris something — no, Christine was her name. Yes, that was it. Gatsby and Christine. They were a wonderful couple. They went everywhere together. I often saw them pass by in front of the store and we'd all call out, 'There goes G and C!' and everyone would know what was meant. Then one week I didn't see them together. I didn't ask him about it, but I think her parents thought him worldly, what with that car and all. He moved to Morden for a few years, then came back to town to help in the business after his father took ill. He became baptised and they got together again, Gatsby and Christine, and he was on top of the world. But that only lasted a short while. I suppose Bergthaler wasn't yet good enough.

"He was never the same after that. I asked him about her once but he didn't want to talk about it. You could tell he was depressed, how much he had loved that girl and all. Oh, he saw a few other women now and then but when the girl would hint at being serious he would say, 'No, I appreciate the thought, thank you just the same.' I don't know where Christine landed up. It seems to me someone said she moved to the city and ran off with an alcoholic — it ran in his family. Well she deserves it, what she did to him. The sins of the fathers.

"Two years ago when Bill and I retired to Clearbrook I caught up with him again by chance. He was in the home there. I saw him near the end. He was not well, no he wasn't. He had a photograph of her on his table and he would sit in his lazyboy all day and when he wasn't looking out the window he would stare at that picture, day after day like that for year after year; nothing could snap him out of it. The nurse found him like that the day the Lord came to take him home. He must have known he was going; he was clutching a note he had written and on it, in a trembling hand, was '*Gieb diese für Christine, BI-*' And that was all. I often wondered what he meant."



His daughter Sarah is trying to get him to walk more — “to keep the heart up” — now that he is 65 and facing the downward slide into long retirement.

So that is what Edgar does. Lengthy walks, morning hikes out along the streets of town in the crisp dawn when the early light makes the world seem sparkling and dazzling and fresh and he feels finely tuned and primed and immortal.

His evening walks, however, are the “medicine strolls:” a workout to relieve the now daily gnawing pains in the pit of his stomach that begin with a sudden digestive lurch reminding him of his age and the terrible sting of mortality. And Edgar, on these evenings, remembers the lines — some of the lines — he memorized so many years ago in his youth:

There was a time when every meadow, grove, and stream,  
 The earth, and every common sight,  
     To me did seem  
 Appareled in celestial light,  
     The glory and freshness of a dream.  
 It is not now as it hath been of yore—  
     Turn whereso’er I may,  
 By night or day,  
     The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

*What will happen to us?* And he thinks of all the townsfolk he used to know and are no longer there, the strangers he now passes by in the post office, the young upstarts he shares the counter with at the cafe. *What is to happen?*

Saturday afternoon Edgar went up to see Deacon Neufeld who was mowing the lawn, the final strip along the sidewalk, and reached over the picket fence to shake hands when he saw Edgar coming. Edgar asked the Deacon if he had a few minutes. They went up to the veranda for a glass of juice and Edgar told his awful secret: he was afraid. Sixty-five years old. His body slowing down and the town changing more every day and “those things which I have seen I now can see no more” and why do I think of death so often? Deacon Neufeld sipped on his lemonade for a moment, reached over for the Book and quoted to Edgar the poetry from the Psalms: “They are like the grass that groweth up in the morning. In the morning it groweth up and in the evening it is cut down. The years of our lives are like a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore and ten. And if by reason of strength they be fourscore, yet they will be cut down and we will fly away. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. I once was young and now am old. And yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his children beg for bread.”

#### Photo Credits

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## New Books About the Amish

by Harry Loewen

There are three new books that come from Amish country:

*The Best of Amish Cooking*, written by Phyllis Pellman Good, includes many recipes adapted from the kitchens and pantries of Old Order Amish cooks. The book is well illustrated and includes beautiful photographs which make the reader hungry for the tempting dishes. The book is hardcover, contains 224 pages, and costs \$19.95 US.

*The Country Bride Quilt*, by Craig N. Heisey and Raceh. T. Pellman, was compiled upon the request of *Brides Magazine* "to design a quilt for them that would be delicate yet sophisticated, romantic yet

strong graphically. The result? The lovely Country Bride Quilt." The book contains actual-sized templates for making the quilt as well as detailed instructions and diagrams for assembling the patches. The book comes in paperback, contains 104 pages, and costs \$12.95 US.

*Decorative Arts of the Amish of Lancaster County*, by Daniel and Cathy McCauley, looks at Amish quilts, rugs, dolls, clothing, graphic arts, furniture and other household objects as expressions of Amish faith, life and culture. The numerous colorful photographs and the clear text provide the reader with a unique and most enjoyable reading/viewing experience. The book comes in hardcover, contains 160 pages, and costs \$29.95 US.

The three books are published by and can be obtained from Good Books, Inter-course, Pennsylvania 17534. USA.  
mm

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# POET'S WORD

## BAY DAY

heavy glass doors  
move in circles  
and let me in  
to vanity fair

there are big deals here  
racks and racks of  
paradise green  
which is peacock  
and tropical blue  
looms  
suddenly I'm  
delighted  
and my only small  
annoyance  
is  
a bee about  
my head  
if  
I wasn't  
running late  
I'd return  
to inform her  
I've changed  
my mind  
it's not  
as bad  
as it seemed

— Dora Dueck

## The jar

The message is lost. Scattered  
shards means nothing to them.  
Their city stands complete  
each roof in place.

Their limbs are whole. Strong  
arms wield whips  
firm hands lock wood  
around my ankles.

But their vision's fractured.  
They can't see the line of chained slaves  
slouching to Babylon, blood  
rising in the valley.

They don't feel the Name  
searing the ribs of my smashed body  
burning my throat. It shoots  
between my lips, leaves me  
exulting.

I see a quiet shining  
fill the temple, clear water  
rising in a jar  
new from the potter's wheel.

— by Sarah Klassen

## SANDS OF TIME

Sands of time drop  
slowly, carefully.  
Savour each moment  
live each second  
love each minute  
hug each hour  
hold onto  
each day  
every day

— Karen Wiens, age 11

## Super Bowl XXII

America on display  
choreographed idolatry  
a hundred million devotees  
worshipping rapt  
the gods of fame, power  
violence.

Half-time spectacle  
sends senses reeling  
the athlete's every action  
and truncated utterance  
accorded mythical status.

We choose our warriors  
Exult when the enemy  
is blooded  
and claim vicarious victory  
as our heroes limp  
from the field of glory  
to receive their reward.

The arena empties  
benedictions are offered  
by countless believers  
and even as the credits roll  
the next rite of salvation  
is promised  
for those whose gods  
have yet to bring them peace.

— Tim Wiebe, January 31, 1988.

---

# POET'S WORD

## morning . . .

toss your teddy out of your crib  
and gurgle with delight  
tear down your musical mobile  
trying to make it work.

children now morning  
is here  
and i am resentful of your  
raucous noise  
I want to sleep in for years  
like rip van winkle  
Of course, he was male and not  
a single parent mom.

baby child  
your blue security blanket  
is falling apart  
needs repair and laundering.  
But you need it now  
one thumb in mouth and  
one fist clutches your  
Blue Blanket.

Lynnette Dueck

## Country Mile

It's not the prairie,  
but the countryside here  
has its own character  
rolling, lilting,  
lush  
with growth.

It lends grace  
to my strides  
as I ascend gentle slopes  
and then ease myself down  
to the view  
of another panoramic valley.

Silos  
dotting the landscape  
remind you of reaping  
promise me  
that a harvest  
of fertile living  
might just await me here.  
**Tim Wiebe**

## STRANGE VIOLET LIGHT

Sometimes in winter  
when the clear prairie air  
is freezing,  
a hush falls over the evening  
and the sky reflects  
a pale violet light  
that covers the land.

On nights like that  
I try to be there  
looking hard and listening  
to the world's nuances,  
so eerie, so mysterious  
that they can't be said.

And needn't be.

— Elmer Suderman

## AS I AM

Here i am again,  
Lost in the moonlight,  
I sink to the bottom of a pool of shadows,  
My life surrounds me,  
but i only see my faults.

I am too exposed,  
Too highlighted by the light.  
I wish to remain invisible in the dark,  
To remain untouched.

Even as i am now,  
I don't want to be found,  
I want to remain as i am,  
Not to be confused by life's mysteries.  
I choose to swim in my own depression and sorrow,  
Alone.

— Jennifer Friesen, (age 13)

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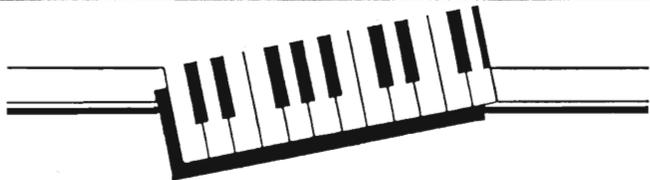
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# REVIEW

## Inside view of Winnipeg arson trial

*Trial by Ordeal* by Esther Matz, published by Queenston House, Winnipeg; \$12.95.

reviewed by **Kris J. Janovcik**

Waldemar and Esther Matz are no strangers in Winnipeg. Long before this book was released, the events of their indictments and court battles were the subject of many journalists' column and reports. If for no other reason, this book will raise a keen interest in those who followed the case for some six years. Esther and her husband were on trial for alleged fraud and arson.

What attracted me in picking up this book was that it was written by Esther Matz. So often, case histories written by third parties lack that sense of the "mental element." Matz makes no denials about her partiality. She asserts that her chief motivation in writing *Trial by Ordeal* is to bring balance to the distorted picture created by the media. "I felt I owed it to our children, to ourselves and to the public to set the record straight" writes Matz.

One immediately gets the impression that she is, in fact, writing to the lay public. Although a lawyer, and perhaps because of it, she takes pains to present legal concepts in simple terms. Her writing is almost conversational in style. Grammatically, it lacks fluidity. But, as the title suggests, its chronological organization makes it easy to follow.

Throughout, the author confronts the integrity of the criminal process. She denounces the Crown's pomposity and the legal system's insolence in their blind pursuit of justice. She questions the "arduous proceedings" which "dehumanize people." Moreover, she challenges the reader to make judgement on certain issues. Unfortunately, frequently, in her zeal to present her side of the story, she fails to give adequate counter-aspects so that the reader may make an unprejudiced judgement.

Even in her moment of vindication — complete acquittal — the author demonstrates to us her frustration with "this horrible machinery" in taking strong exception to Justice Scollin's statement that "just because guilt had not been proven that did not mean that she was

innocent." The impropriety of the judge's statement is certainly unquestionable. Its correctness lies only in legal consideration. Under law, she was found not to have committed any crime, beyond a reasonable doubt. This did not imply that she had not, in fact, committed any crimes. Matz argues that the latter statement finds no place in a court of law. She reasons: "I was innocent and I had always known it. I did not need a court to tell me this. But neither did I need the court to take this away from me."

Overall, Matz succeeds in her appeal to the reader's sense of justice. Her firm convictions leave one with a sense of assuredness about the accuracy of the story, or at least that part which she reveals. Anyone who reads this book can't help but feel a certain import of compassion for the victims. Matz submits:

"I have made no attempt to disguise the fact that the proceedings were a tremendous drain on the physical, mental and emotional resources of our immediate family as well as those near and dear to us. As year after unproductive year went by, it became clear that it was a trial by ordeal. To endure the ordeal meant to win the case. Survival became an end in itself."

This book is, to be sure, an emotional appeal by the author. Considering it in this context the reader may find it necessary to search out a more dispassionate perspective from which to properly assess and appreciate the case on its merits.

(Mr. Janovcik is a law student at the University of Manitoba.) **mm**

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### COMING EVENTS

**January 22-28.** Mennonite Colleges Church Music Seminar.

**January 27 and 28.** Performance of *Elijah*. Mennonite Festival Chorus with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. Centennial Concert Hall. Helmuth Rilling conductor.

**January 29.** Edith Wiens Recital with Irmgard Baerg. Jubilee Place. 3 pm.

**February 5.** Winnipeg Singers. Petite Messe SOLLONELLE. Crescent Fort Rouge United Church. 8pm.

**February 16 and 17.** Prairie Performances. Choral music with the University Singers. Henry Engbrecht conductor. Muriel Richardson Auditorium. 8 pm.

## Helmuth Rilling at Church Music Seminar

Once again the two Mennonite colleges in Winnipeg are co-sponsoring a Church Music Seminar, which promises to be an outstanding musical event in the life of a music-rich city. For a whole week several hundred fortunate music makers will spend their time from morning till night in rehearsals, lectures, workshops and discussions, culminating in two evening performances of Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*.

Lecturers and instructors will include many of the local music teachers and performers, including John Martens, William Baerg, Esther and George Wiebe, Lawrence Ritchey, and the guest lecturer and conductor, Helmuth Rilling, of Stuttgart, Germany.

In addition to the preparation of the performance, there will be discussion of topics like: "Today's Relevance of Yesterday's Hymns" and the "Question of Excellence." Helmuth Rilling will give an address on "Mendelssohn — the Interpreter and Preacher" in a special worship service in the Elmwood MB Church.

All this will culminate in the performances of the oratorio with full choir, orchestra and soloists in the Centennial Concert Hall, January 27 and 28.

Audience expectations are high after years of outstanding co-operative productions by the music departments of the two colleges. Who will soon forget Robert Shaw's direction of the German Requiem by Brahms? With Helmuth Rilling, who has devoted his life to the interpretation of the great religious music, beginning with Bach, we may well anticipate another unforgettable experience.

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### world news

**ZP-30 tower rises again:** Radio Station ZP-30, located in Filadelfia, Paraguay, is back on the air with full power now that new one has been installed. This past June a single-engine military aircraft crashed into the old tower in an accident that left the aircrew unhurt. The \$20,000 costs are shared by the colony Mennonites and the Evangelical Mennonite Conference of Canada,

which participates in the radio ministry.

**Peace book:** Dutch Quakers and Mennonites joined to publish a new nine-chapter booklet, *God's Peace Wins the Battle*, designed to provide background to their peace witness and help in the search for a peace strategy. The publication is to be a focus for peace courses in Dutch Mennonite churches in 1989. Closer to home, a collection of speeches on peace and justice themes from the 10th assembly of the 1978 Wichita Mennonite World Conference were recently "re-discovered" in storage. The book, *The Kingdom of God and the Way of Peace*, is available free for the asking by writing the MWC office, 465 Gundersen Drive, Suite 200, Carol Stream, Illinois, 60188.

The Conference of Mennonites in Canada has been invited by some Mennonite churches in Germany to help with the influx of Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union. Almost 15 per cent of the people coming from the Soviet Union are Mennonite, with approximately 4,000 arriving in 1988. This would bring the total number of Mennonite immigrants since the early 1970's to 17,000. CMC had been involved in the *Umsiedler* ministry in the 1970's, but had scaled down its assistance as the Mennonite churches became more established and self-sufficient. **Rev. Jake Harms**, coordinator of the European Ministries Committee of CMC, made a visit to Germany in December to see how CMC can assist the churches.

**Catholic plea:** Catholic and Mennonite leaders are calling for a friendly, lawful solution to a land dispute that continues to receive extensive publicity in Paraguay. At issue is the ownership of 1,200 hectares of land in East Paraguay claimed both by the Sommerfeld Colony and by the Mbya indigenous people. The matter has been in the courts since 1984. The most recent plea for a settlement came in an open letter by Lucio Alfert, representing the National Missions Team of the Catholic bishops' conference to Kornelius Walde of Asuncion, who represents Mennonite interests in dealings with the national government. The Sommerfeld Colony was founded in 1948 by immigrants from Canada. The Mennonites claim the land is theirs by virtue of their titles, while the Mbya claim they never relinquished ownership.

## REVIEW

### Valuable record recounts

### Shantz' contributions

#### Comment by Harry Loewen

There are two historical streams of Canadian Mennonites: The Swiss-South German Mennonites who came to Canada, mostly Ontario, in the eighteenth century and later, and the Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonites who came to western Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is well known that during the earlier part of Mennonite history in Europe, it was the Dutch Mennonites who often helped their Swiss and South German coreligionists in times of distress and persecution. What is less known — at least to Russian Mennonites — is the fact that when the Russian Mennonites came to Canada (initially to Manitoba) in the 1870's, it was the work and assistance of "Swiss Mennonites" in Ontario who made the Russian-Mennonite immigration if not possible then certainly less difficult.

The one person who put his mind and heart to the task of helping the Russian Mennonites in the 1870s more than anyone else was Jacob Y. Shantz (1811-1909), a Mennonite leader and businessman of Kitchener (formerly Berlin), Ontario. He had good connections with Canadian government officials, preparing with them the way for the Russian-Mennonite immigration; he travelled to Manitoba and other western areas where Mennonites might settle, investigating the climate, soil and farming possibilities; he accompanied the first Russian-Mennonite delegates on their inspection tours in Manitoba and parts of the United States in 1873; and he was instrumental in advancing aid and advice to the Russian

Mennonites when they arrived in this country.

Jacob Y. Shantz worked tirelessly for the cause of the Mennonites in Canada, both east and west, with his pen, with advice in government circles, and with his financial means. In Manitoba, just east of where the Russian Mennonites landed on the Red River, Shantz built temporary housing for the newcomers. Here they lived until they could proceed farther east to their appointed East Reserve (around present day Steinbach). The area was affectionately called "Shantzenfeld," in honour of this Mennonite philanthropist.

Samuel J. Steiner's new book *Vicarious Pioneer* is both a valuable record of and tribute to this Mennonite leader. The book is well researched and includes many sources and documents relating to the life and work of J. Y. Shantz. It is the first published biography of this important man, providing much information and interpretive insight into the Canadian situation toward the end of the nineteenth century and Mennonite pioneering activities at that time.

*Vicarious Pioneer* is a must-book for all students and teachers of Mennonite history and at the same time most interesting reading for interested lay persons. Included in the Hyperion Press series of books in Mennonite studies (sponsored by the Chair in Mennonite Studies and the Mennonite Literary Society, Inc.), the book is well bound and includes a list of illustrations, maps, charts, an extensive bibliography, and a useful index. Both Sam Steiner and Hyperion Press are to be commended for producing a fine and important book.

Samuel J. Steiner, *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz*. Winnipeg: Hyperion Press. 1988. Paperback. 224 pages. \$12. mm



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# Old Technology becomes an old friend

by Dana Mohr

What we have here is a classic case of writer meets computer. Writer is initially excited. Writer thinks, "Gee, maybe, just maybe, this'll make my job easier!" Gush, Gush, Gush. Computer is indifferent. He, (all computers are male because only a man could cause such anguish) flashes "Welcome to Wordmate." I don't think he means it. This seemingly inoffensive message was to be the beginning of my mental decline. Let me back up . . .

I'm a pretty modern person. I like to think that I keep up with the times. Why, just last week I got cable. The spree didn't stop there however. No, I was on a roll. I bought what appeared to be the cutest little word processor that, believe this or not, fit into my brief case. I want to point out right here and now, this purchase was

prompted by my sincere desire to make my life easier.

According to the salesMAN, I could write all my articles on this little baby, then, when I felt so inclined, I could hook it up to the main computer in the office, and have the stories printed. Sounded easy enough. Technical whiz extraordinaire, I thought, I'll just plug A into B here, the info will miraculously be transferred from this cute little word processor onto the paper and I'll be on my merry little way. Well, IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY! Not by a long shot.

By the time the office expert explained the procedure to me I had taken no less than 10, count them, 10 pages of notes. All of course to remind myself of just how simple this procedure was. And, I would

like to take this opportunity to point out to you once again, that I bought this machine, HIM, to save time.

Back to the story. The office expert pressed all the appropriate buttons and, as if by magic, an article appeared on a piece of paper. I pressed the EXACT same appropriate buttons and . . . "There has been an error." No, I'm sorry, there has been NO error. I followed these here instructions step-by-step. I have witnesses to prove it. Well, apparently, this sort of malfunction (HIS, not mine) does happen from time to time.

I'm mature. I can accept that. But, what I want to know, is why this happens only when I'm at the controls. Is it possible HE knows of my disgust for all modern technology. Has HE been talking to my telephone answering machine and comparing stories on my incompetencies. Does HE know that after two years I have yet to master the remote control function on my answering machine; the control for which I paid extra money, because I could get my messages from any phone, thus saving time and making my life easier. Is HE playing games with me out of some warped sense of fun? Am I becoming paranoid?

Perseverance paid off. After merely eight months of daily run-ins with HIM, I single-handedly managed to print one of my own articles. The problem? No one believes me. Seems I was alone and therefore incapable of dealing with that machine on any sort of rational level. Often in the past I'd have to be physically restrained so as to avoid hurting HIM. None of my co-workers could fathom me even approaching HIM without members of the SPCA, The Society for the Prevention of Computer Abuse standing on guard. A society whose motto is: Don't hurt HIM, HE knows not what HE does.

Therein lies the problem. Computers don't know what they are doing and I do. I'm fairly competent, some would even say intelligent. I am able to grasp a concept and run with it with the best of them. A computer can't. A computer has to go from point A to point B to point C, and on, and on, and on, and on. Very slowly, I might add. Whereas I, being a quick thinker who is always looking for a short cut, can mentally go from point A to point Z, and skip all those useless letters in between. I have no patience for anyone or anything that can't keep up.

If I want to print an article I want to be able to turn the machine on and press print. Makes sense to me. But no, I have to connect my no longer cute little word processor to the main terminal, and to the printer. Already five minutes are wasted.

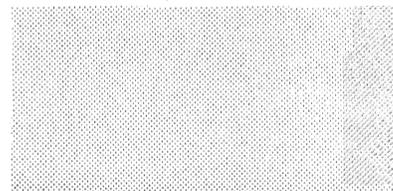
Further time is lost when HE insists I create and assign names to files (files?!), asks me whether I want to open or close them, then lists at least 20 options as to what I may or may not do with these files, and NONE, not one, of these options is print. I give up!!!

I've come to the conclusion that we, me and HE are just not meant to be. I live a fast-paced life. HE does everything in his own good time, with no apparent logic. I think incompatibility is sufficient grounds for a computer store refund. The computer store doesn't. The same salesMAN that sold me this contraption looks at me with pity in his eyes. I know what he is thinking, "Poor thing; she's never going to survive in this world."

Well, I hate to break it to you, but I'm surviving just fine, thank you very much. I wrote this article longhand. I put a piece of paper in my typewriter. I pushed the appropriate keys, and it's printed. As if by magic! Not once did my typewriter tell me, or even insinuate, that I was incompetent. I like my typewriter. I think I'll keep her. mm

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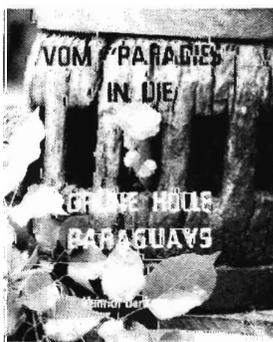
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## Vom "Paradies" in die Grüne Hölle Paraguays

Heinrich Derksen, sen



An account of the flight of many Mennonites from Russia through China to Paraguay and the resettlement in Paraguay. Derksen recounts the difficulties encountered in establishing a new order in a new country, developing economically and spiritually. Of special interest to those who have at one time lived in Paraguay, or have friends and relatives there now. \$9.95

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# Brigade program aims to create 'real men'

by Marylou Driedger

It's a cool fall evening. In the growing twilight 30 boys from Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach are playing kick ball on the congregation's parking lot. The enthusiastic voices of the kids ring out across the neighboring streets. I've come to observe the Christian Service Brigade club program used by the men and boys of the church for an hour and a half every Wednesday evening.

One by one I notice the boys leave the ball game to run into the church for a few minutes and then return. They have gone to meet individually with the man in charge of their age group in the club program. Rick Goerzen, the leader of the oldest boys, explains this is a time for the kids to discuss things that may have happened to them during the week, one on one with a caring adult. Leaders also check up on how the fellows are doing on the achievement aspects of Brigade. Together they may set goals for each boy to work toward in the coming week. Perhaps he will commit to memory a Bible passage, complete a woodworking project or be of service to someone in his family or neighborhood.

A shout, "Time for Stockade," from chief ranger, Ken Klassen, brings the kids running excitedly inside. Hastily they form a square in designated spots on the church basement floor. The boys are clad in identical blue shirts with a variety of insignias and patches on them. They bow for prayer. Mr. Klassen makes announcements and awards achievement badges to several boys. Then these 'Stockaders,' the younger members of the Brigade program, leave with their club leaders to work on a variety of projects. I watch the eight year olds practicing the long jump, one of the track and field skills needed to complete the 'Strong and Fit' component of Brigade. The nine year olds are drawing plans for a wooden key rack they will make as part of the 'In the Workshop' section of the program. The 10 and 11 year olds are working on the unit entitled 'Exploring God's Word,' by doing a Bible study of the first chapter of John.

While these boys are busy in various corners of the church the older group called Battalion meet for their opening exercises. Ken Klassen serves as the captain of these fellows as well. They begin their time together with a practice drill. Boys designated as sergeants, corporals and lance corporals march in patterns and shout out orders like "eyes front," or "attention," or "stand easy, squad dismissed." Later I observe these 12 to 14 year olds learning how to perform various first aid techniques.

Grace Church club leader, Ken Klassen, explains the format of a typical Christian Service Brigade meeting. The boys spend some time working on a variety of projects with their club leader and the other fellows their age. There are 20-25 minutes of games taken from the Christian Service Brigade manual "Game Plan." Finally, a teaching session called 'Story Circle' for the younger boys and 'Council Ring' for the older ones brings the kids together for a devotional and prayer time.

Mr. Klassen is enthusiastic about the Christian Service Brigade Program. A participant himself, as a youngster, Klassen feels Brigade played a key role in his development as an adolescent. He has high praise for the leadership skills he gained as a member of a Battalion group. He hopes to make Brigade that same kind of positive experience for the boys he works with at Grace Mennonite.

Several weeks after my Brigade meeting visit, I arrange to interview John Miller. Miller is the Manitoba representative for Christian Service Brigade. He tells me that Brigade was begun in 1937 in Chicago by a Sunday school teacher who wanted to spend more time getting to know the fellows in his class. He arranged to meet with these boys one evening a week for a variety of activities. This small Sunday school group grew rapidly and in 1940 Christian Service Brigade was incorporated. Today some 2,000 Brigade groups meet in various American church denominations across the United States. The Canadian branch started in 1942 with

clubs in Niagara Falls and Vancouver. From these two groups the Canadian organization has grown to include 500 congregations. Mennonites, Baptists, Pentecostals, Free Churches and a variety of non-denominational groups presently use the materials.

Mr. Miller is one of eight regional representatives for Christian Service Brigade who work across Canada promoting the program and training club leaders. In Manitoba he has contact with many different Mennonite churches. Congregations using the material represent most of the Mennonite conferences including the Mennonite Brethren, EMC, EMMC, General Conference, EMB, Chortitzer and the Berghaler.

I ask Mr. Miller if any of the Mennonite groups in his region object to the military aspects of the program, the uniforms, the military ranks, the marching and the illustrations of soldiers. He responds that if they do, it certainly hasn't prevented them from participating. In Manitoba nearly 60 per cent of the 52 churches involved with Brigade are Mennonite and the percentage of Mennonite involvement in Saskatchewan is even higher.

Mr. Miller feels the military emphasis has merit. It helps to develop a valuable "esprit de corps" between the leaders and the boys. Kids, after all, need a certain amount of discipline. In school they stand and sit in rows and organize themselves for games. The marching and line up formations at boys club serve the same function. The Biblical basis for the military aspect of Christian Service Brigade is from Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Mr. Miller says there is a spiritual warfare going on in our world and the military terminology of the boys club fits that concept.

As I look through the Brigade material I notice it is very male-oriented. Mr. Miller makes no apologies for this. Christian Service Brigade does emphasize endeavors commonly associated with the masculine, like carpentry, athletics, yard work and mechanics. I am curious if the boys at

any point in the program learn child care, cooking or sewing. Mr. Miller says they don't. He emphasizes that they certainly aren't a chauvinistic club, "but we are trying to teach boys to be 'men' in the traditional sense of the word." Mr. Miller recognizes that nurturing and house-keeping skills are important for boys to learn but feels these things can be taught at home, at school, or as a part of other church programs.

I notice also that the material emphasizes the father-son relationship. Mr. Miller says this is central to the program. One of its goals is to create opportunities for father-son interaction. I question him as to whether such an approach doesn't leave out boys from single parent families with no father present. Miller admits this is a problem. They have not, however, considered using mothers as club leaders and don't aggressively promote parent-son rather than father-son activities. Instead, they try to match up fatherless boys with another man in the church who can help the lad and act as a mentor and role model for him. Mr. Miller thinks male leadership is important if the group is to live up to its motto of "Building men for Christ."

Mr. Miller is cautiously optimistic about the future of Christian Service Brigade. The program for younger boys, 'Stockaders,' is increasing in popularity as is a brand new set of materials for six and seven year olds called Tree Climbers. He reports that the Battalion groups for older boys are just holding their own as more and more churches move towards co-educational junior high youth activities for their young people ages 12-14. Brigade is hoping to continue attracting new groups to the program, however, by updating their resources, redesigning their materials and introducing new uniforms.

Mr. Miller admits that in the past they could have been accused of being an organization for white middle class urban families. They are trying hard to revise the program to meet the special needs of boys of various races, economic backgrounds, disabled boys and boys from single parent families.

Miller is convinced that churches will continue to see the importance of a club program like Christian Service Brigade. As a promotional booklet for the organization puts it, "In a time when women are being called on to carry more than their share of responsibility in the church, Christian Service Brigade is an excellent way for churches to develop 'man power' to help boys grow up to be effective fathers and leaders." **mm**

## REVIEW

### A cliched book about missions

Omar Eby, *A Long, Dry Season* Inter-course, PA: Good Books, 1988, \$14.95 (American)

by Victor Doerksen

Here is a beautifully produced book which will soon be in many Mennonite church libraries for obvious reasons: it is by a Mennonite author whose name is not recognizable as such in western Canada, it is about missions and it documents the battle with and the defeat of sin in short, bus-ride length chapters.

This book takes us back to the "foreign field" with a vengeance, and with almost every cliché of Christian fiction intact. What separates this religious pot-boiler from its 19th century forerunners is the fact that its hero's sexual preoccupations are everywhere apparent, spoiling the fun of the amateur psychoanalysts among its potential readership.

As the hero is confronted in turn by a whole panorama of problems, each of which could have been a fiction feature in

*Christian Life* magazine, the reader gradually becomes as confused as the main character seems to be, though without his guilty excitement. There is no real answer to the question which inevitably must strike the reader: what is this academic doing in Africa? But before this can become the more substantial question: what are American and other foreign missionaries doing there, we are given, what else, a happy ending.

The author, who spent some years in Africa, gives us much detail for the setting of his story, but it only occasionally comes together in terms of atmosphere. There are too many characters and situations for a relatively short novel, so that the major figures are scarcely real. One has the impression that the author is trying to create a symbolism beyond his reach. Thus, when "Maxi," Thomas Martin's wife, shows him her hotel room full of paintings things do *not* fall into place for the (this) reader.

Since much of the book can in fact be considered a rather strong critique of the missionary enterprise, the happy ending is really quite unhappy and we must wonder if the hero has not simply extended his stay in his own kind of hell, in which he has, to misquote St. Paul, married, missionaried and burned. **mm**

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# MANITOBA NEWS

Mennonites from Costa Rica, Belize, Canada and the United States joined Nicaraguans recently to help rebuild homes, churches and schools destroyed by the hurricane in October. Work teams were mobilized by **Mennonite Disaster Service**. Since the country was devastated ecologically, with more than 15 per cent of the country's forests destroyed, MCC also hopes to clean up and log downed trees, and later help with reforestation. MCC is also sending food, blankets, meat, clothing, soap and health kits from North America.



**Pete Dueck** of Riverton has begun a six-month Mennonite Central Committee assignment in Akron, where he is working as a driver with MCC Administrative Services.



**Henry and Loreena Dyck** of Landmark are beginning two-year MCC assignments in Winnipeg. Henry will be working as custodian and groundkeeper and Loreena as custodian and with material aid.

In 1988 the **Community Selfhelp Centres** of Manitoba topped the \$1/2 million mark in revenue. The total was \$525,117. Some 2,000 volunteers worked in Manitoba's 13 thrift shops in 1988.

Mennonite migration from Mexico to Manitoba in 1988 included 96 families (527 individuals). A total of 1,404 persons have arrived in Manitoba in the past three years.

A second **Church Member Profile**, in which about 4,000 Mennonites of all confessions will be questioned about their lifestyles, morals, beliefs, religious experiences, church membership and social issues, is slated for the coming year. The last survey was done in 1972. Prof. Leo Driedger of the University of Manitoba is one of the committee members working on the survey.

A national choral festival for all the schools affiliated with the **Canadian Association of Mennonite Schools** is being planned to correspond with the centennial celebrations of Mennonite Collegiate Institute for April 8, 1990. A music selection has been especially commissioned for the festival

**Kindred Press** has just signed its first ever contract for the overseas publication of one of its books. The British rights to **Alone: A Search for Joy**, by Katie Funk Wiebe, have been purchased by Hodder and Stoughton of England, for publication and distribution.

**Becky Dyck** of Winkler has begun a one-year Voluntary Service term as a child-care worker in Markham, Illinois. Her parents are David and Eileen Dyck of Winkler.

**Wendy Enns** of Winkler has begun a one-year term as a child-care worker in Beatrice, Neb. Her parents are Betty and William Enns of Winkler.

**Jonathan Sawatzky** of Altona has begun a 10-month term as a child-care worker in Markham, Illinois. His parents are Ella and Wes Sawatzky of Altona.

**Leona Sawatzky** of Brandon has begun a one-year term of service as a child-care worker in Markham. Her parents are Helena and Jake Sawatzky of Brandon.



**Marci Friedman Hamm** of Winnipeg is beginning a two-year MCC assignment in Winnipeg, where she will be serving as community outreach worker at Inner City Voice newspaper.

Three violin students of **Emmanuel Horch** won silver medals in the recent Toronto Conservatory examinations. They received the highest marks in the province of Manitoba. **Maurice Arnaud** won the silver medal in grade 4. He also won the Frederick Harris Scholarship. **Rochelle Huebner** won the silver medal in grade 7. She also won a Frederick Harris Scholarship. **Cecilia Swereda** won the silver medal in grade 8.

**Stuart Clark**, who formerly worked in the overseas department of MCC in Winnipeg, has been hired by MCC's Manitoba office to explore ways that MCC can become involved in job creation in Manitoba. Clark, a member of Winnipeg's Grain of Wheat Community, will do research to determine whether MCC can play a role in creating employment for ex-offenders, Native people, refugees and disabled people. Clark will also focus on ways to promote employment in rural areas.

Over \$1 million was raised for the first time ever at MCC relief sales across Canada in 1988.

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# Where Am I Now?

## (or Why I Am Not a Mennonite)

by John Weier

1. Yesterday, I opened my *Mennonite Mirror* to face another confession. So and So — Jane Doe probably isn't appropriate, and John Dick would be a little too risky — telling me and anyone else who cares to listen, why he or she is a Mennonite.

2. It's the fourth time, I think. My eyes sort of slipped past the first time, and maybe the second. It's not the kind of thing I read. As a matter of fact, I didn't read any of these articles until the first draft of my own was completed. But that title, *Why I am a Mennonite*. By the fourth time I'm beginning to find the title pretty hard to ignore. If only the editor had helped me out by changing it a little, *Why am I a Mennonite?* Maybe then I could have slipped over it a third and fourth time. If all these people are so insistent on being, staying or becoming Mennonite, what about me?

3. I've decided to call the *Mirror* to see if they're interested in running a piece on why I am *not* a Mennonite.

4. Well, maybe I really am. I still like *holubschi!* And chicken will always taste better done with *bubbat* the way Mom

made it when I lived at home. You may not believe it, but I even use a Mennonite cookbook. D'8 Shtove? Sure, I eat there, often. They have good food, and better still, there's always somebody there I know. Jake or Dave, Kim, Andrea; it's the only place I can see these people now that I don't go to church anymore. Maybe there's some Mennonite left in me; I still read the *Mennonite Mirror*.

5. But I know, I can hear you, none of this is enough. Being Mennonite is not like being Icelandic, or Greek. Or Canadian. I know I'm Canadian, and it has nothing to do with how I vote, or with Ottawa and Parliament Hill.

6. No, the real truth is that I just don't believe what Mennonites are supposed to believe. It's not that I always think the opposite. Somehow, everything Mennonite seems too tightly bound, is seen through glasses that are just too narrow. When I was ten, I told my mother that I thought Hindus would probably go to heaven just like the rest of us. Well, I don't really know if I was ten, maybe I was fifteen and looking for trouble. But I still don't think Mennonites have a better grip on God's coattails than Hindus, or Buddhists, or some native shaman. I just don't believe it.

7. Language has something to do with it. Sure I can talk plautdietsch, but that's

not what I mean. The language of belief, the words I hear from the pulpit, can't make sense of where I live. Can't tell me why marriages fail — I'm sorry, one-word answers aren't good enough. Can't tell me about the paintings I see at the gallery, the books I read, or write. A lot of things happen in this world that I haven't managed to squeeze into Mennonite boxes.

8. Do you understand me? Probably not. But I'm not alone. Some of my friends might have something to say. Maybe this woman I know; she's pretty angry. I have friends who are divorced, or living common-law. Some are gay. Maybe they could explain.

9. A friend of mine calls us *lost mennos*. We're not Mennonite, but we can never really be *not* Mennonite. We just bring too much along. Lost mennos. I guess that's us.

10. And that's probably why I'm writing. The longer I live, the more I read and write and see, the more I let myself be who I am, the greater the gap between Mennonites and me. Maybe there can be no real bridge. But I can at least write to you. And someday we might get together, talk. There's a nice restaurant down on Pembina Highway, I think you'll like the food... mm

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# YOUR WORD

## Werter Publisher:

Mein Schreiben an Sie betrifft den Artikel in Volume 18/#2 Oktober 1988.

Ich bin enttäuscht u. zugleich empöhrt, dass solche Schundartikel wie "Wann sitj dee Heeflijchtjeit...", von Jasch Loewen, im *Mirror* Pobleziert werden. Das Mr. Loewen die Missionare lächerlich macht u. dann noch als Lügner hinstellt, ist sehr zu bedauern. Die Ausdrücke, die Mr. Loewen hier Eraucht sind unhöflich u. gemein. Ein gebildeter Mensch findet auch noch andere Worte seine Gedanken zu äussern.

Ich würde Mr. Loewen raten, wenn er sich nicht besser auszudrücken versteht, dass schreiben andern zu überlassen.

Der Artikel, Mr. Loewen, ist weder belehrend, noch unterhaltend, u. überhaupt nicht spassig.

Dann sollte auch nicht jeder eine plattdeutsche Schrift aufstellen. Plattdeutsch ist nur ein Dialekt, u. brauchte, von mir aus, nur gesprochen werden. Ich würde dem "Mirror" raten, solche Artikel, gleich in in den Papierkorb zu werfen, wo sie hingehören.

Der Artikel von G. Epp ist sehr interessant u. wichtig. Auch lesen wir genre Ihre Artikel, Mr. Vogt, *Observed Along the Way*" u.a.

Aber bitte, lassen Sie die plattdeutschen Artikel weg. Annie Neufeld, Winnipeg.

## Ad dismays

I am dismayed. Just now when I have again paid up my overdue subscription to your apper, and just now when in recent months you dealt with the question of what it means to be Mennonite, I open my November issue to the article "Our Word" and see on the opposite side a full-page advertisement inviting people to join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Mind you, I have nothing against Canada's "finest." But what is their ad doing in a "Mennonite" periodical? Is the editorial staff of your paper not serious about its title? Or does Mennonite in this case mean nothing more than "Mennonite" as in some ethnic foods or language?

Perhaps I am mistaken about how you see your task. Being prophetic or educational may not be your aim. But your periodical does, nonetheless, project an image of who the Mennonites in Winnipeg and Manitoba are. And if, as your title suggests, you are attempting to reflect what is, then this full-page advertisement bothers me even more. Is this what we have come to be? Will we be seeing an ad inviting people to join Canada's army, navy and air force in the forthcoming issues?

You, dear editor, are well aware that Mennonites have avoided association with military service, violence and the use of force through the centuries. As a result Mennonites have endured endless hardship and moved to many new unwelcome places. All this not for reasons of adventure or cowardice, but for reasons of faith believing that self-giving, sacrificial love was at the heart of our gospel and faith. Isn't this what we try to tell the world in world and sacrificial deeds—that there is another way?

In 1990 one of the largest Mennonite World Conference assemblies will take place here in Winnipeg. Mennonites from many other parts of the world will be our guests, most of whom are Mennonite by

our persuasion and witness. They have taken our words and witness eriously, believing that peacemaking and suffering rather than force is the way to follow Christ. We are known for this the world over. How will we then explain this incongruity to them? I am dismayed.

J.F. Pauls,  
Winnipeg.

## NOT TO THIS HOME

After reading Waldemar Ens's review on the *Last Temptation of Christ* and Ruth Vogts' discourse on homosexuality, October 1988 issue, I do not wish to continue receiving the *Mennonite Mirror* into my home.

Surely any Christian periodical worthy of distribution within the Christian community must be able to distinguish between issues requiring dialogue from those that tamper with fundamental doctrines that are timeless. It would be interesting to know whether these attitudes reflect the Mennonite community as a whole or just a minority among the intellectuals! Sincerely,

P.C. Giesbrecht,  
Winnipeg.

**PS:** You may print my comments if you wish provided they are published unedited.

## NO BIBLICAL VALIDITY

In response to "Our Word" in the October 1988 issue I believe that the presuppositions are not Biblically valid.

The article assumes that homosexual acts "are not committed with complete freedom of choice." The entire set of assumptions in the second last paragraph is based on social theory and experience apart from any discussion of God's design and man's sinful nature.

Why do we rush to make acceptable what the Bible so clearly says is wrong?

In Romans 1:26,27 it refers to individuals blinded by sin who abandon the natural function of heterosexual relationships.

One is also left to ponder the total meaning of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 if they do not indicate that homosexuality is sin.

In 1 Timothy 1:10 homosexuality is lumped together with "whatever else is contrary to sound teaching."

In the Gospels Jesus did not specifically address homosexuality. Correct application of what Jesus did say is essential to this discussion.

The Apostle Paul did not see his position on homosexuality to be inconsistent with the Gospel of his Saviour (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

If the writer believes that Jesus lack of

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specific instruction about homosexuality, and his compassion is to be interpreted as Biblical support for acceptance and condoning of a homosexual lifestyle she is sadly mistaken.

I do believe that Christians should have compassion for the homosexual as a person but we are not to condone or encourage a 'Christian' justification of their sin.

I find it intriguing that the comparison of clergy attitudes cited portrays the Mennonite intolerance in comparison to primarily liturgical mainline churches. Do we measure ourselves ultimately by the Bible or by churches which we have historically differed with in matters of doctrine and interpretation?

Thank you for your tolerant consideration of a view different from your own!

Randy Smart,  
Winkler

#### A DIFFICULT TAX

This is in response to "Our Word" in the October issue. With respect, the article contains a number of inconsistencies. After criticising others for citing only Old Testament references, the writer fails to cite directly any New Testament ones herself, and significantly overlooks explicit NT texts that regard homosexual activity as sin, e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:9, Romans 1: 26-27). Certainly we need to follow the example and Spirit of Jesus Christ as the article states. He demonstrated compassion for sinners without condoning their sin. That statement may seem trite, but cannot be denied from the NT accounts of Jesus.

Moreover, in line with common secular thinking the article fails to distinguish between homosexual orientation and practice. Scripture clearly speaks against sexual activity outside of marriage. To expect abstinence by unmarried heterosexuals and to condone sexual activity by homosexuals seems like discrimination in reverse. While his orientation may not have been chosen, a person is responsible if he practices homosexuality, or for the decision not to. Some time ago a Christian periodical carried a number of stories of persons who had been healed of homosexuality with the Lord's help. The New Testament seems to indicate a precedent for that in 1 Corinthians 6:11.

The real task of Christians is to learn to show genuine love for people, to minister to them, not to reject the persons, and yet not to compromise Biblical principles of conduct. That is not easy, and we need to confess that the church often fails to live out that distinction.

William Schroeder  
Winkler

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## ZUR DISKUSSION

### VON KALTEN KRIEGEN UND KRIEGERN

Ich hörte vor kurzem, Margaret Thatcher habe gesagt, der "Kalte Krieg" sei vorbei. Meine erste Reaktion war, zu denken: aus ihrem Mund müsse das einen ironischen Klang haben. Wieso kommen Ronald Reagen und Maggie Thatcher, er mit seinem Abkommen über Waffen und sie mit ihrer Aussage, dazu, sich als Friedensstifter aufzuspielen? Wie hätten sie das verdient?

Reagen hatte ja vor nicht allzulanger Zeit verkündet, die UdSSR sei ein "Reich des Bösen" (evil empire), wobei seine Vorstellungen wohlmöglich von schlechten Amerikanischen Filmen geprägt worden waren. Was wußte er schon über die sowjetischen Ländern und ihre Leute? Hatte er sich jemals um diesen, oder auch um andere Weltteile gekümmert? Und trotzdem findet er den Weg zu einer Verständigung (begrenzt, natürlich) mit diesen Konkurrenten.

Auch die "Iron Lady" hatte sich schon öfters eher schroff über die Macht hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang geäußert. Während ihrer Zeit als Prime Minister hat ihre Politik in einem Teil ihres Landes Reichtum angesammelt, während andere Teile leer ausgehen — fast ein Beweis für die alten, überholten Thesen von Karl Marx über die Klassengesellschaft. Aber auch sie will sich jetzt mit den Sowjetmenschen abfinden.

Doch in Kanada sind wir (auch und

besonders wir Mennoniten) noch nicht so weit. Unsere Konservative Regierung will jetzt — etwa acht Jahre nach Reagen — erst einmal eine nukleare Flotte anschaffen, womit man dochwohl nicht Amerikanische Schiffe abschrecken will! Unsere "Mennoniten" im kanadischen Unterhaus, die Epp, Reimer und Friesen heißen sind anscheinend voll mit dabei. Es war wohl ein Reimer der vor anderthalb hundert Jahren im Frankfurter Parlament protestierte gegen die Wehrlosigkeit.

Wir Mennoniten stimmen zu 80 Prozent für eine Regierung, die möglichst schnell unsere Streitkräfte auf — und ausbauen will, anstatt unsere Wirksamkeit als Friedensstifter, die in der Welt gut bekannt ist (ich spreche von Kanada, nicht von Mennoniten) zu stärken und auszubauen.

Die jüngere Generation hat die Mennonitische Sprache nicht übernommen. Sie hat auch in vielen stücken die Religiosität der älteren Generation nicht für sich in Anspruch genommen. Aber eines haben sie: den mehr oder weniger blinden Antisowjetismus. Dieser ist bei den älteren unter uns sehr verständlich, aber für heute und morgen keineswegs friedensfördernd. Da müssen unsere neue Generationen sich von Ronald Reagen und Maggie Thatcher belehren lassen!

VGD

## Diamanten Jubiläum 60 Jahre Concordia 1928–88

von Peter Kroeger

Vor sechzig Jahren fing es an,  
Von Mennoniten gegründet,  
Das Mennoniten-Hospital,  
Sich auf Concordia findet!

Es fing mit nur fünf Betten an,  
Sie wuchsen rapide schneller;  
Bald wurden's fünfzig Betten dann;  
Die Umgebung wurde heller.

Der Doktors waren damals vier:  
Hiebert, Neufeld, Oelkers, Claassen;  
Sie dokterten wohl mit Begier,  
Erfreuten sich der Insassen.

Vergrösserten das Krankenhaus  
Um mehr der Kranken zu heilen;  
Die wanderten dort ein und aus,  
Mochten nicht lange verweilen!

Versicherungs Plan ward eingeführt.  
Grosses Grundstück war zu kaufen,  
Erwarben es, nicht lange geniert,  
Fongen aun emm Schwoet too schafften!

Gross-Gebäude wurde gebaut,  
„Concordia“ weiter mit Namen;  
Sie doktern leise, wohl auch laut  
Kinder, Jugend, Herren und Damen!

Dies war seit neunzehn siebzig vier  
Mit hundert vier und dreissig Betten;  
Steht da seither in schönster Zier:  
Die Menschen von Krankheit zu retten!

Und sechzig Betten sind geplant  
Wohl nicht in zu weiter Ferne,  
Damit mehr Heilung noch gebahnt,  
Gesund sind die Leute gerne!

Dann werden's fast zweihundert sein  
Für die vielen lieben Kranken;  
Hierzu freut sehr sich der Verein,  
Allzumal dem Herrn zu danken!

Und auch freiwilliges Programm  
Ward eingeführt, die Menschen kamen;  
Ein jedes seine Arbeit nahm  
Und allesamt in Gottes Namen!

Auch zu den Pastoralen Diensten  
Concordia, Bethania zu Recht;  
Denn man kommt nur zu Gewinsten  
Wenn wahres Christentum ist echt!

A fire alarm system is installed  
Duomett tjoen Fia tjemmt, nich knault,  
Denn dann wär's wirklich sehr schnell aus:  
Verbrannt das teure Krankenhaus!

Psychiater kam auch noch an,  
Teil von Eden Mental Health Center;  
Kranke brauchen nicht Winkler nah'n,  
Doch wirkt im Segen Doktor Guenther!

Verbesserungen wurden gemacht  
Recht viele, manche schier über Nacht.  
Doktoren viele, viel Personal;  
Sie doktern, dienen treu allzumal!

Concordia, steige froh empor  
Wie dich der himmlische Arzt erkor.  
Wirke stets weiter für arm und reich  
Und für den Menschen Heiland zugleich!

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada  
Dienstag, den 27. September 1988  
im Concordia Hospital

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# OUR WORD

## Who's Afraid of Mennonite Art?

The other day I met an articulate, educated Mennonite who told me (with what appeared to be genuine regret) that he can't bring himself to read the poetry of one of our best-known Mennonite poets because he disapproves of the kind of life the poet leads. That this naive confusion between an artist's life and his art is still prevalent among us is sad but true.

Too many of us cling to the old Mennonite notion that art — especially literary art — should be properly didactic, that is, sermon-like or prayer-like, and that "good" (read "acceptable") Mennonite art can only come from devout, conforming Mennonite believers. There is still a strong tendency to regard Mennonite artists who are no longer practicing Mennonites, or who have never been members of a Mennonite church, with veiled distrust if not open contempt. They have nothing valid to tell us as Mennonites because they are not "one of us," and therefore have forfeited their right to speak to or for us. That these disaffiliated Mennonite artists may have something important to tell us about ourselves is a possibility we reject out of hand.

The issue is far from being that simple, however, even for Mennonites. In fact, we're not even consistent in our simplistic attitude towards artists and their art. In the field of music, for example, a field in which Mennonites have become prominent — we now produce everything from world-class opera singers to widely known choral groups and conductors — the question of whether there is a direct correlation between a composer's life and his work doesn't even arise. We know the great Bach was a devout Christian and an exemplary family man, but the equally sublime Mozart lived a pretty irregular life at times, as did many other classical composers whom we revere today. Artemiy Vedel (1767–1806), who composed some of the most profoundly moving sacred music in Russian liturgical history, was a vagabond and petty criminal who spent much of his life in prison. The rather obvious point I'm making is that great art — profound, spiritually uplifting art in all its forms — has been created by artists of genius regardless of whether they led virtuous or dissolute lives, were Christian believers or not.

Why then can we not accept Mennonite artists — especially our writers — in the same way? Is it the old Mennonite fear of the word as icon, the distrust of imaginative literature as "made-up" and therefore a form of lying? Are we afraid that Mennonite writers who criticize us, who write about us realistically, are somehow putting the "hex" on us? Do we want only the kind of "Christian" art that conveys a specific Christian message no matter how simplistic or superficial? What's wrong with art and literature that try to look at our Mennonite experience without blinkers, as it is actually lived, and not as we like to think in our best moments it ought to be lived? And creating an honest art free of pious ideology, bigotry and parochial prejudice is exactly what good artists are all about.

We should regard as authentic and valuable all Mennonite art that shakes up our spiritual complacency, challenges our Mennonite cultural stereotypes, subverts our middle-class smugness,

and discredits our accumulated false myths — many of them derived from our still sacrosanct and nostalgia-generated Russian-Mennonite past. Good Mennonite art, and there is a growing body of it, can and will remind us of the radical roots of our Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, affirm our hard-won moral values and celebrate our plain-spoken, wholesome peasant tradition while at the same time exposing our hypocrisy, our shallowness and ethnic snobbery. Didactic art that sacrifices artistic integrity to dogmatic manipulation, or "pretty" art that substitutes surface for core, sentimentality for emotional honesty, is simply bad art not worth any serious person's consideration.

Make no mistake, the work of our best Mennonite artists is attracting increasing attention outside of the Mennonite community. In the past dozen years Turnstone Press in Winnipeg, a non-Mennonite press, has published seventeen volumes of poetry and fiction by Mennonite writers — two in the last month. This past year at least two articles on Mennonite art and literature have appeared in non-Mennonite magazines, and just recently a German graduate student in a German university wrote a master's thesis on Canadian-Mennonite literature.

We may argue, of course, that most of our better artists are no longer true Mennonites, but even if we regard them as peripheral, or lapsed or rebellious, or non-believing, or merely "cultural" — choose your own adjective of rejected status — Mennonites, these artists are interpreting us to the rest of the world regardless of what deaf ears and blind eyes we turn to their work. It's true that some of these artists no longer even think of themselves as Mennonite, or consider that identity as irrelevant to their work. And yet, so long as they write or make films or paint or sculpt or compose or perform with artistic sensibilities that were in some recognizable way shaped by their "Mennonite" experience, even if only in childhood, they can be legitimately regarded as Mennonite artists who speak to us directly.

Indeed, at this transitional moment in our ethno-religious history I strongly believe we have more to learn from those Mennonite artists who stand on the border or outside the Mennonite community altogether than we have from those safely within it. Our best writers — Rudy Wiebe, Sandra Birdsell, Armin Wiebe, Pat Friesen, David Waltner-Toews, Di Brandt, to name only the best-known ones — are preeminently called, I believe, to challenge us as Mennonites, to revitalize us by calling our very identity into question, to test and probe our lives — our very souls — to see what makes us tick. And we must pay attention to them now, while they are still speaking to us directly by creating art out of their Mennonite experience. In a few years this vibrant, crucial phase of our culture will be a thing of the past as the best of our writers and artists will move on to wider, non-Mennonite themes and subjects and take their rightful places among Canadian artists speaking to all Canadians. And then who will show us what we are as Mennonites?

Or will we even care?

— Al Reimer

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