



Bethel  
College

North Newton, Kansas

Newsletter of the Mennonite Library and Archives  
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### SCHEDULE OF MENNONITE STUDIES EVENTS

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Oct. 29-31, 2006: Menno Simons Lectures: Helmut Harder of Winnipeg, Manitoba, on the International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue

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### THE FIRST MENNONITE IN KANSAS

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Who was the first Mennonite in Kansas? Paul Erb in his 1974 book *South Central Frontiers* described A. H. Martin as “the first Kansas Mennonite of record.”<sup>1</sup> Martin is listed as a subscriber to the Mennonite newspaper *Herald of Truth* in a list of subscribers published in March 1866.<sup>2</sup> He was the only subscriber listed for Kansas; his location was given as “Meniola.” Erb erroneously identifies this with Minneola in Clark County in western Kansas. In fact there was a Minneola post office in Franklin County in eastern Kansas from 1858 to 1865.<sup>3</sup>

If subscribing to the *Herald of Truth* makes him a Mennonite, then Abraham H. Martin was the first Mennonite for whom we have any record of living in Kansas. He was born at Clarence Center, New York, May 28, 1832, son of Abraham W. Martin and Maria Horst. He married Mary Ann Enders on March 25, 1860. They moved immediately to LaPorte County, Indiana, and then in 1865 to Kansas. He died at Overbrook, Kansas, (in Osage County), January 2, 1902.<sup>4</sup>

Knowing only this meager outline of Martin’s story, we’re left to wonder what his relationship to Mennonites might have been for the rest of his life, since no Mennonite congregations existed near his region of Kansas.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Erb, *South Central Frontiers: A History of the South Central Mennonite Conference* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 159.

<sup>2</sup>*Herald of Truth*, “Extra Edition to No. 27,” vol. 3, no. 3, whole no. 27, March 1866, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup>Robert W. Baughman, *Kansas Post Offices, May 29, 1828-August 3, 1961* (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Historical Society, Kansas Postal History Society, 1961), 85. The Clark County Minneola did not begin until 1888.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel S. Wenger, ed., *The Wenger Book: A Foundation Book of American Wengers* (Lancaster, PA: Pennsylvania German Heritage History, 1978), 280. Obituary in *Herald of Truth*, Feb. 15, 1902, vol. 39, no. 4, p. 61.

# Gleanings

from the  
Threshing Floor



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### 1787 FLYER

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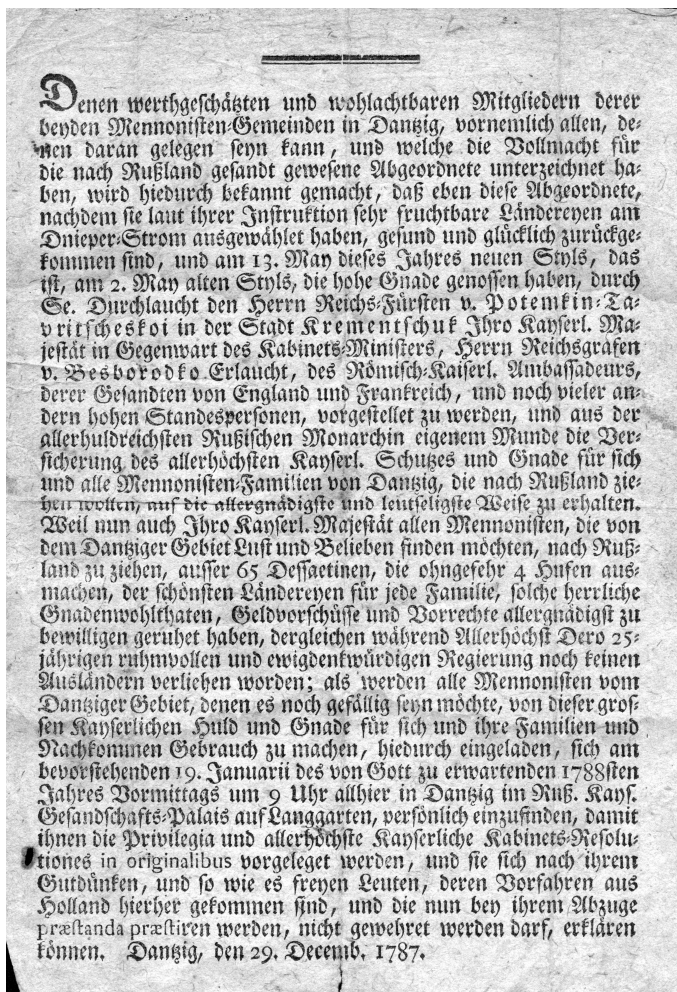
The archival/library world uses the term “ephemera” for items such as brochures, programs, and flyers—printed documents with short-term purposes. Usually ephemera don’t survive beyond their intended short-term time period. But the page pictured here is an example of Mennonite-related ephemera that is 218 years old.

The epic story of Mennonites in Russia began with the work of a traveling salesman for the Russian government, Georg von Trappe. This is one of what were probably several different flyers handed out by Trappe in the late 1780s among Mennonites in the Danzig area.

This one was preserved for much of the following two centuries in a Friesen family Bible. In 1793, an Abraham von Riesen (1769-1817) bought the Bible from an unknown previous owner; it is a 1630 Luther translation published in Strasbourg. He may have been the recipient of the 1787 flyer or possibly it was already in the Bible from the previous owner.

The Bible remained in the von Riesen/Friesen family in Russia and was then brought to Canada in the 1870s, was taken to Paraguay, back to Canada, and then to Minnesota in about 1950. At some point after 1950, the flyer was taken out and framed for display. Both the Bible and the flyer were brought to the Mennonite Library and Archives in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

February 2006, No. 7



The text of the flyer, in English translation:

To the highly esteemed and right honorable members of both Mennonite congregations in Danzig, especially all those who are concerned and who signed the authorization for the delegates<sup>2</sup> sent to Russia: You are hereby informed that these very delegates have returned safe and sound, after selecting very fruitful lands along the Dniepr river according to your instructions. On May 13 of this year, new style—that is, May 2 old style—they enjoyed the high privilege of being presented to Her Imperial Majesty in the city of Kremenchug by His Highness Prince Potemkin-Tavricheskoi, in the presence of the cabinet minister the illustrious Count Bezborodko, the ambassador of the Holy Roman Empire, the ambassadors of England and France, and many other persons of high rank. And they received from the all-gracious Russian monarch's own mouth, in a most merciful and kind manner, the assurance of the most high imperial protection and favor for themselves and all Mennonite families from Danzig who want to move to Russia. Now her imperial Majesty has most graciously deigned to grant to all Mennonites of the Danzig region who may desire and please to move to Russia: 65 dessiatines (which is about 4 Hufen<sup>3</sup>) of the most beautiful land for each family, such grand and gracious benefits, advances of money, and privileges the like of which has not been granted to any other foreigners in Her Highness' 25 year glorious and forever memorable rule. All Mennonites of the Danzig region who may wish to accept this Imperial favor and grace for themselves and their families and descendants are hereby invited on the coming 19th of January in the coming year of 1788, in the morning at 9:00 o'clock, to personally

appear here in Danzig at the Russian Imperial embassy on Langgarten street, so that the privileges and most high Imperial cabinet resolution can be put before them in the original, and they can at their discretion declare themselves, as free people whose ancestors came here from Holland and now, at their departure, must not be hindered from carrying out their obligations.

Danzig, 29 Dec 1787

<sup>1</sup>This information about the travels of the Bible and flyer comes from family member Jacob T. Friesen of North Newton.

<sup>2</sup>Johann Bartsch and Jacob Höppner left Danzig on 31 Oct 1786.

<sup>3</sup>About 175 acres or 71 hectares. Dessiatine is the imperial Russian unit of land area. Hufe was the Prussian unit.

## ANABAPTISTS IN "ALTERNATIVE HISTORY"

Recently I was reading a novel by Harry Turtledove (yes, that's his real name), a science fiction writer who is known mainly for his "alternative history" novels. Turtledove is a good writer, as popular science fiction writers go, and also has academic credentials as a historian, with a 1977 Ph. D. from UCLA. His dissertation was titled "The immediate successors of Justinian: a study of the Persian problem and of continuity and change in internal secular affairs in the later Roman Empire during the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius II Constantine (A. D. 565-582)."

The novel I was reading, *How Few Remain* (Ballantine, 1997), follows one of the favorite themes of what-if writers, an alternative Civil War. Turtledove has the Civil War of the 1860s end in stalemate, followed by a second civil war in the 1880s (the main focus of *How Few Remain*), a third in 1914, and a fourth in 1941. A significant minor character in *How Few Remain* is Alfred von Schlieffen (of the World War I German Schlieffen plan), who observes the 1880s war as a military attaché to the United States.

On p. 51, introducing Schlieffen to the story, Turtledove calls him "a devout Hutterite"!! Turtledove is usually pretty accurate with details, but here obviously he made a mistake. What did Turtledove think he was saying here? I posted this question to the readers of Mennolink, the online Mennonite email list. Lin Garber, an inveterate Mennolink commentator, with access to the resources of the Harvard University libraries, followed the trail a bit further. As I suspected, a previous scholar has confused "Hutterite" with "Herrnhuter," the Moravian pietist group. A book by Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen, and Prussian War Planning* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) makes reference to Schlieffen's elementary schooling in a Herrnhuter school in Germany, which Bucholz erroneously calls "Hutterian," even footnoting John Hostetler's *Hutterite Society* without discovering his confusion. Presumably, then, Turtledove relied on Bucholz for his description of Schlieffen as a Hutterite. Bucholz continues in his confusion: his review of two books about Schlieffen in the *Journal of Modern History*, March 2005 (p. 220) again refers to Schlieffen as a "self-contained Hutterian."

Turtledove has a couple of other Mennonite tidbits:

• On p. 94 of *How Few Remain*, there is a Sergeant Neufeld, a fleeting character in the U. S. Army, crewing a Gatling gun.

• In a sequel following the alternative history into the twentieth century—*Settling Accounts: Return Engagement* (Ballantine, 2004)—one thread of vignettes takes place in Rosenfeld, Manitoba, the U. S. having conquered Canada from the British. On p. 610 we read, "A lot of the farmers in these parts were Mennonites who went along with the central authority, whatever it happened to be."



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## AMISH IN THE SECULAR MEDIA

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*The Atlantic* during 2005 has been running a series of articles commemorating the bicentennial of the birth of Alexis de Tocqueville, whose 1835 *Democracy in America* is a classic commentary on American national character. Bernard-Henri Lévy, a French writer and philosopher of secular Jewish background, reports on his experiences in the United States for *The Atlantic*. The May 2005 issue includes a visit to the Amish near Kalona, Iowa.

Lévy's knowledge of the Amish beforehand seemed to be limited to the movie *Witness*. Writing under the subheading "The Place of the Fanatics," he seems rather clueless, as he stops first at Pella and Amana before arriving at Kalona. He describes a couple of brief personal conversations with Amish shopkeepers but doesn't seem to get very far. His main interest is political philosophy, and he concludes that "For the Amish, the United States is not a country but an abstraction, a fiction." (p. 79)

One insightful comment: "Who are the Amish, then? . . . A case, unique in the West, of an *a-communal community*." [emphasis mine]

Lévy concludes,

They are witnesses not of God, but of America. The real, final pioneers. The only ones who haven't given in, haven't summed up their religion as the 'In God We Trust' of banknotes. They are witnesses to a lost purity. The heirs of the *Mayflower*. The silent witnesses, truly silent, since, unlike the Indians or the blacks, they don't say anything, don't demand anything, and above all don't reproach others for anything. Silent witnesses, then, to the values that were those of America but on which America has turned its back since it sold itself to the religion of commodity.

Not anti-America but hyper-America. A conservatory. A remnant of the Bible's meaning. America's living bad conscience but, once again, silent. You betrayed the ideals of the Founding Fathers? Turned your back on your principles? America is a failed country? An unrealized utopia? Well, then, here we are. Just here. We don't criticize anything. But we are the Amish. The profound, hidden, forgotten, denied truth of America, alive in us. (p. 80)

*Technology Review*, published by MIT, "describes emerging technologies and analyzes their commercial, economic, social, and political impact for an audience of senior executives, researchers, financiers, and policymakers, as well as for the MIT alumni." Ed Tenner writes a column called "Megascop: A look at the big picture." The July 2005 column (p. 75) focuses on the Amish. Tenner praises them for being innovators in hydraulic and compressed-air technologies because of their resistance to being dependent on the electric utility grid. He recognizes a range of differing views about technologies among the Amish. "Amish life might not be utopian, but it remains one of America's oldest and most robust technological experiments, with something to teach the rest of us."

*Time* magazine, in its Oct. 24, 2005, issue (vol. 166, no. 17, p. 124), with a focus on "What's Next," the near term trends in technology, included an essay by Joel Stein, a regular humor columnist. Stein took what he thought was a contrarian approach to the "What's Next" theme. "What never changes?" he asks, and turns to the Amish. He, like Lévy, makes reference to the movie *Witness*. "They [the Amish] still feel pretty screwed over by that *Witness* movie." Stein found his way to Donald Kraybill for some authoritative information, and garnered tidbits about a hodgepodge of issues: Amish uses of cell phones and rollerblades, the rising land prices of Lancaster County and consequent

emigration, Amish opposition to a local Wal-Mart, women owners of Amish businesses, Amish opposition to government requirements for photo IDs, and changes in approaches to mental health treatment.

Stein concludes, "I couldn't help feeling depressed by all this new stuff the Amish are doing. Not just because yet again a little bit of reporting had ruined a simple, elegant joke, but because if the Amish can't stay the same, what hope is there for the rest of us?"

Unfortunately, Stein doesn't really understand that the Amish aren't trying to stay unchanged but to change deliberately and intentionally in ways that are compatible with their understanding of Christian discipleship.

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## MORE ON MENNONITES AND FLIGHT

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In the previous issue of *Gleanings* (No. 6, Oct. 2004) we had some brief stories of early Mennonite aviators, in recognition of the 2003 centennial of the Wright brothers. That article prompted a few additional comments:

- Gary Waltner of Weierhof, Germany, emailed further details about the Freeman, South Dakota, story: "Uncle Alvin Waltner who died a few weeks ago and my father, Felix, a younger brother, were both pilots, and flew the plane that is presently in the Museum in Freeman. My father flew from Freeman to attend the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. In the local area the brothers were known as the Flying Waltners or the airplane boys, and often gave rides to local people. The pilot who was hired to teach the Waltner Brothers to fly was also a Mennonite from Nebraska. His name was Andrew Risser from the area of Norfolk, (maybe Aurora) I believe. Risser's parents were from the Palatinate (Friedelsheim Mennonite church near Bad Dürkheim). Andrew visited the Mennonites of South Dakota by plane several times. He is the one who really created interest in flying for the Waltner Brothers, who were all mechanically inclined." (email of 19 Oct 2004)

- Kevin Enns-Rempel, archivist at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California, reported: "In 1910 Jacob H. Klassen built and flew a monoplane in the Los Angeles area. A sketch and description of this plane appears in *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1910-1911* (p. 335). We have a photo of the plane with Klassen standing to the left. We don't know much about Klassen or his plane." (email of 28 Oct 2004)

- Keith Sprunger, emeritus history professor at Bethel College, brought up the story of Paul F. Rohrer of Berne, Indiana. Rohrer crashed and was killed Nov. 30, 1916, Thanksgiving Day, in a plane he had built himself.

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## HUTTERITE ROCKETS?

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Annually during the summers, hobby rocket flyers gather for an international convention called LDRS. (Originally the acronym stood for "Large Dangerous Rocket Ships." See [www.tripoli.org](http://www.tripoli.org)) The 24th such gathering took place in July 2005 near Lethbridge, Alberta, the first time LDRS was held outside the United States. The launch site was on a Lehrerleut Hutterite colony!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Rick Clapp, "LDRS 24," *Extreme Rocketry* 49 (Nov. 2005), 20.

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## VISTULA MENNONITE STUDIES PROJECT

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The story of Mennonites in the Vistula Delta (what is now northern Poland) is one of the less thoroughly studied chapters of Mennonite history, especially in English. This is despite the fact that it is the fountainhead of the Russian Mennonite experience, which features so prominently in North American Mennonite experience. The history of Mennonites along the Vistula river in eastern Europe deserves more intensive cultivation.

The "Vistula Mennonite Studies Project" focuses on the collection of archival material, and the translation and publication of historical texts about the Vistula Mennonites.

Mark Jantzen, assistant professor of history at Bethel, and John Thiesen, archivist, continue to work on editing a draft translation of H. G. Mannhardt's *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* [The Danzig Mennonite Congregation] (1919), a history of one of the leading congregations. We hope to publish the translation as part of the C. H. Wedel series sometime in 2006. We also have a draft translation of Wilhelm Mannhardt's *Die Wehrfreiheit der altpreussischen Mennoniten* [The Military Exemption of the Prussian Mennonites] (1863). This is the central historical work on the Vistula Mennonite story. This translation will also be published after the Danzig translation is completed.

Donations toward this project to help with publication costs and future archival collecting are always welcome.

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## GRANDMA DATA ENTRY

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The GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry AND Database of Mennonite Ancestry) database has significantly changed Mennonite biographical and family history research. The project is sponsored by the California Mennonite Historical Society (<http://www.fresno.edu/affiliation/cmhs/gpc/home.htm>).

The MLA has been submitting information to the GRANDMA database project from its early stages in 1993. We have focused mostly on original church membership record books that reflect the immigration to the plains states in the 1870s. So far we have entered all of the data from the following church record books and other sources:

- Alexanderwohl (Kansas) and its predecessors in Russia and Poland (Przechowka)
- Hoffnungsau, Inman, Kansas
- Bethesda, Henderson, Nebraska
- Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, Henderson, Nebraska
- First, Mountain Lake, Minnesota
- Karlsruwalder, Turner County, South Dakota
- a book labeled "Mennoniten Gemeinde im Turner County," South Dakota
- Emmanuel, Moundridge, Kansas
- Bergthal Mennonite Church, Pawnee Rock, Kansas
- Heinrichsdorf, Volhynia
- Michalin-Gnadenberg-Grace Hill record book of Volhynia and Kansas
- Lonetree (Holdeman) church of Moundridge, Kansas
- Friedensthal (Central Heights) church of Durham, Kansas
- scattered records of Low German Volhynian families
- Bethel Mennonite Church, Inman, Kansas
- the former Bruderthal Mennonite Church near Hillsboro, Kansas
- the former Johannestal churches near Hillsboro
- First Mennonite, Hillsboro

- Emmaus Mennonite Church, Whitewater, Kansas
- 9 of 11 vols. of Albert J. Ruth, "Ruth Family Genealogy," a typed compilation held by the MLA. (One of the 11 volumes is an index and another is a collection of photos and texts. These two volumes were not entered in the database.) Some financing for this project was provided by Dale and Bertha Galle of Moundridge, Kansas.
- Goessel, Kansas, Mennonite Church
- First Mennonite, Newton, Kansas.
- First Mennonite, Beatrice, Nebraska
- Hebron, Buhler, Kansas
- First Mennonite, Halstead, Kansas
- First Mennonite of Christian, Moundridge
- Lehigh, Kansas, Mennonite Church
- Tabor Mennonite Church, rural Newton, Kansas
- Zion Mennonite Church, Elbing, Kansas
- Mennoville Mennonite Church, north of El Reno, Oklahoma

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## FRIENDS OF THE MLA

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The purpose of the "Friends of the Mennonite Library and Archives" (and friends of the Mennonite Church USA Archives-North Newton) organization is to provide a more active sense of support and participation for the MLA and to promote Mennonite studies in general for the central Kansas audience.

Annual membership in the Friends of the MLA is \$25. Please become our friend!

Since the last newsletter we have sponsored the following programs:

- Oct. 12, 2004, Jim Juhnke, "The Boehr-Samuelson 1994 Contest in Kansas' 74th District"
- Nov. 19, 2004, Sandra Birdsell, "*Katya: A Novel of Mennonite History*"
- Apr. 14, 2005, Jeff Gundy, poetry reading (co-sponsored with Bethel College English department)

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## WEDEL BOOK SERIES

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At the end of 2004 we published vol. 13 in the C. H. Wedel book series, poet Jean Janzen's *Elements of Faithful Writing*, based on her Menno Simons lectures at Bethel in fall 2003. This volume was published jointly with Pandora Press of Kitchener, Ontario.

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## MENNONITE LIFE ONLINE

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Just a reminder that *Mennonite Life*, published by Bethel College since 1946, continues to publish quarterly on the web at <<http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife>>.



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**IDENTIFY THIS**

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Can you identify either of the unidentified photos below?

