MENNONITE LIFE

DECEMBER 1978

In this Issue

This "Canadian" issue illustrates again that the Mennonite experience does not restrict itself to national boundaries—and that research continues on many facets of this broad theme.

In an engaging essay on Johann Warkentin, an early Mennonite Brethren farmer-minister of Winkler, Manitoba, we find the fruit of joining biography with wider family research. Countless others deserve the sensitive telling of their life story as Peter Penner has done. The stalwarts of the past must remain our companions today, for they keep pointing at what is not yet.

There is a similar thrust in John B. Toews' portrait of another farmer-minister, Diedrich Gaeddert, a Mennonite from Russia who eventually left his homeland to live in Kansas, USA. Using the seemingly routine, yet detailed contents of a personal diary, the author is able to fill many blanks regarding our knowledge of every-day life and work in nineteenth century south Russia.

The translation of P.M. Friesen's impressive historical work provides added motivation and a fitting context for creating items like the Gaeddert account. John Friesen's review of *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia 1789-1910,* and Jake Letkemann's analysis of two other Russian Mennonite translations, help to commemorate this important publication event of 1978.

Whether the Low German studies of Doreen Klassen and Peter Petkau signify a more general "renaissance," or simply a clinging to what must inevitably disappear, time alone will tell. There appears to be a growing interest in the language and its role and significance, in Canada at least. For the uninitiated the dialect drama titles and verses may be confusing—or possibly a challenge to rise up and join the Low German-speaking pundits if they can.

Opening the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg has been an event itself. The brief comments on function and purposes are an invitation to all readers: Drop by sometime, and look in!

Lawrence Klippenstein

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Front cover

A view of the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Back cover

P. M. Friesen (1849-1914), teacher, minister and historian at his desk.

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By Reason of Strength: Johann Warkentin; 1859-1948

by Peter Penner

One of the most remarkable yet little known leaders of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada is Johann Warkentin. His life spanned three formative generations of his chosen denomination. Though he served the first and leading Canadian congregation, Winkler, for twenty-five years (1906-1931), hardly more is known of him then the eulogy-obituary in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* of 2 June 1948. Not even the handbook, *The Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler* (1963) provides much more than that.

It is a pity that such a man appears, serves without much public notice, and disappears in the obituary column. Only the family remembers. Fortunately, in this case, an articulate member of the family, the sixth-born, and fourth son, Bernard (Ben), has been able to portray the man who bloomed where he was planted.[2] Ben freely admitted the difficulty in trying to recapture completely the "myriad facets of character." Nevertheless, the son has heightened our awareness of the tree that stood tall and green, giving shelter in its lifetime, and warmth of remembrance when cut down.

Johann Warkentin never stood out like the Bible expositor A. H. Unruh who was a member of his congregation from 1925 to 1944. Nor did he have the fervor of H. S. Voth, the evangelist, who married Warkentin's oldest daughter Susan and succeeded as church moderator in 1931. What is important, however, is to know what kind of man it was who served the Winkler MB Church as moderator longer than any other, and in its formative years. It will be helpful to divide Johann Warkentin's life into two broad categories. First, the migrant-teacher-family man and, second, the farmer-preacher-church moderator.

Johann Warkentin was born in Nieder-Chortitza, South Russia, on 29 September 1859. His family came to Manitoba in the immigration of 1879, and settled at Kronsfeld, today's Haskett. One Sarah (Krahn) Loewen settled at nearby Osterwick. They married in the church of the parents, the Old Colony Mennonite congregation, on 23 October 1881. Naturally gifted with a keen and enquiring if not brilliant mind, Johann turned to teaching. For eight years during the 1880's he taught in the village of Hoffnungsfeld, just outside Winkler, for the "traditional acre" by way of payment.[3] Hoffnungsfeld then proved to be the center of a sort of *Kulturkampf*, transplanted from Russia. It was here that progressive old Colony types like Warkentin, and the Bergthaler minister, Jacob Hoeppner, along with Heinrich Voth, a Mennonite Brethren itinerant evangelist from Minnesota, USA, were seeking to capture the hearts and minds of Sommerfelder and Old Colony cousins. While Warkentin seems to have given satisfaction for eight years (he also served as the village watch repair man), Jacob Hoeppner, the "progressive-minded school teacher," who introduced Bible studies and four-part harmony singing, lost his contract over such innovations.[4]

Meanwhile, in the Warkentin family the first children arrived, Susan on 15 October 1882, Jacob on 26 February 1884, and Isaac on 27 November 1885. At that rate, would child-rearing lead the mother to an early grave? And how would such a family be supported?

According to son Ben, Johann had pledged that he would never deliberately deprive his children of educational opportunities as he had been deprived by his father. Therefore Johann and Sarah must have rationalized controlled family growth for, after Isaac's birth, there was almost invariably a two-year span between children. Ben explains in his inimitable way how it was that there were ten children in nineteen and a half years, rather than in fifteen years, as was often the case in that century.

> This spacing of a family . . . was not an accident. There was a certain amount of ribald amusement when my brother-in-law [H. S. Voth] smugly and piously informed us by letter that the 'Giver of all good and perfect gifts had presented them with another evidence of His Love.' In my father's family the enlargement was not left to chance, nor even to the goodwill of the Maker. I am satisfied that my father was too intelligent, too observant, too conscious of his responsibilities as a thinking man to leave so important a matter as the size and pattern of his family to chance. So, between [my parents] there was intelligent family planning, so that my mother . . . did not die, as so many women died in those [pioneer] days, because they were worn out by hard work and childbearing.

It was, in fact, Sarah's lot to

reach the promised threescore and ten, dying in 1930, twenty-nine years after her last child. Her husband, and all of her children exceeded that Old Testament standard of longevity. The eldest five lived between 85 and 90 years; the youngest, Tiena, is 77, and the eldest of those living, Ben, is 86.

To support such a family the father turned to farming. And why not? According to Ben, his father knew carpentry, masonry, and blacksmithing. He was a good machinist, and inventive as well. In time he became a relatively prosperous farmer, working five quarters at the corner of the Pembina Road and Highway 32. But he never became wealthy. According to Ben, his father could have been really prosperous had he put his ready business sense to percentages. With the help of his boys he worked more and more land, but this had to be paid off. At the same time he made loans to further the education of his children who, for the most part, turned to teaching for varying periods.

Some of them, certainly Helen and Ben, attended Heinrich H. Ewert's Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna. Isaac, Ben, and two others, completed degree work at the university, a fairly rare phenomenon in Mennonite circles in those days. One daughter, Helen, found parental support for a long period of service as a missionary in India (1919-58). There were fairly good investments made, in terms of business acumen, but there were also those who found in Johann an easy target for loans and borrowings, some of which were never repaid or returned. 'A brother in deed to those in need!' was part of his character.

The Jakob Warkentin family, Chortitza, south Russia, about 1870. Johann is standing on the left (back row).

Johann Warkentin was a man's man, a man for six stalwart sons. His life began in hard work. He once told Ben of his father's hauling wheat a distance of 70 *verst* to Odessa on the Black Sea. Though the story sounds apocryphal Johann Warkentin once crossed the Dnieper River, "treading water and playing the accordion all the while." Johann was, in any case, a very strong man. Fortunately for his children, he was a gamesman too. Even on a Sunday, for some hours of relaxation, he would join in a game of baseball. Until age seventy, he skated with his family. He never discouraged his sons from hockey or soccer. At home the children played "Flinch," as a substitute for the "devil's cards." Checkers and chess engaged the wits of father against son. Here the father's occasional impatience might show up. Ben remembers one chess game. Johann had lectured his children about trying too hard always to win. On this occasion, "fortune favoured" Ben, but the father tried desperately to escape checkmate. Carried away by his own desire to win that game, the father, "with an expression of disgust . . . , swept the pieces off the board, and that ended the chess game."

More serious was an altercation between father and son when the binder Ben was using broke down. When three binders are in synchronized operation, and everything is supposed to run smoothly to achieve the cutting and binding of ripened grain, it is all too easy to lose patience. When one binder caused trouble it was the father's practice "to take over the machine in trouble," and to let one of the sons drive on with the father's machine. On this occasion Ben's attention had been devoted to placing his whip-holder at a more convenient spot on the machine. He needed the whip frequently to prod "old Tim," the Indian pony, the "laziest and trickest in four counties." At the same time he must hold the reins, manip-

ulate levers to drop the sheaves, all this for one still undersized, perhaps aged 12 at the time. When the knotter developed trouble, and the father came over to help, and noticed Ben's attention devoted to the whip-holder, the father gave him "a solid clout on the ear (eine Ohrfeige!)."

Next morning was Sunday, and the Rev. Johann Warkentin came into the kitchen, where Ben was alone, with Bible in hand ready to go preaching. Ben writes:

> He called me over and told me that he wanted me to forgive him for giving me that clout on the ear. He told me that I had deserved the punishment, but that he had acted in a fit of temper, and he could not forgive himself for having lost control of his feelings. He could not go to church until this failure to live up to the standard of behaviour which he had set himself to observe was at least eased by his confession of failure, and by my forgiveness.

Johann was obviously not the pious-in-the-dias type. The healthy vertical God-man relationship depended on horizontal man to man relationships uncluttered by failings, unforgiveness, and grudges.

The father gave deserved punishment and asked forgiveness when stricken in his conscience. But he would not praise his children, and played no favourites. "Praise for work well done was not forthcoming. As he set a high standard of performance, he expected nothing less of his offspring. That we should do well in school was taken for granted. Being his children, we could do no less." In 1908 Dr. Fletcher, deputy-minister of Education in the Manitoba government, came to the Warkentin farm to congratulate Ben for achieving the highest mark in the province on a certain examination for his second-class certificate. Ben was then rather remarkable for being bilingual in German and English. But would Johann let Fletcher see his son personally? Ben was around the place, "but my father made no effort to find me, so that I did not see the deputy minister. He excused himself to me afterwards when I heard of the visit by saying that he thought that I was shy, and therefore might be embarrassed in meeting strangers." The real point, however, was that it was "not necessary to make any fuss about something which he considered quite an ordinary thing" in his family. "La-

The Johann Warkentin family, Winkler, Manitoba, ca. 1896. Seated l. to r.: Helen, little Sarah, Ben on the rocker, Peter on the lap of Mother Sarah; standing l. to r.: Jacob, Father Johann, Isaac, Susan, John.

ter," Ben writes, "when I was awarded scholarships and a gold medal they elicited no special attention."

If there was little room for congratulation, there was almost less for overt affection. Though the Warkentin family were by no means loveless, the parents reflected an age when intimacies were still a cause for embarrassment. For parents discovered by a six-year old to be giving "a kiss of love" was cause for hurried unclinging. Anyway, there was no time for heart to heart talks with ten children. The demands of the five quarters, the careful preparation of the weekly sermon, and the calls on his time from the district conference held the preacher-farmer captive, a slave to the plough, the lamp, and the brotherhood.

A scene in early spring. The Warkentin farmhouse and summer kitchen, built in 1904.

Yet precisely in that farming operation lay the traditional foundation for confidence in Warkentin as a leader. Mennonites in pioneering days were not chosen moderators of congregations unless the man was able to manage his family as well as his farm, and the two combined. Leaders could not become a financial burden. Demonstrated self-support was essential. More was required, however, to make a Mennonite Brethren farmer-preacher-moderator. He and his spouse had to be soundly and demonstrably converted in order to satisfy the standards brought by evangelist Heinrich Voth. How did Johann and Sarah as Old Colony Mennonites break out of the conservatism which "resisted revivalism"? How in the 1880s were they acculturated to the Mennonite Brethren way?

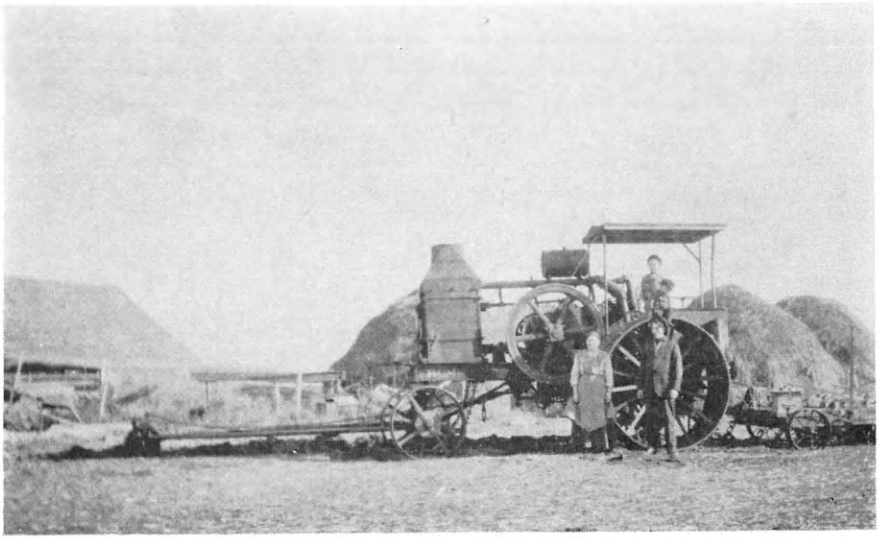
To the M.B. evangelists like Voth and David Dyck who came north from Minnesota and Kansas, the Mennonites of Manitoba needed to be converted. The village of Hoffnungsfeld particularly was seen as a trial of strength for various evangelists, not least by Voth. Its people were seen as without spiritual vitality and Scriptural assurance of salvation. In Johann's case, according to his daughter Tiena, a Methodist preacher had already sparked a spiritual interest in Johann. Perhaps speaking in German or Russian, English Methodist missioners met transient immigrants at points like Liverpool. When he settled in Manitoba, Johann had already become a seeker after clarity in matters of his soul. This search continued while he taught in Hoffnungsfeld. It was there he was converted in April 1885 and testified to H. Voth in June that he had found forgiveness. As a result of the preaching of Voth and others, Johann and Sarah in 1890 joined the Mennonite Brethren congregation at Burwalde, northwest of Winkler, first formed there in 1888. Presumably this meant *Wiedertaufe* (rebaptism) for them.[6]

Immediately the 31-year old Warkentin began to serve in the Sunday school. Having picked up four-part singing, perhaps in Hoffnungsfeld, he also directed the choir. In order to prepare himself for an ordered ministry, he went to Bingham Lake, Minnesota, Heinrich Voth-country, to take some theological courses. At home during the cold winter months, he read the Scriptures and, in his mature years, studied Hebrew with the aid of Winkler's Jewish merchants. According to Ben, only this could satisfy his rational approach to the Bible. Did the English and German translations "truly represent the Word of God"?

Having served as a *Mitarbeiter* (a sort of minister-elect), Johann was ordained to the Gospel ministry in 1895. In the very next year he was elected to assist the moderator of the growing Burwalde congregation, the Rev. David Dyck. He was there when its members decided to move into or very near Winkler. For a few days, in October 1897, the small church building rested, like the Ark of the Covenant, on the wagons of the congregation, while its members deliberated on the degree of urbanization that could be tolerated. Eventually "reason won over prejudice" and the first Canadian M.B. congregation went urban-rural nine years after it was founded.[7]

Throughout these formative years of the congregation Johann served as the assistant moderator. When Dyck moved to Saskatchewan in 1906, Johann was a matured and natural choice as successor.

From the paucity of commentary on Johann Warkentin as leader and preacher one might deduce that he was unexceptional. Frank Brown, the Winkler historian, remembers Warkentin's sermons on low key, "rather suited to the message which often expressed the love of God."[8] As Ben put it decisively, his father was "not a spell-binder, nor a hell-raiser." Unlike his son-in-law, H. S. Voth, Johann did not believe in



Johann and Sarah Warkentin with their Rumely tractor on the home farm.

brimstoning his audiences. He was a quiet-spoken "shepherd of his flock," reaching the heart without neglecting the mind. There was "no attempt at rhetoric or profound delving into obscure Scripture." He tried to live the Gospel. Away from the pulpit he influenced people by quiet persuasion, unafraid of incongruities between pulpit and performance. Among his friends he counted other Mennonite leaders: the Rev. H. H. Ewert, Gretna educator, and Bishop Jacob Hoeppner of the Bergthaler Church.[9]

Even though he withdrew from the active ministry in his last years, his eulogists considered him at age 88, until his last illness, to have always exuded a certain freshness and vigor in his bearing as well as providing edification by his earnest prayers. To the end he exhibited a vital interest in the ongoing work of the various M.B. conferences. He served on the various boards of the *Bundeskonferenz* of the M.B. Church. He even married a second time, taking as his wife the widow Elizabeth (Hooge) Dyck.[10]

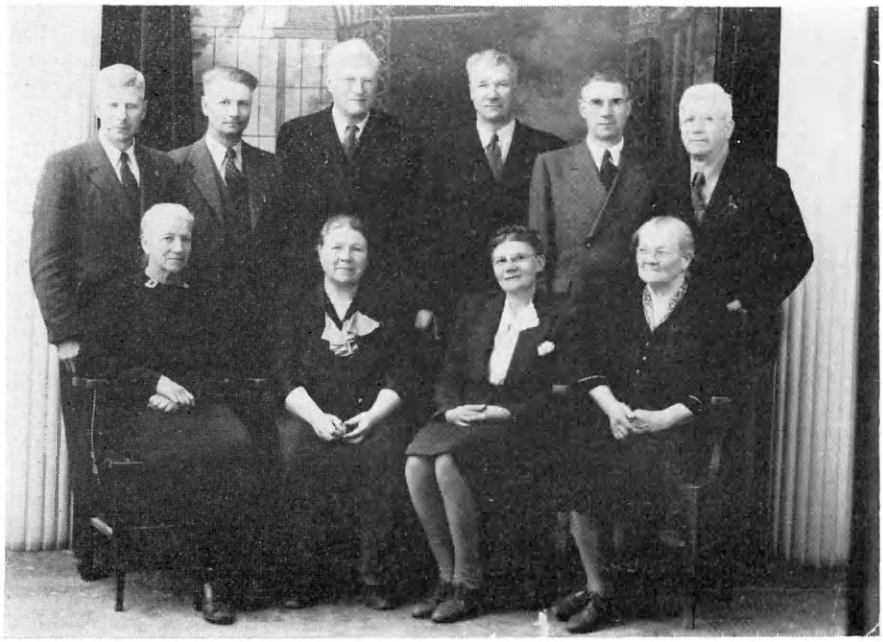
His interest in missionary outreach blossomed in 1907 when he assisted a fledgling group of Mennonite Brethren to become established in Winnipeg. He made frequent trips to Winnipeg to edify this "small flock" by preaching. Then he discovered a small chapel for sale and a vacant lot at Burrows and Andrews Streets, in the North End, on which to place it. In this way Warkentin helped to form the nucleus of the North End (now Elmwood) M.B. congregation.[11] Nor was he loathe to help new congregations become established at nearby Kronsgart and Grossweide in the years before the Great War.[12]

In 1914 the question of non-resistance became a matter of church discipline. Ben put the question into context as follows:

> Though my father was only partly German by blood, and though he had never been a German subject, he was prepared to excuse the German violation of Belgian neutrality by comparing the German action to the violation of Hebrew law by David when he ate the shew-bread in the temple. I imagine he felt that necessity knows no law. I never heard him pray for a German victory.

What brought matters to a head, however, was Ben's desire, while at University, to enlist in the British Army. "My father held firmly to the doctrine of non-resistance to aggression. We asked what he would do if his wife or his daughters became victims of brutality." His answer was one that many M.B. ministers have given: "He said he would pray fervently that the Lord would give him strength to hang on to his principles, and not use his strength to resist the intruders."

The ten children of Johann and Sarah Warkentin: Seated l. to r.: Helen, Sarah, Tiena, Susan; standing l. to r.: Peter, John, Isaac, Ben, Cornelius, Jacob. Taken before 1970.



When Ben first enlisted, the father threatened to "lie down in the doorway so that I would have to step over his body if I persisted in going. He did nothing of the kind. Later on, when I was an ambulance driver in France, he even bragged that he had a son engaged in Red Cross work." During the Second World War there seems to have been a general change of attitude in Winkler. For Warkentin, participation was "no longer a matter of church discipline"; the decision must be left to the individual.

During the inter-war period, Warkentin carried the burden of church leadership until 1931. In the relatively prosperous decade of the 1920s, the life of the Winkler M.B. Church was considerably altered by the influx of the Russian Mennonite migration. In fact, as is well known, Abram H. Unruh in 1925 brought with him from the Crimea in Russia the nucleus of a Bible institute. Soon joining were two other teachers from the Crimea, J. G. Wiens and G. J. Reimer. Modelled after Wiens' own experience as a theological student in Hamburg, Germany, this school as transplanted provided one model for a Bible school curriculum.[13] This progressive and educated element from Russia [*die Russlaender*] led to problems of incorporation into a congregation whose membership had come from the migration of the 1870s [*die Kanadier*]. The newcomers were considered worldly and overbearing, and perhaps unwilling to pioneer, while the *Russlaender* found the *Kanadier* backward and uneducated.[14] The local church historian, however, claims there was no noticeable friction between Johann Warkentin and the new theological leadership provided particularly by the soon esteemed A. H. Unruh. Though there were some tensions during the years of merging the traffic of new and old ideas, it was not the moderator's fault. Wiens on that side, and H. S. Voth on the *Kanadier* side, could sometimes be misunderstood, but not Warkentin.[15] Himself a "progressive" among his own kind in the 1880s, he found less difficulty than some in accommodating the newcomers.

Johann Warkentin, as he appeared about 1936 on returning from a mountain climb at Banff, Alberta.

In this way Johann Warkentin became an admirable example of the farmer-preacher-moderator type so common in the years before the Second World War. He was a successful pioneer as a farmer, a respected head of a large family of educators and farmers, and an accomplished promoter of church and conference extension work. He gave thoughtful leadership to the Winkler congregation, helping in the flowering of that congregation in the 1920s, and providing a thoughtful, though subdued, influence in the depression decade. All told, he served in Winkler when that Mennonite Brethren congregation exerted considerable influence on the Canadian and General Conference scene.

For the family, blessings have extended to the third and fourth generation. Johann Warkentin's unfulfilled desires for the development of his potential were realized in his children and grandchildren. Given their opportunities in Canada, they developed, in academic and other ways, the potential Ben believed his father possessed. What he missed was "the stimulation of a wider range of studies . . . of contact with the best minds . . . and the opportunity of doing research on his own." The son obviously thinks his father would have gone far in a time more favourable to his intellectual development.

In summary, Warkentin not only had a shaping influence on an entire congregation, but also a wholesome progenitive influence on a family. What more can one ask of unpretentious greatness?

Notes

[1]Psalm 90:10 in the *New English Bible* reads: "Seventy years is the span of our life, eighty if our strength holds; the hurrying years are labour and sorrow, so quickly they pass and are forgotten." The title is taken from the King James Version.

[2]Ben Warkentin, "A Study in Personality: My Father Johann Warkentin" (an unpublished 1978 paper of nine pages written at the request of the author). Unless otherwise indicated, every quotation or factual detail is from this paper.

For a brief study of Ben Warkentin, see Peter Penner, "Ben Warkentin, Educator and Sage," *Mennonite Reporter* (31 October 1977), 17.

[3]Tiena Warkentin to Arnie Neufeld, "Rev. John Warkentin: Leader of the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church" (a November 1975 unpublished statement of two pages). Hereafter Tiena.

[4]Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada* (Macmillan, 1974), 283-300.

[5]Epp, 298.

[6]Tiena; some recollections from Johann Warkentin in Frank Brown, *The Mennonite Brethren Church, Winkler, Manitoba* (1888-1963) (D. W. Friesen, 1963), 6.

[7]J. A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (1975), 155.

[8]Frank Brown to Peter Penner, 19 May 1978.

[9]Tiena.

[10]*Mennonitische Rundschau* (2 June 1948), 1.

[11]Toews, 156.

[12]A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Bruedergemeinde* (1954), 493.

[13]Toews, 113-114.

[14]E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia,* in Toews, 164.

[15]Brown to Penner.

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A Russian Mennonite: The Diary of Dietrich Gaeddert (1860-1876)*

by John B. Toews

Dietrich Gaeddert was born on March 2, 1837, the eldest son of Jacob and Elisabeth Ratzlaff, both of Alexanderwohl, Molochnaya. At nineteen years of age he was baptized in the Alexanderwohl church and married Maria Martens three years later in 1859. Six of their thirteen children did not survive infancy. Their mother died in 1874, after fourteen years of marriage. As a young man Dietrich studied under Heinrich Buller, a minister in the Alexanderwohl church who provided a moderate, quite conservative, education.

The Russian Mennonite historian P. M. Friesen, in a rather harsh judgment of the migration leaders of the 1870's, wrote: "These men knew nothing of and wanted nothing from Russia, except its rich, fertile soil and its czar as a lofty abstraction, who was only real to them as the giver and protector of the great *privilegium* . . ." He included Gaeddert as one of "these men."[1] Friesen's status as a cultured, progressive Mennonite as well as his inherent suspicion of the emigration motives somewhat obscured his assessment of men like Gaeddert.[2] Friesen, whose generation surpassed Gaeddert's by virtue of its advanced training in Germany and Russia, never really understood the intellectual restrictions placed on men like Gaeddert by the Russian Mennonite *Weltanschauung* of the 1840s and 1850s.

Gaeddert taught in Rueckenau until March, 1862, then left for Fuerstenwerder where he began teaching on September 3.

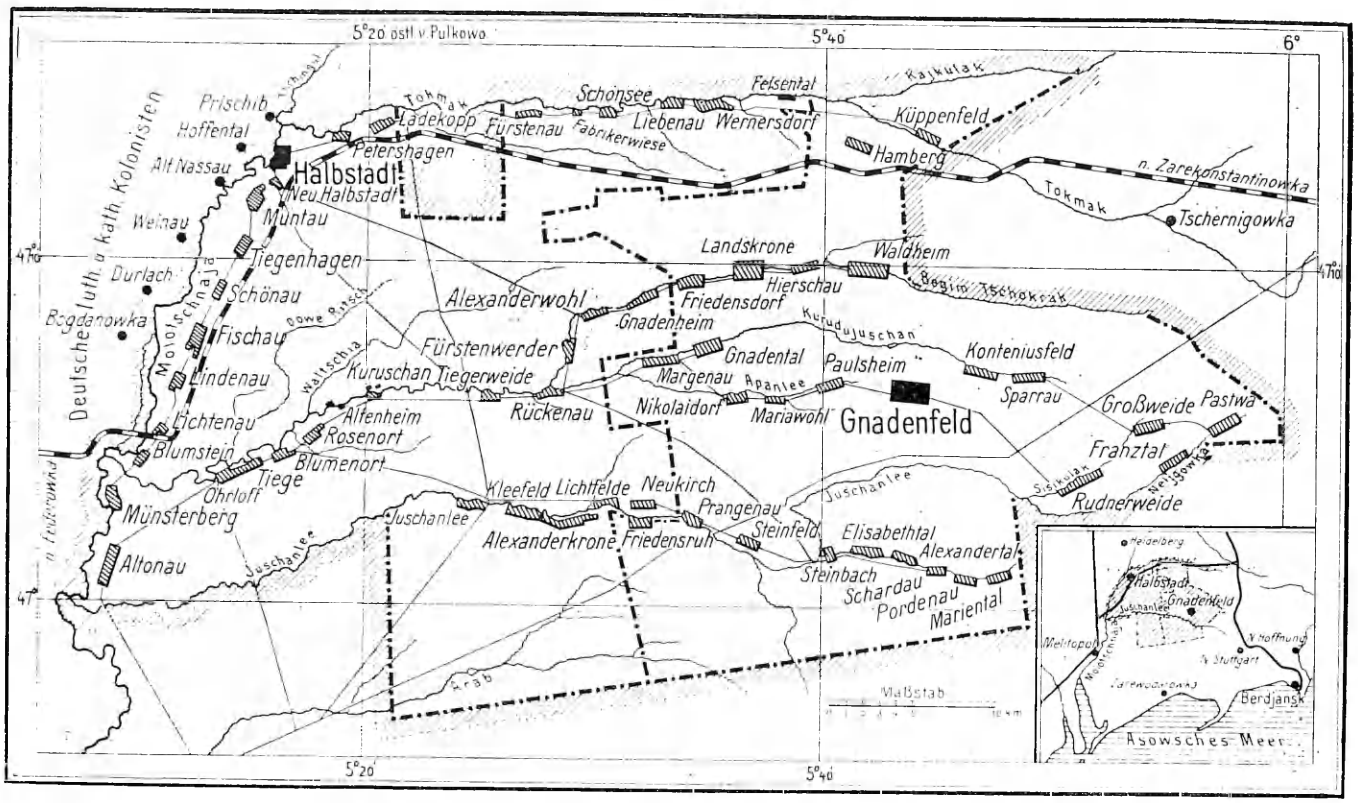
In both of these localities he faithfully recorded his day to day experiences. The document with its brief and terse entries provides an amazingly detailed record of Gaeddert's life as villager, teacher and eventually minister. As a teacher-minister he functions comfortably as an integral member of the local community. He is content with village values and norms and displays no heroic compulsions as a reformer. Throughout his diary he reveals himself as a man of modest talent and intellect who fully acknowledges his limitations, yet gives himself ungrudgingly to the service of his community. He recorded the mundane activities of the everyday world: the weather; the planting and harvesting of grain; the caring for domestic animals and birds; the produce of the family garden. He displays a steady affection for the church and the community which the church embraces. Regional fires, accidents, domestic tragedies, festivals, illness and deaths—all find notation in his diary. Gaeddert is content with the borders of his world, which by and large do not transcend the Molochnaya settlement.

The diary coincided with two of the more significant developments in nineteenth century Russian Mennonitism: firstly, the religious revolt of the Mennonite Brethren, and secondly, the struggle of propertied and landless Mennonites. St. Petersburg ultimately intervened (1865) in the question of land distribution and similarly upheld the right of religious dissent in the Russian Mennonite community. Such high drama passes virtually unnoticed in Gaeddert's diary. He focuses on the immediate family and the local village. His diary, because of its parochial character, provides one of the most authentic portraits of community life collectively as well as the intellectual-cultural interests of a typical village school teacher.

When Gaeddert began his diary in 1860 the religious traditions and practices of the past five decades had forged a stable and predictable pattern of village piety. As a member of the Alexanderwohl church Gaeddert may on occasion reflect the congregation's conservative inclinations, derived in part from its Old Flemish origins. Aeltester Peter Wedel, who led the group from Prussia in 1820-21, was active until Jakob Buller was elected to succeed him in 1869.[3] Alexanderwohl possessed a strong sense of continuity both as a community and a religious group. Gaeddert, as he emerges from his diary, vigorously participated in the social and ecclesiastical activities of his people. He had no reservations about their norms or way of life.

Gaeddert's yearly religious calendar reflects few radical innovations. Sunday services in Rueckenau and later Fuerstenwerder were held once a month, with occasional exceptions. On April 17, 1860, for instance, Regehr of Waldheim (one of the church teachers) preached at Rueckenau. The following Sunday Gaeddert drove 6¼ versts to participate in the weekly service held at Alexanderwohl. On May 1 he stayed at home. He was preoccupied

*The diary is preserved in the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.



A map of the Mennonite Molotschna colony, founded in 1803-1804.

with more worldly interests: his silkworms were hatching. There was also distressing news from Waldheim, Marienthal and Elisabetthal where cutworms were destroying the roots of the young crops. The next Sunday (May 8) Dietrich returned to Alexanderwohl to hear the aging Mennonite Aeltester Peter Wedel. In mid-May Rueckenau again held its monthly service. As in most years the celebration of Pentecost interrupted the normal pattern and a second village service was held on May 22. The next day the Gaeddert's drove to Alexanderwohl since the annual baptism was always held on the second day of Pentecost. Wedel celebrated only two communion services (June 19 and November 27), in 1860, and Gaeddert attended both.

On the religious scene 1860 was a quiet year. There was momentary discomfort in the Rueckenau service on August 21 when the customary guest speaker failed to arrive. Gaeddert felt it appropriate to read a sermon from the Wuerttemberg pietist Ludwig Hofacker (1798-1828). Gaeddert makes only two references to the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren. The traditional three days of Christmas were celebrated in 1860: villagers worshiped locally on December 25; Gaeddert drove to Alexanderwohl for the services on December 26 and 27. On the evening of December 27 he stayed for a special *Bruderschaft* (brotherhood meeting) which probably focused on the dissenting brethren (literally *wegen die Frömmler.*) Gaeddert does not elaborate. Some time later (March 12, 1861) he refers to *der heutigen Bruderschaft* (today's Brotherhood meeting) and its concern with David Goerzen who had left the church and now wished to be readmitted. Goerzen was officially received back on March 19, 1862.[4]

Some of Gaeddert's religious activities were invariably connected with his role as the village teacher. Teachers' conferences, usually concerned with curriculum and methodology, met several times a year. Gaeddert designates these as "general conferences" lasting one day and probably involving the teachers from nearby villages. An assembly on May 14, 1860, "dealt with Bible Stories (*biblische Geschichte*)," at another on August 15 "we practised several melodies," as they did at a further conference on August 27. At the mid-August session Dietrich "saw the new choral books for the first time and immediately bought a copy for one silver ruble," which represented one percent of Gaeddert's annual salary. Judging by the price of the choral book, Gaeddert probably purchased H. Franz (ed.), *Choralbuch: Zunächst zum Gebrauch in den mennonitischen Schulen Südrusslands* (Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1860). It contained 223 pages.

The rhythm of Gaeddert's religious life does not change substantially between 1860 and 1868. His religious schedule is prescribed and he follows it rather closely. Preachers (*Lehrer*) were elected annually and Dietrich occasionally felt it worthwhile to report the results. In 1860 (December 1) B. Harder was elected in Halbstadt, F. Klassen in Ladekopp and P. Friesen in Tiegenhagen. Throughout this period Gaeddert seems to have been

in charge of the monthly service in Rueckenau, which was regularly staffed by ministers from neighboring villages. If *Ehrsamer* Buller or Aron Rempel didn't show up, the meeting often dissolved (February 12/61). In later years Gaeddert either read a sermon or "with God's grace" preached his own. One other socio-religious duty fell to Gaeddert as the village teacher: he was usually requested to write the customary wedding and funeral letters (*Hochzeits und Begräbnis Briefe*) which were then sent from farmstead to farmstead and read aloud by a horse-mounted messenger.

The tempo of Gaeddert's spiritual concerns increased remarkably during 1868. He delivered his first sermon on February 11 (Text: Jer. 1:1-7). His comment deserves a plaque on some seminary wall: "Thank God, for in His grace He helped us." Henceforth he is much more meticulous in recording the texts and themes of other preachers in his diary. A very pervasive influence on Dietrich seems to have been the preaching of Heinrich Dirks, the first missionary sent out by the Russian Mennonites under the Dutch Board of Missions. Dirks studied at the *Missionshaus*, Barmen, Germany between 1862-66 and was ordained as a minister at Gnadenfeld in 1867. Gaeddert first became acquainted with him on March 10, 1868, when he and two other teachers (Wedel and Giesbrecht) went to Neukirch to hear Dirks preach. Two days later he confided to his diary: "The more one learns to know brother Dirks, the more one loves him."[5] On the third day of Easter (April 2, 1868) Dirks preached in Alexanderwohl. Some weeks later at the Gnadenfeld missions festival (third day of Pentecost, May 21) Dirks preached his farewell sermon to over 1,500 listeners including an attentive Gaeddert, who recorded the essence of the sermon in his diary. Dirks left on May 27 for further study in Europe, first at the Barmen *Missionshaus*, then Amsterdam. Dietrich accompanied him as far as Halbstadt. He and others in the village followed Dirks' progress with interest. One Sunday evening (August 11, 1868) they gathered in the local school to twice read a letter from Dirks in Amsterdam. The diary suggests a widespread interest in missions.

A Mennonite farmstead and the new church house of the Mennonite Brethren congregation in the village of Rueckenau, Molotschna colony in the latter part of the century.

Approximately one month later (September 15, 1868) Dietrich and two other teachers travelled to a Lutheran missions festival in Prischib to hear Rev. Zeller from Stuttgart as well as the local pastor, Keuchel. In December (27) a special missions service was held in Fuerstenwerder with Richert, Buller and Gaeddert preaching. Following his first sermon in February, 1868, Gaeddert expanded his ministry in both scope and content. He spoke frequently following the same itinerant ministry which characterized monthly services in his own village: Rudnerweide and Schardau in May; Fuerstenwerder and Halbstadt in June; Kleefeld and Elisabethal in July; Liebenau and Mariawohl in August; Paulsheim and Neukirch in September. In October he preached at the Rueckenau harvest festival. On July 14 he confided "because of laziness I relied on an earlier text," namely Hosea 6, utilized in Halbstadt on June 16.[6]

Preaching and missions remained the dominant theme in Gaeddert's religious experience throughout 1869. He apparently attained considerable popularity emerging with the second highest number of votes when the elder elections were held in Alexanderwohl during February. In mid-April Dirks returned from Amsterdam. Again Gaeddert tried to hear him preach whenever possible and usually described his sermons in considerable detail. Dirks spoke on Psalm 117 at a Gnadenfeld missions festival on June 10. It was possibly through the preaching of Dirks that Russian Mennonite audiences heard portions of J. N. Darby's (one of the main founders of the Plymouth Brethren, 1800-1882) dispensationalism for the first time. Gaeddert seemed amazed that Dirks related "the millenium (*tausendjaehrige Reich*) to this text (Psalm 117)." On this oc-

casion Gaeddert also preached "a little bit on Psalm 105:1."[7]

Approximately two months later Gaeddert and Dirks shared the pulpit at Neukirch.[8] Dirks outlined "the course of the Kingdom of God since Adam" and pointed to the culmination of God's plan—the millennium, the anti-Christ, Gog and Magog, the destruction of the earth. The exegetical lapse notwithstanding, Dirks then outlined four major mission tasks. Another mission festival followed on August 24. Again Dirks spoke of the millennium, the "marriage of the Lamb," and the "new Jerusalem." In the evening Gaeddert went to visit *Aeltester* Buller. Dirks happened to be there and "drew me a chart of the plan of God's kingdom."[9]

Well over 3,000 people attended the Gnadenfeld church for the August 31 ordination of Heinrich Dirks as elder and missionary. The Gnadenfeld *Aeltester* August Lenzmann ordained Dirks and asked him to answer some "very deep questions." Then came the greetings and words from a number of other *Aeltesters*, Isaak Peters of Pordenau; Benjamin Wedel of Waldheim; Leonhard Sudermann from Berdjansk and the two Alexanderwohl *Aeltesters*, Peter Wedel and Jacob Buller. On September 1 Gaeddert drove Dirks to Mariawohl to visit Dirks' ailing mother-in-law, Mrs. Schroeder. Unfortunately she passed away just prior to their arrival. Gaeddert made a second journey to Mariawohl on September 13 to bid Dirks farewell. On that occasion Dirks read a Scripture and "prayed powerfully." *Aeltester* Wedel also spoke "a brief prayer."

Henceforth Gaeddert's diary is again concerned with local issues and problems, the most significant of which focus upon the government's intention to introduce compulsory military service. Russification pressures, especially the use of the Russian language in schools and local government, had already caused considerable apprehension throughout the colonies. Gaeddert's references to these new pressures occur almost casually, usually in connection with *Aeltester* conferences. Two such meetings in 1870 (January 16 and February 7) nevertheless had a very different agenda. The Waldheim *Aeltester*, Benjamin Wedel, "only wishes to baptize by immersion," which the "church does not approve." The *Aeltesters* (and others) met again on February 7. Wedel refused to change his position and since the church would not compromise "its old rules and practices," the Waldheim *Aeltester* was deposed by a vote of 30 to 7.[10]

On December 17, 1870 Gaeddert noted the first Alexanderwohl Conference of *Aeltesters*, which turned out to be a preliminary meeting; it scheduled a more representative gathering for January 5, 1871, at which "measures to discharge the military service" would be taken. When the day arrived "any teachers" and "almost all *Aeltesters*" were in attendance. Isaak, Goerz, Janzen and Sudermann were elected to travel to St. Petersburg. For Gaeddert the issue was closed: "Now we think there will be peace. God grant it."[11] He did not see an impending crisis. Gaeddert participated in another *Bruderschaft* (church meeting) held at Rudnerweide on the morning of July 4. Again the issues were self-evident: another delegation to St. Petersburg "to request the Czar to prolong our military exemption"; the question of foot-washing was deferred pending "further study"; the *Aeltester* asked the brethren to ease "their strife and quarreling." Gaeddert viewed life wholistically. In the same entry he noted that one of his pigs had died, the other became sick, and that he had cut barley in the afternoon. The *Aeltesters'* trip to St. Petersburg was mentioned at a Rudnerweide *Bruderschaft* on December 27, but only in connection with a levy to cover expenses. The major issue involved the election of four ministers from eight candidates.

Migration was briefly mentioned in a February 4, 1873 entry. A special meeting held in the Pordenau church elected a delegation to send to America. Among others it included Buller of Alexanderwohl, Sudermann of Berdjansk and Wiebe from the Bergthaler colony. Over a year later (April 22, 1874) Gaeddert mentions the migration question again: Todleben from St. Petersburg has arrived. A *Bruderschaft* held at Rudnerweide concluded that the Mennonites might work as tailors, saddlers, shoemakers, workers in wood and iron, but not participate in military-related activities. If the government could not accommodate these wishes emigration was the only alternative. "Oh Lord strengthen our faith in this recently troubled time."[12] By May 19, 1874, it was clear that the aging *Aeltester* Ratzlaff was leaving for America. On that Sunday he preached his farewell sermon in the Rudnerweide church after serving the community as *Aeltester* for 35 years. The following Sunday (May 26) Gaeddert listened to two minister at Pordenau likewise delivering their farewell sermons. Over a year later (June 26/75) Gaeddert and his wife drove to the local railway station to bid adieu to a train load of emigrants. July 20 saw Gaeddert in Rudnerweide where an *Aeltester* Goerzen read a memorandum which the next deputation to St. Petersburg hoped to deliver to the czar. In 1875-76 Gaeddert attended several auction sales of people leaving for America and even makes a few purchases. He apparently left Russia late in 1876, though his diary provides no hint as to when or why he decided to do so.

There is no substantial shift in the content of Dietrich Gaeddert's religious-intellectual awareness between 1860 and his departure from Russia. As a parishioner, teacher, and later a minister, his experiences revolved about the central villages of the Molochnaya settlement. He not only frequented the various churches within a given year, but heard most of the ministers and *Aeltesters* of the region preach as well. This exposure was by and large a reaffirming experience, with two possible exceptions. The presence of missionary Dirks introduced Gaeddert to a new preaching style which he greatly admired, and to a new theology—at least as far as missions, eschatology and perhaps Christology was concerned. Dirks' stress on the despised and suffering Savior [April 30, 1869] is pos-

sibly reminiscent of Zinzendorf and Herrnhuterian pietism. Dirks' charisma possibly inspired Gaeddert in his early ministerial career (1868-69), when he was virtually a circuit preacher. By the 1870s he had either exhausted his inner inspiration or the available reference material. He began to read the sermons of the Mennonite minister Jacob Denner (1659-1746), Altona near Hamburg, rather regularly. Gaeddert nowhere indicates when or where he obtained the book or which edition he utilized (it was printed in at least five German editions). If nothing else the sheer size of the book (c. 1300-1500 pages) must have impressed the listeners. On at least one occasion Gaeddert read from Spurgeon's sermons.

A second distraction affecting Gaeddert's sense of intact theology related to possible new influences generated mainly within the Mennonite community. He makes only two incidental references to the activities of the Mennonite Brethren and none whatsoever to the emergence of the Templers. The only new dimension which apparently had a sustaining influence on Gaeddert were the Gnadenfeld mission festivals. These translated into occasional *"Missionsstunden"* (mission meetings) at the local church level. With the exception of Dirks, his exposure to other outside speakers was very limited. Once a Herrenhuter preacher from Prussia named Friedemann spoke in Rudnerweide (May 19, 1874). On another occasion an English missionary, "who could only express himself poorly in German" preached in Alexanderwohl (January 9, 1870), while several months before a converted Jew also preached locally. In 1872 two *Aeltesters* from the Ostrog Mennonite colony spoke in Rudnerweide [May 31]. The occasional visits of Leonhard Sudermann from Berdyansk, though inspiring, did not seriously affect Dietrich's mindset since they offered no radically different theological diet.[13]

What role might teacher's conferences, periodicals and books have played in Gaeddert's intellectual life? The conferences were certainly purposeful and sought to enhance the professional competence of the teacher. They appear singularly free of the contemporary notions associated with conventions and not only focused on methodology but better content in teaching. Gaeddert was particularly impressed with those sessions that dealt with singing, though usually the other areas also figured in the discussions: reading, arithmetic and Bible history.[14] One particular dimension of the diary troubles the reader: with the exception of Denner's, Hofacker's and Spurgeon's sermons Gaeddert never mentions reading a book or buying one, except for the new choral book in 1860. Dietrich mentions books in only one other entry. On May 15, 1862 he observed: "The Society (*Verein*) has obtained twelve books for us school teachers which we are to examine. If any others are needed we are to inform the Society." Only once does Gaeddert refer to periodic literature. Early in 1871 he subscribed to *Volksbote and Sonntagsblatt*.[15] Publications like *Mennonitische Blätter, Friedensglocke, Sueddeutsche Warte, Odessa Zeitung* and *St. Petersburg Zeitung* were known, but do not seem to have penetrated Gaeddert's world. Perhaps it was simply an oversight in recording or may reflect intellectual poverty locally.

A page from an arithmetic notebook of a Mennonite pupil in south Russia (ca. 1830).

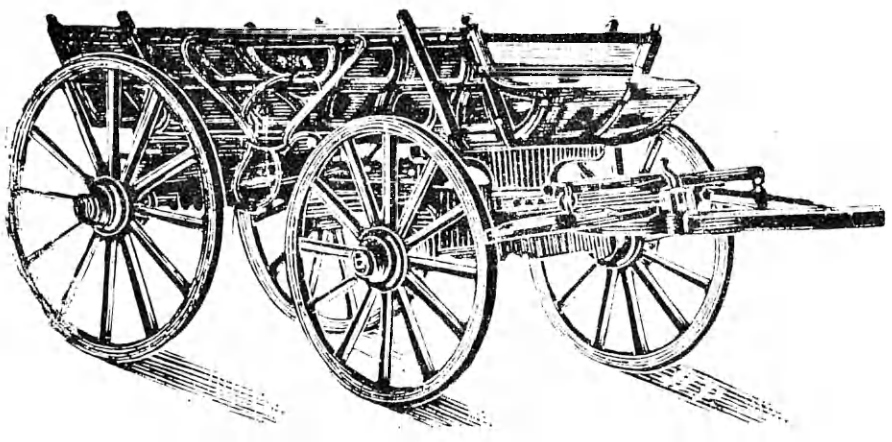
Dietrich was not unhappy with his lot or role. Nowhere does he complain about his pupils, his constituency or his annual salary. Gaeddert received no cost of living adjustment or merit increment: his 1861 contract was "like the one of the past year."[16] The village expected him to provide a basic literacy for the children. He was also the village scribe who prepared wedding and funeral letters, or acted as a spiritual leader between the monthly Sunday visits of Mennonite *Aeltesters*. After Gaeddert begins active preaching in 1868 he cites his religious activities in great detail. At best his teaching activity is described by terse comments like: "School has begun. God help me!" [Sept. 3, 1862]. Perhaps Gaeddert symbolizes one aspect of the Mennonite intellect during the 1860s: he prefers to work within the context of the old and the traditional and avoided all possible ideas and stimuli which violated time-honored patterns. He preferred to reflect the prevailing norms and patterns, not change them. In some ways he illustrates the cultural-intellectual transition of the 1860s and 1870s. Gaeddert's training and intellectual prowess as a village teacher and minister was still adequate during these two decades. By 1880 he would have faced competition from local better-trained teachers as well as even more formidable intellects trained in German, Swiss and Russian seminaries and universities.

Farming

Gaeddert's farming activities fill the largest portion of his diary. While at Rueckenau his yearly contract called for a salary of 100 rubles, 20 chetverts of grain and a four-dessiatine allotment of arable land.[17] When he signed his contract with the village of Fuerstenwerder some two years later, the salary was again 100 rubles plus some 22½ chetverts of grain as well as the "usual hayland."[18] Gaeddert appears to have resigned from teaching in late February, 1865. "I have held *Schulprüfung* (examinations attended by the general public) for the last time in Fuerstenwerder," he confided to his diary.[19] Earlier in the year he purchased his parent's farm in Alexandewohl for 2,000 silver rubles,[20] and planted his first spring crops. The first harvest produced 132½ chetverts of grain.[21] Gaeddert apparently never went back to teaching, though he did take part in the examination of young teachers and participated in the various *Prüfungen* held in village schools.

Gaeddert's accounts of his farming provide an excellent reflection of the cycle of Mennonite agricultural life in the mid-nineteenth century. There is a sense of boredom in his accounts during January and February: snow storms; low temperatures; the monotonous feeding of farm animals. The tempo of activity increased during March. Usually he was able to begin work on the fields[22] and plant barley and oats and at times wheat. By mid-April the garden had been planted, including the melon patch. By now the sheep, pigs, cows and horses had given birth to their young while the chickens and ducks were placed on their eggs. During the lull before the haying season in late May and early June the necessary repairs were made on buildings, implements and harnesses. June brought a flurry of activities: rye had to be cut and tied, a slow and laborious process which apparently utilized the scythe, and in later years a mechanical cutter. Not long after, often during the first days in July, wheat, barley and oats were similarly processed. The sheaves were then brought under shelter and the threshing process, lasting most of July, began. When Gaeddert reported that he had "begun to roll out the wheat"[23] he referred to the cylindrical threshing stone with raised wedges pulled around a circular floor by horses. Invariably there were situations demanding immediate attention, like potato bugs and grasshoppers.

August brought a less strenuous pace. The grain harvest was usually complete and Gaeddert enjoyed the fruits and vegetables of his garden. He was especially fond of watermelons, which began to ripen in early August. After the middle of the month he was picking them in large quantities (August 22—174; August 24—173) and converting them into syrup.[24] September passed rather quietly. There were still a few potatoes to dig, animals to sell, trade or purchase, and regional fairs to attend. In October cattle, but more often pigs were slaughtered and prepared for the larder. Immediate family and friends worked cooperatively moving to each others farmsteads and in the course of a day rendered the butchered animals into hams, sausages and head cheese. Increasing night frosts hastened the last preparations for winter. In November the size of the duck and chicken flocks were reduced while the sausages and hams were hung in the specially designed kitchen chimney for further curing. December passed quietly. A few cattle or horses were sold or traded, the flock of sheep culled and possibly new stock added. Weather permitting, some grain might be taken to market.



Travel

Gaeddert was a sociable person and seems to have lived amidst a gregarious society. Friends and relatives were numerous, hence there were frequent evening visits in Alexanderwohl as well as Sunday trips to other villages. Journeys to Halbstadt by horse-drawn wagon meant an overnight stop. Acquaintences enroute supplied accommodation while Gaeddert's home frequently provided reciprocal hospitality. Life from day to day was restricted to the confines of the Molochnaya settlement. Throughout the 1860s Gaeddert apparently never left the colony; his only awareness of the outside world came via occasional contacts with visitors, often visiting clergymen. In 1872 Gaeddert travelled to Berdyansk for the first time and even swam in the sea.[25] The next fall (October, 1873) he left to visit relatives in Chortitza. It was a exhilarating experience, at least judging by the length of his diary entries. His journey took him due north to Schönwiese (not far from Zaporzhye), at that time the nearest railway center. He was astounded by a new railway bridge "made entirely of iron" and the local station with its buildings, railway cars and several locomotives. It was all "very wonderful to see."[26] He and his horse-drawn vehicle crossed the Dnieper river by ferry, arriving at Einlage. Gaeddert then proceeded directly to his next of kin in Chortitza. Sightseeing dominated the first day of the visit: the factory of Lepp and Wallman with its seventy-five or one hundred employees as well as Niebuhr's steam driven mill. The widow Voth apparently catered to the local tourist trade with her colorful hand-made aprons. Gaeddert bought forty of them. Now it was time to visit—first with acquaintances in Chortitza, then in Shoenhorst and Neuendorf.[27] On October 29 Gaeddert bade farewell to all the "uncles and aunts" in Chortitza and left for home. Following a brief stop in Halbstadt for two cans of "petroleum" (coal oil?) the journey continued uneventfully. He stopped at Reimers in Prangenau for *Vesper* (late afternoon snack) and arrived in Alexanderwhol before dark.[28]

Scenes of the Chortitza colony on a post card about the turn of the century.

On September 3, 1875, Gaeddert left by horse and wagon for the "land of Zagradovka." It was his most eventful trip before his emigration to America. The journey to the village of Alexanderfe'd took three long days. They left as early as four or five in the morning: there were roads muddied by rains; frequent stops to feed and rest the horses; ferries to be crossed.[29] On the evening of the third day the wagon and its passengers arrived at the farmstead of his brother-in-law, Abraham Woelk. The next day "Woelk drove us around. We had letters to distribute as well as other messages. We were in Orloff, Tiege and at Mrs. Fast in Schoensee. In the evening we visited at Bernhard Friesens and spent the night at Isaaks."[30] Three more days of intense interaction with friends and relatives followed, during one of which "we all went to the fair."[31] Now the return journey commenced. Again there were horses to feed and ferries to cross. The inevitable Prangenau *Vesper* stop came on the last day of the journey, at John Peters. Later that evening Gaeddert arrived home, thankful that the "faithful Savior had protected and preserved against all danger."[32]

Home Remedies

Medical or dental help was virtually unavailable. When Gaeddert's son Jacob was injured by a horse they went to Wiebe in Lichtfelde for treatment of the affected shoulder.[33] Wiebe's chiropractic and orthopedic skills were apparently widely respected, though there is nothing to suggest that he possessed any formal medical training. His broad expertise was simply assumed. Gaeddert's wife contracted a severe finger infection as a result of an injury. The wound continued to fester and finally Wiebe was consulted. He "prescribed salve and oil."[34] In the absence of medical help home remedies were very much in fashion. At times Dietrich washed his eyes with warm milk to relieve irritation.[35] Dietrich's sister who contracted colic was treated with a hot mustard plaster "until it burned." It was then removed and a tallow compress put in its place. Camomile and lilac branches were soaked in hot water, then laid between two towels and placed on the abdomen.[36] Camomile in a hot bath was felt to possess

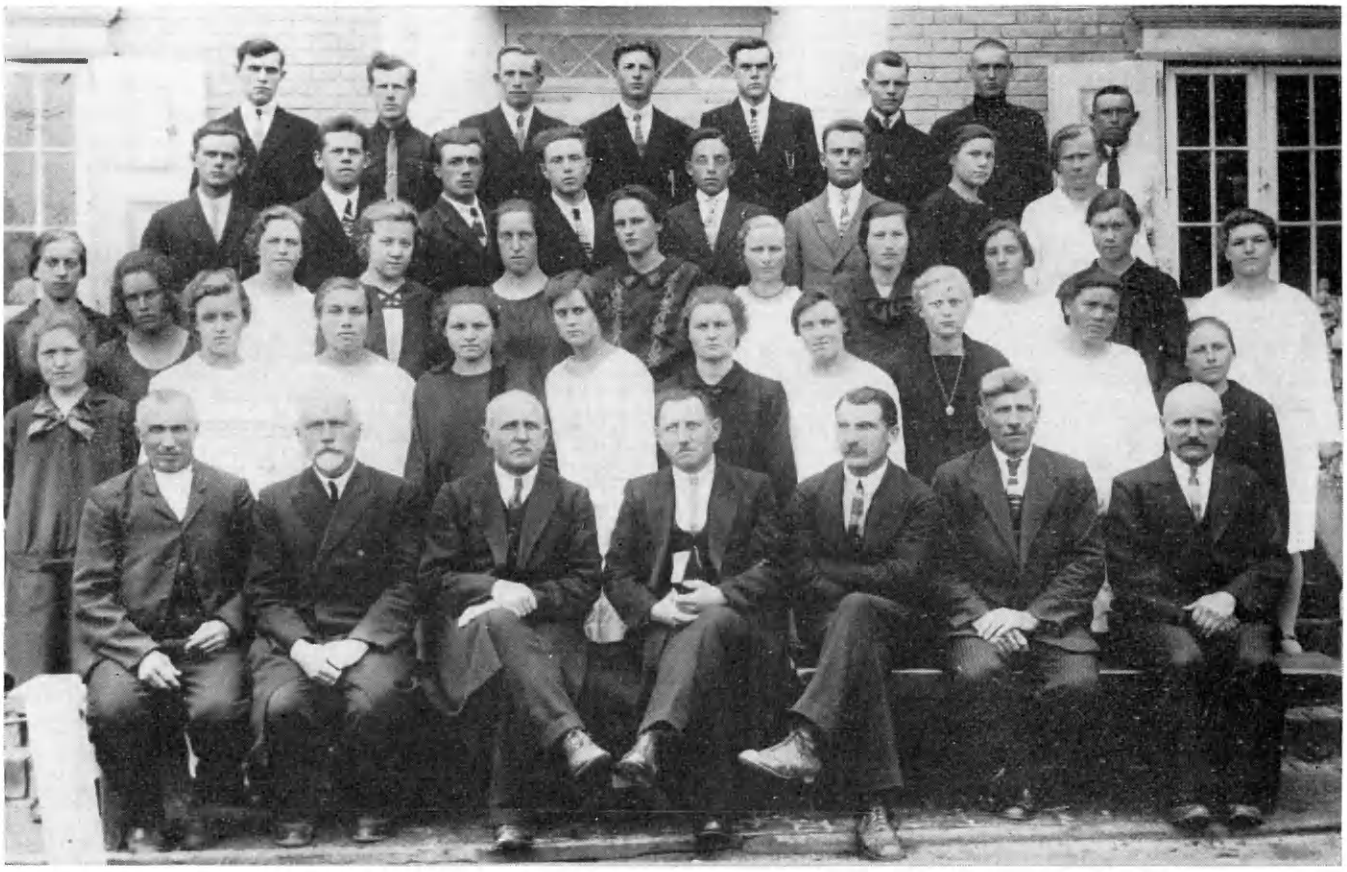
special curative properties.[37] Local practitioners usually disposed of bothersome teeth by pulling them, as fillings and dentures were unknown. Even then tooth-related ailments were costly. Gaeddert was somewhat incensed when the local specialist Baergen "really charged me for my toothache."[38] Some treatments revealed good common sense. When Kornelius Richert was bit by a spider (black widow?) and became rather ill, the affected area was bled, a tourniquet applied and vomiting induced. Thereupon his feet were bathed in a hot salt solution.[39] Ten days later another villager was bit by a spider.[40] In all probability the same treatment was applied. No special treatment facilities existed to cope with mental illness. When John Unruh became *seelenkrank,* Gaeddert and others took turns in keeping the night watch.[41] We don't know the outcome of the vigil; perhaps brotherly love was more effective than we suspect.

One special elixir found regular usage. Gaeddert implicitly believed in St. Paul's advice: "a little wine for the stomach's sake." There were periodic trips to Halbstadt in order to purchase *Branntwein* (spirits) or beer, sometimes in substantial quantity.[42] There were memorable evenings like the one on May 25, 1862, when the Gaedderts visited the Martens. It was a balmy evening with a temperature of 26°C., and the "sweet booze" made it even more enjoyable.[43] Even this most delectable medicine had its limitations. The community had to deal with Kop's and Müller's drunkenness and face the fact that the night watchman hung himself after a drinking spree.[44] In Gaeddert's case, however the diary consistently suggests a moderate, restrained use of alcoholic beverages.

Childbirth, Children and Death

From a contemporary viewpoint it is difficult to grasp the hazards associated with childbirth and early childhood in mid-nineteenth century Mennonite Russia. Gaeddert's diary suggests the local mid-wife was readily available and usually assisted in most births. The skills involved, however, were those of a traditional folk art. Little new knowledge by way of techniques or hygenic methods was added. There was frequent infection and at times death.[45] Gaeddert accepted a high infant mortality rate as a routine fact of life. There was his 7½ month old son Franz who died of an "illness," his daughter Maria fatally strickened by dysentery.[46] The threat of the common childhood diseases was a constant one. On August 10, 1868 Dietrich preached at the Liebenau funeral of the 9 month old daughter of J. Martens

A baptismal group at the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church about 1930, Aeltester Janzen (Landskrone), fourth from left, is seated with fellow-ministers of the congregation.



There was a second funeral three days later: Helena, aged seven years, had also succumbed to the disease.[47] Later that year he spoke at a double funeral: the H. Voths (probably of Alexanderwohl) buried two boys aged 2 years, 7½ months, and a year, two months.[48] A typhus and yellow fever epidemic in Franzthal and Sparrau resulted in "many deaths" during the spring of 1862.

The diary provides some somber statistics when citing the death of Mrs. Peter Schmidt, aged seventy-four.[49] She left behind twelve children, five of whom preceded her; fifty-six grandchildren, eighteen of which were dead; twelve great-grandchildren of whom four died in infancy. Death was always stark and realistic. On May 7, 1876 Gaeddert's friend, Johann Wiens, died at age fifty-three. "I was there and helped to lay him on the board."[50] He was too late to say good-bye to Daniel Penner in Rueckenau: "he was already on the board and placed in the summer room."[51] Funerals were characterized by their simplicity. At the service for Johann Wiens *Aeltester* Leonhard Sudermann of Berdyansk preached, after which the coffin was carried outside and placed on a wagon. David Friesen and Franz Ens led the horses while the congregation walked to the cemetery for the interment.[52]

Once in the United States Gaeddert continued his unfaltering service to church and community. He not only organized the Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church in Kansas, but also provided the surrounding communities with the type of itinerant ministry so characteristic of his Russian sojourn. Whether active in the founding of Bethel College (North Newton, Kansas) or serving on its Board of Directors, Gaeddert always had one concern—the welfare of his community.

Missionary Heinrich Dirks (1842-1915) of Gnadenfeld, Molotschna colony.

Notes

1. P. M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruederschaft in Russland, 1789-1910* (Halbstadt, Taurien, 1911), 499, 501.
2. Friesen cites Gaeddert as a member of the Molochnaya Mennonite School Board, headed by Philipp Wiebe. *Ibid.*, 646.
3. All references to the diary are simply by date of entry. If the precise date of an event is mentioned in the text it is not usually recorded in the notes a second time. At the Alexanderwohl *Aeltester* elections in 1869 Gaeddert himself was a candidate and received only a few less votes than Jakob Buller (February 19 and April 13, 1869). Buller (1827-1901) eventually led a segment of his congregation to the U.S. in 1874.
4. On October 20, 1862, a *Bruderschaft* was held in Alexanderwohl *"wegen die Ausgetretene"* (those who left). Those present resolved to work towards a more vitalized Christianity, "have more concern for each other and where possible induce people to return." On another occasion (July 1, 1862) there was discussion about the admission of Huebert from Elisabethal but no further details are given. Neither entry makes it clear whether the dissidents are specifically Mennonite Brethren.
5. March 12, 1868.
6. Gaeddert's entry for September 29, 1868, is unique. Apparently *Aeltester* Wedel of Tiegerweide was circulating a description of a vision. He was in the Margenau church and saw it filled with people, but was unable to direct his congregation in a unified praise of God. Fire broke out in the center of the church and everyone headed for the exits. Wedel wondered whether this reflected recent fires in Sparrau and Conteniusfeld.
7. June 10, 1869. Two others also preached: Karr, a teacher from Neuhoffnung, as well as one Thomsen.
8. August 6, 1869.
9. Gaeddert was also impressed with the marriage vows Dirks asked widower Heinrich Richert of Alexanderwohl to exchange with Helena Unruh. He recorded them in their entirety. August 19, 1869.
10. P. M. Friesen reports that Wedel *"trat vom Amt ab"* (140), which was obviously not the case.
11. January 5, 1871.
12. April 22, 1874.
13. A December 7, 1868 entry provides a reflection of the current attitudes towards intermarriage with Russians. The issue involved the daughter of Schroeders in Landskrone, "whom Satan ensnared with the idea that she should run away with the hired man, a Russian. We tried to explain the dreadful implications of this act and she seemed inclined to renounce it."
14. August 27, 1860; December 22, 1862.
15. January 5, 1871.
16. January 19, 1861.
17. January 19, 1861. A chetvert was the equivalent of 2.099 hectolitres or 5.9567 American bushels.
18. January 23, 1863.
19. February 26, 1865.
20. January 2, 1865.
21. The harvest included 49½ chetverts wheat (Sept. 2, 1865); 35 chetverts of oats (Sept. 13, 1865); 48 chetverts of barley (Sept. 25, 1865). Only in one entry (1870) does Gaeddert give a clear indication as to the productivity of his land. The results which he considers a good harvest were as follows.

Amount Seeded	*Area (in Morgen ca. 2 acres each)*	*Amount Harvested*
chetverts		chetverts
Wheat 9.7	44	135
4.1	12	60
3.5	7½	55
1.3	6½	18
	70	268

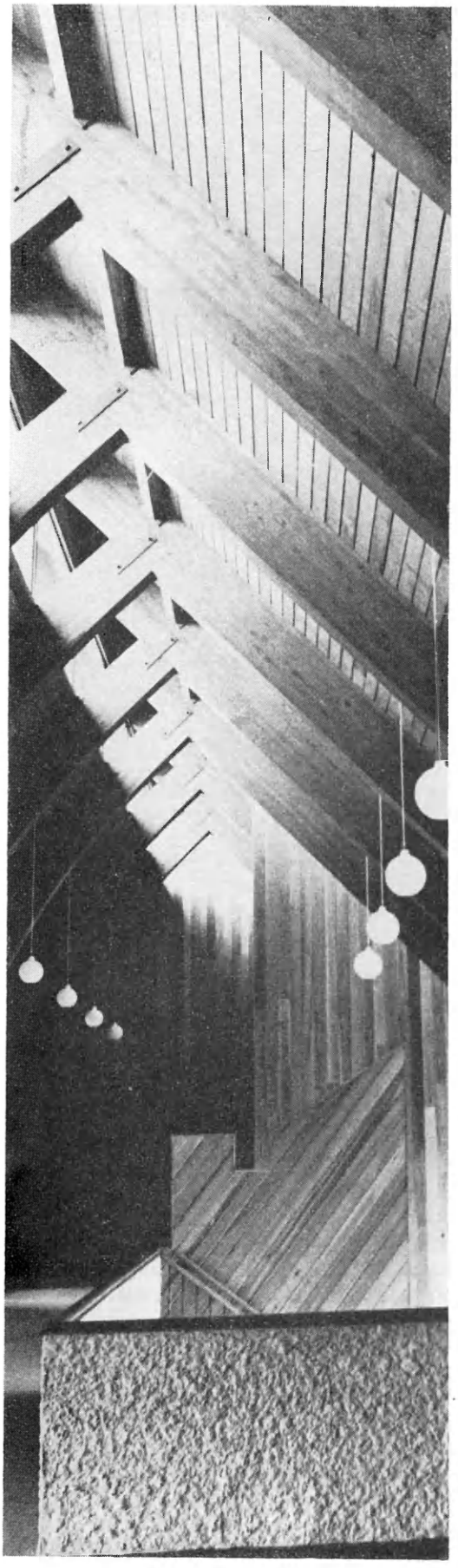
In addition he harvested 21 chetverts of potatoes and 35 chetverts of corn.
22. March 10, 1866.
23. August 14, 1867.
24. August 22, 24, 1860.
25. June 19, 1872.
26. October 24, 1873.
27. October 26/27, 1873.
28. October 30, 1873.
29. September 3-5, 1875.
30. September 6, 1875.
31. September 8, 1875.
32. September 12, 1875.
33. August 5, 1868.
34. October 1-10, 1860.
35. July 26, 1870.
36. October 16, 1860.
37. July 28, 1868.
38. May 15, 1868.
39. July 23, 1867.
40. August 3, 1867.
41. January 10, 1869.
42. May 18, August 10, 1860; December 29, 1866.
43. May 25, 1862.
44. February 3, 1868; November 13, 1867.
45. October 13, 22, 1860.
46. December 10, 1869; July 11, 1875; June 1, 1862.
47. August 10, 13, 1868.
48. November 5, 1868. Gaeddert's brief entries in no way detract from the tragedy of such eveits, as when Friesen's "little Barbara," aged 6 months, was buried on June 27, 1875 or when Franz's four hour old daughter was interred on February 19, 1875.
49. November 8, 1870.
50. May 7, 1876.
51. January 27, 1871. Both references to "the board" reflect the custom of placing the dead body on a platform and storing it in the summer kitchen (unheated in winter) until the funeral.
52. May 10, 1876.

Dr. John B. Toews is Professor of History at the University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre

For Research and Study

by Lawrence Klippenstein and John Friesen

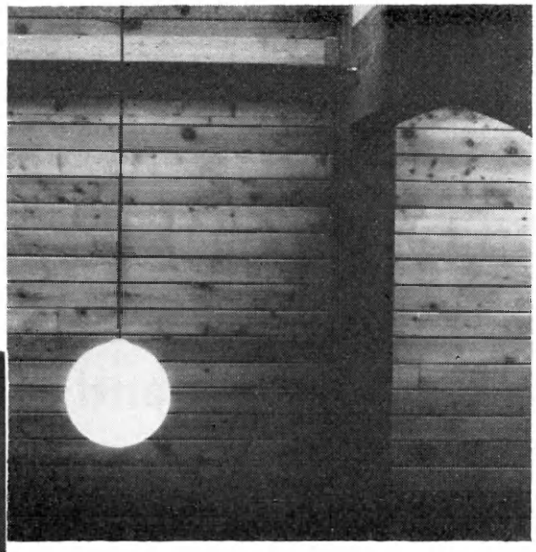


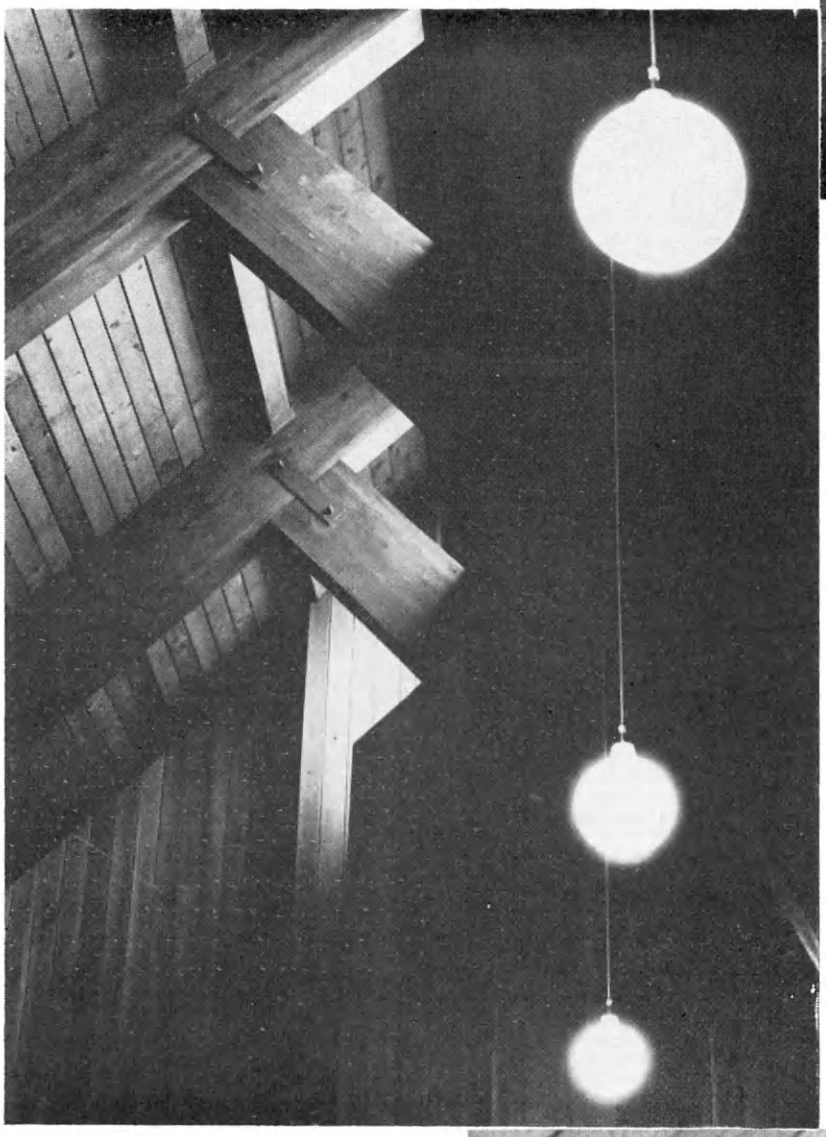
Research and writing on Mennonite themes has reached a high point in recent years. Such activity has renewed an interest in, and search for, primary and other sources, and a concern for acquiring and preserving documents related to the Mennonite story.

In the Conference of Mennonites in Canada the question of beginning an archives dates back to the middle thirties or earlier. At that time a Russian Mennonite immigrant school teacher, Bernhard J. Schellenberg agreed to take on archival duties for the Conference. With considerable energy he attempted to create an appreciation for important historical records, and encouraged others to collect and utilize these materials.

After some years Benjamin Ewert, a minister and statistician of the Conference took over these responsibilities, to be followed by another teacher-minister, Gerhard Lohrenz. With the establishment of a Historical Library at the newly-founded Canadian Mennonite Bible College (1947) Lohrenz found encouragement and assistance from various historical committees set up to undergird this program. The History-Archives Committee of the Conference maintains that function at present.

The celebrations of the Mennonite centennial in 1974 and 1975 brought the history-archives goals of the

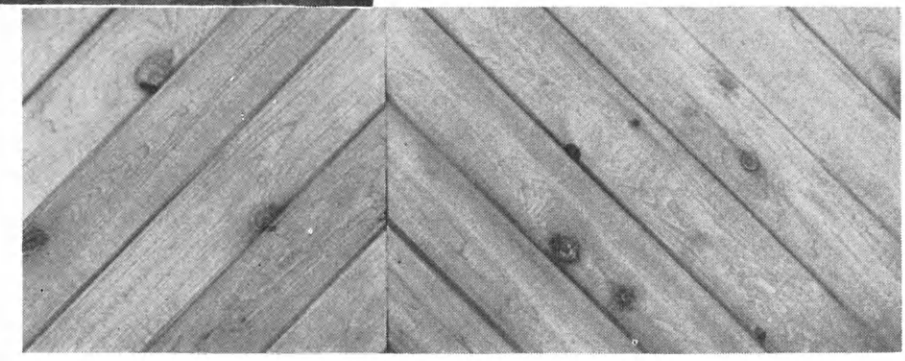




Conference into better focus, and also created additional resources to pursue these objectives. With this came the construction of new archives facilities, as well as the provision of staff to guide record care, and provide help for research and publication.

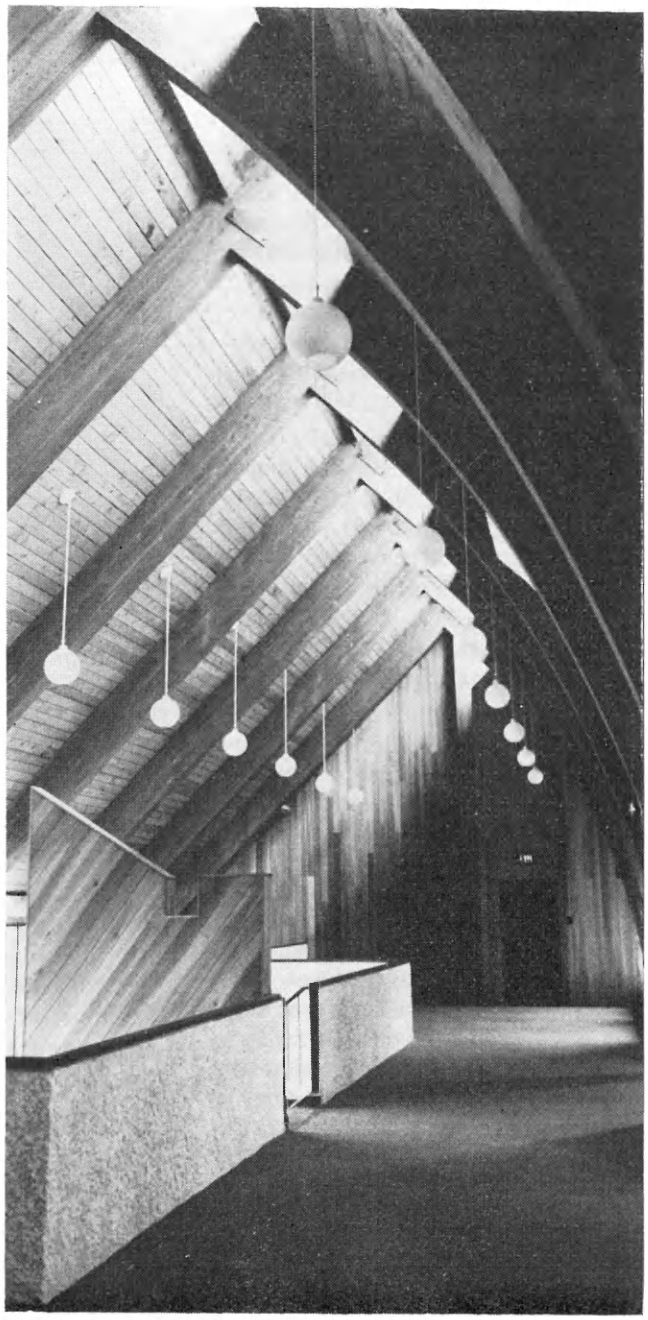
Existing explicitly as religious archives, the CMC holdings now form the largest public Mennonite archival deposit in the country. Built around such collections as the immigration records of the Canadian Mennonite Colonization Board, the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada) and the 25,000 member Conference itself, these files provide a major resource in the study of religious, social and institutional history of Western Canada.

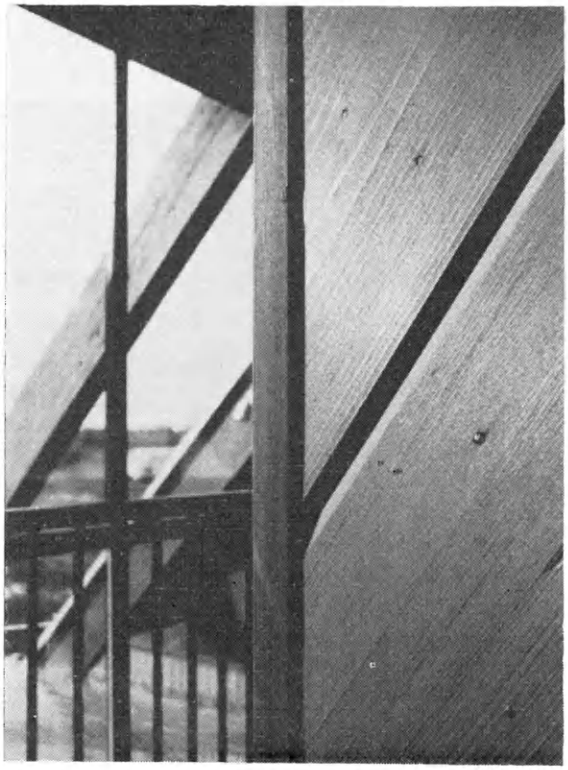
Integral to this body of material are several series of German and English newspapers published in the



Mennonite community. *Der Bote* (1924-present), originating in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, *Der Mitarbeiter* (1906-1934), the *Red River Valley Echo* (1941-present), of southern Manitoba, and *Mennonitische Rundschau* (in Canada from 1923 to the present), represent substantial sources of information on regional and interprovincial developments of the country.

Special collections from European points of origin for Canadian Mennonites provide a further field of study. Microfilm and other records from West Prussia, including periodicals such as *Mennonitische Blaetter* and *Gemeindeblatt der Mennoniten* as well as church registers and numerous secondary works form one dimension of this holding. Over a thousand photos, part of a larger 5000-item picture collection relate to the Prusso-Russian past of the Mennonite experience as well. Among Russian Mennonite materials are papers like *Unser Blatt* and *Friedensstime* (almost a complete set), several large diaries from the colonies and miscellaneous related items.





The personal papers of nearly fifty leaders of the Mennonites depict individual contributions made to the hundred year old life of Mennonites in Western Canada. The files of ministers J. J. Thiessen and David Toews, both of Saskatchewan, as well as Benjamin and Heinrich Ewert, of Manitoba, and H. M. Epp of B.C. illustrate this type of material.

Archives materials are utilized ex-

tensively for aiding the current production of several publications. In progress now are a photo album on the story of Mennonite conscientious objectors in World War II, several translations of documents related to the migration of Russian Mennonites to Canada in the 1870's, and a detailed catalogue of the entire Mennonite studies literary holdings of the college and archives available in 1977. Numerous finding aids and an index to the photo collection have been prepared in the past year as well.

Related closely to the program of Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the archives have been a rich source of aid to students of high schools and universities as well. A growing file of research papers attests to their contribution in historical and other areas.

The recent erection of a new archives-library building offers added opportunities to develop historical and archival work in the Conference. The Mennonite Heritage Centre, as it is known, forms a new and important addition to the campus of the college. It is open to the public daily on week days, and is expected to offer improved services in the areas of general research along with specialized work, e.g. in family studies (genealogy), immigration, minority relations in Canada, state-church relations, Mennonite life and thought, etc.

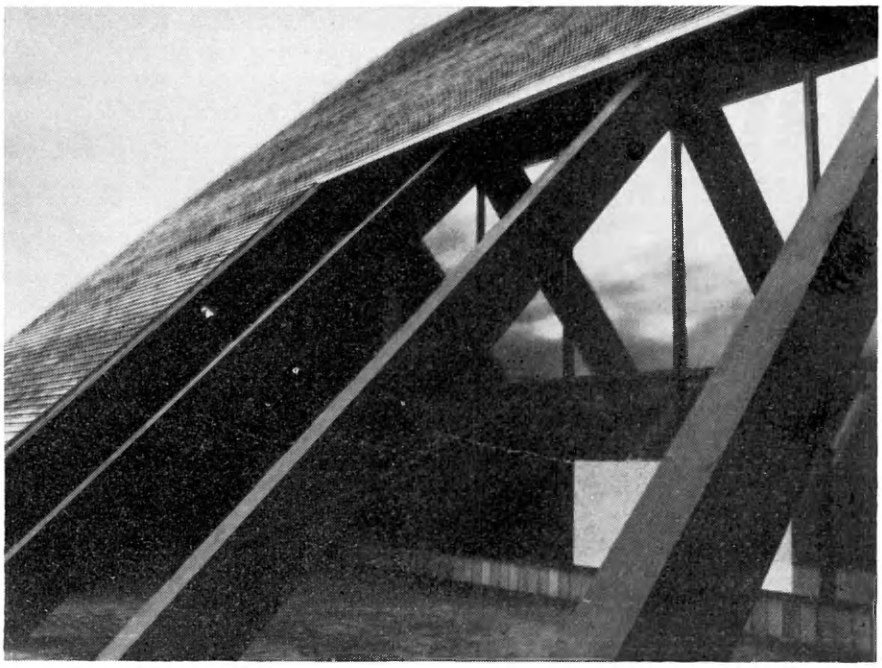
Inquiries may be directed to the historian-archivist, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P OM4. Interested persons may also subscribe to the *Mennonite Historian,* a quarterly newsletter published at the centre.

The Centre archives were opened to the public on National Archives Day, November 15, and will be officially dedicated on January 26, 1979.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre serves a number of purposes. The large rectangular shaped section (see cover photo) contains the Canadian Mennonite Bible College library, the Mennonite Historical Library, and the archives of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. This area is constructed to be well protected against fire, and includes room for expansion.

The tall A-frame includes a meeting room and considerable space on two levels for setting up displays. This display area, with its lofty open ceiling, is intended to help communicate Mennonite heritage to the public in various visual forms.

The Mennonite Heritage Centre is designed to serve the whole Mennonite community. The hope is that a greater appreciation and understanding of their common heritage will enable Mennonite churches to strengthen their unity and mission.



Low German Songs? Ohba yo!

by Doreen Klassen

Plautdietshe Ledda? Ney, vie habe niemohls opp Plautdietsh yesunge. Yeft et erhaupt souvaut? One can milk the cows, cook porridge, or harvest grain in Low German, *ohba vie sunge emma opp Huadietsh.* And yet, most Low German speaking Mennonites remember songs like *'Susa Petruzha vaut rushelt em Strou?'* or *'Shokkel, shokkel sheiya.'*

Na yoh, ohba daut sent ye blous Chingaleeda. Just children's songs? What about the use of nursery rhymes for political satire in England? The rhyme of "Little Jack Horner," for example, tells the story of a dishonest steward who stole a land title baked into a pie he was delivering to King Henry VIII.

Low German children's songs are no exception. One children's song, probably translated from High German, refers to the advance of the Napoleonic armies in 19th century Europe:

Hups meryallche, hups meryallche,
Loht de Poppches daunse.
Habe roude yackches aun,
Sen voll fon de Fraunse.

This type of political statement is not, however, typical of Low German children's songs. There are songs like *'Aus dee Yued em Borem foll"* which express 'hostility' toward the ethnic outsider. More common is criticism of non-conformist behavior within the family or the community. In the song *'Tiep Heenaches,'* we are told that if the little chickens (probably, the children) misbehave

mama voat yuent shelle
papa voat yuent shlohne.

Another reaction to non-comformist behavior is found in the song *'Eck ying emohl em Vould,'* sung to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell." The first verse reads

Eck ying emohl em Vould,
Eck ying emohl em Vould,
Eck ying emohl em Brummelsvould,
Eck ying emohl em Vould.

The *Kanadier* version of this song was a cumulative nonsense song of 17 stanzas, ending with the words *See seyde eck via domm.* Another version, with fewer verses, also followed the question and answer format.

v. 2. *Vaut vusst du en deym Vould?*
3. *Eck vull mie yriep'n en Hohs.*
4. *Vaut vusst du met deyn Hohs?*
5. *Eck vull deym laddre auf.*
6. *Vaut vusst du met daut Ladda?*
7. *Eck vull doa moake Shou.*
8. *Vaut vusst du met dee Shou?*
9. *Eck vull doamet toh Choik.*
10. *Vaut seyde de Lied don?*

This second version, sung by a 6 or 7 year old girl who has recently immigrated to Canada from Paraguay, ended with the words *Dee seyde eck via stolt.* In a Mennonite community in which 'Demütigkeit' or humility is emphasized, being *'stolt,'* or proud, would be a serious social and religious offence. This

Doing "The Ballad of Peter Harms," etc. at the Reinland Centennial in 1975.

Ms. Doreen Klassen is a graduate student in ethno-musicology at the University of Manitoba. She also instructs music at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Steinbach Bible Institute in Winnipeg and Steinbach respectively.

idea has found its way into a children's song—a mere children's song.

Yeft et noch aunare Leeda? Yes, there are various types of Low German songs. In addition to the children's songs already mentioned, there are many *Vieyenleeda* like *'Shlohp Chindche Shlohp'* and children's games like *'Bakke, Bakke Kuake.'*

People also talked about *Gausseleeda,* or village street songs like *'Lemke haud en Kubbelche,'* a song which is familiar to *Kanadier, Russlaender, Neueingewanderte* and recent Paraguayan immigrants alike.

Another type of song, often too colorful to be printed, includes *Chnacht* and/or *Drashaleeda* such as *'Henrick es de kausten Maun.'*

Love songs are also sung in Low German. These range from a parody on 'You are my Sunshine,' to Low German verses for *Schluesselbund Lieder,* circle song games sung by *Russlaender* young people both in Russia and Canada. Other love songs include *'Acht Meyalles,'* the lament of eight single domestically-skilled ladies, as well as *'Eck haud emohl en Frieya,'* sung by Russlaender from the Molotschna Colony.

Low German religious songs are mainly translations of German or English evangelistic songs or English choruses. Exceptions include a Low German Christmas song brought to Canada from Mexico, and sung to the tune of "Flow Gently Sweet Afton," and, *'Singt am Leeflich,'* a praise song brought to Canada by *Russlaender* and *Neueingewanderte,* frequently hand-notated in "ziffern" (numbers).

There are ballads like "The Ballad of Peter Harms" or "Legend of the *Gausseshlinyels"* composed for the 1975 Reinland Village Centennial Celebrations, and older ballads like *'Ons Nohba Klohse haud ne Koa'* and *'Dee Roussefeldshe Yunges.'* These older ballads are sung by *Kanadier* Mennonites.

The more recently composed songs could also be placed into the category of historical or social comment songs. *'Mien Darp'-Bloomenfeld,'* to the tune of "Something to Sing About" is just one of numerous songs written for centennial celebrations or reunions. Among social

comment songs, one finds titles such as *'Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden'* and *'Daut Plautdietsh es ons aula vach,'* sung by *Kanadier.*

A rather unusual category is that of Low German operetta. In 1976, the Landmark Alumni Drama Club presented its first Low German operetta: *Koop 'n Bua Voare noh Dietshlaund.* A second operetta, based on Gilbert and Sullivan's 'H.M.S. Pinafore,' but dealing with a wealthy *Russlaender* farmer is in preparation for presentation this spring.

Vua fingst du sounne Leeda? Vea singt dee souracht? Many of the songs were collected while enjoying a traditional Mennonite pastime: going visiting, or *spazieren gohnen,* to people like *Onkel Issak Bruhn, Vuasaenga Rampel* or *Taunte Frieyeshe (Du voasht ea voll nich channe. See vohnt hia em Darp eyvre Gaus. Vann du tohm Fensta ruht chickst kaust ea chickelstaul seene.)*

Many of the songs were collected from older people, partially because they take more time to reflect about the past, and partially because some of these songs are no longer being sung. These people represented the three major periods of Mennonite immigration from Russia to Canada: the *Kanadier* in the 1870s, the *Russlaender* in the 1920s, and the *Neueingewanderte* after World War II, sometimes via South America. They are presently living in southern Manitoba centres of high Mennonite population like Altona, Winkler, Steinbach and their surrounding villages, or in the city of Winnipeg.

People who knew many songs cited several reasons for this: 'we lived in the village and learned these songs on the street,' 'my mother always sang while she worked,' 'I always had to babysit the younger children, so I tried to entertain them,' 'My uncle had a lively sense of humor and would always sing funny songs to us,' 'our family used to sit and sing evenings before we lit the lamps,' 'we didn't have motorcycles or TV so we entertained ourselves by making up songs.'

Songs which are still being sung are usually collected from younger people: children—who sing while playing, high school students—who use Low German for social criti-

cism, and groups like *'De Heischratje en de Villa Honig'* who have composed songs like *'Du bes mein Sonneshien,' "Blingal Lament (Daut Plautdietsh es ons aula vach),"* and *"Sindach opp Vaspa,"* written for the annual Landmark *Plautdietsha Ohvent.*

Daut sent obha sounne pruste Leeda. Dee vudd eena nicht mank Menshen singen. It is reported that in certain communities where people cdaim to sing only *Geistliche Leeda,* the cows are milked to Low German songs which are not suitable for *Menshen.* But there are many songs which have found their way into various social contexts: the home, at work, and in the community.

In the home, Low German songs were used to entertain the children. Several fathers mentioned that they used to sing songs to their children while waiting for supper, to keep the children (of course) from getting restless.

Sometimes work songs talked about the activity at hand: *'Henrick es de kausten Maun'* (sung while harvesting in southern Manitoba) and *'Eck ying emohl met de hoak oppe Deyl'* (sung while harvesting in the Schoenhorst-Neuendorf area in the Chortitza Settlement in Russia). At other times people sang simply to pass the time while they worked.

In the past, Low German songs were improvised in informal community get-togethers: *Gausseshlinyels* meeting on the streets, hired hands getting together Saturday nights or Sunday afternoons, or at the young peoples' *Schluesselbund* evenings. The *Heischratje,* the *Gausseshlinyels* of Landmark, compose their songs in the same informal, improvising story fashion.

But *Heischratje* performances, although they are designed to recreate the *'Tuus'* atmosphere, are part of a new phenomenon, namely the *Plautdietsha Ohvent.* These evenings of entertainment are used as fund raising events in rural areas of the province.

Another more recent performance context for Low German songs is the historic commemorative event like centennial celebrations or village reunions, where volunteer choirs and groups singing Low German songs recalling the history of the Mennonites in that area. These recent performance contexts suggest that Low German still has some sentimental and economic significance in the community.

Fea dee Plautdietsche Leeda kaun enna aeyent ne melodie brucken. Daut sent sounne toupyeklopte Leeda.

Borrowing melodies is a trademark of Mennonite history. In fact, it dates back to the time of the Reformation. The early Anabaptists borrowed tunes to sing about their new-found faith. Mennonites have continued to borrow melodies for their church music. In this respect, Low German songs are characteristic of Mennonite music-making.

Melodies used for Low German songs come from sources such as High German folksong, High German chorales and gospel songs, English religious choruses and North American folksong.

Variants of the tune for *Fuchs, du hast die ganz gestohlen* were used for *"Aus dee Yued em Borem foll'* (sung by *Kanadier*), *"Aus dee Sheepa malke ying'* (sung by *Russlaender*). The melody of *Mein Hut der hat drei Ecken* was used for *'Ohm Banjamin es mien Lehra'* (a Molotschna/*Russlaender* song) and

Vaut sent mie daut fea nushte,
Vua blift mien Hauns sou lang?
Hea sheddat vadda krushche,
On mie voat angst en bang.

(a Chortitza/*Russelaender* song).

Two more recent songs set to High German folksong melodies are: *'En Musdarp bie Yrientohl,'* a *Heishratje* song sung to *Haenschen Klein,* and *'De Horndean-a'* sung to *Im Wald und auf der Heide.*

Among High German religious melodies, one notes the use of tunes like *Es lebe Gott allein in mir* for the *'Legend of the Gausseshlinyels,' Jesus Liebt mich* for *'Mienne Mamme es mie gout," Mir ist Erbarmung Widerfahren* for *"Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden,'* and *Ihr Kinderlein Kommet* used by *Russlaender* for *'Susa Petruzha.'*

Auld Lang Syne was the most popular North American folksong tune, with claims to three sets of Low German lyrics: *'De goude oule Tiet'* (Horndean Reunion), and *'Blingel Lament'* and a New Year's song by the *Heishratje.* "This Land is Your Land" was a popular choice for centennial celebration lyrics. One amusing choice was that of "Old MacDonald had a Farm" for the song *'En Musdarp vohn vie aula toup.'*

There appear to be only a handful of original melodies. These are similar to either German chorales or folksongs, depending on the type of song for which they are used.

Sent dea Leeda nich blous vom Huadietshen eyvasatt? Some of the songs are simply translated from High German, e.g. *'Eene chleene fiddle mucht eck haben'* from *Eine kleine Geige,* or, from English, e.g. *'Die oule Laumpaunstecka'* and *'Mien leeva Gott shrift aules aun.'*

Names like *Haunsche en Yreetche* or *Peetache en Leenache,* or place names like *Reinlaund, Schoenhorst* or *Ostrachan,* suggest that words of some of the songs were either composed by Mennonites, or borrowed and adapted to fit a particular situation.

One song which may be 'original' is

Miene Mamme es mie gout,
Yeft mie sheenet eyte.
Shinkefleesh en butta Brout,
Daut voa eck nie feyeyte.

This song was sung by children to their mothers or grandmothers, especially when they were expecting some sort of a gift or treat. Another song with which many Mennonites can identify is

Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden,
eck lied am nich mien nieyet Biel.
Hea liet fon mie blous aule sorten,
daut lieyen haft bie am cheen ziel.
Dee aundre dach borgd hee mien voiyen,
on bruak mie fuats de Diestel tvei,
on bruak mie fuats de Diestel tvei.

The authors of most of the Low German songs written within the past ten years are known, so one can certainly ascribe these songs to the Mennonite community. The list of authors includes Henry Ens and

Menno Wiebe, who wrote the Reinland Centennial songs, and Ray Plett, Mrs. Kay Friesen and the *Heischratie* who have written songs for their musical group.

Vuarom saumelst du dee domme Leeda? Vuarom deist nich leeve vaut yesheidet? Perhaps knowing what kinds of things a community finds funny enough to laugh about, tells us something about what that community is really like.

The fact that Low German songs have been written during the past ten years have been authored either by *Kanadier* or *Russlaender* whose parents lived in the Chortitza or Old Colony settlements in Russia, and that only a handful of older Low German songs have come from Molotschna Mennonites, remind us that language attitudes of the past two centuries persist even in the twentieth century.

Melodic sources also point to the separate histories of various groups in the Mennonite community. High German folksong melodies were fairly equally distributed among *Kanadier, Russlaender* and *Neueingewanderte*. North American folksong melodies, used for most of the twentieth century compositions, were used almost exclusively by *Kanadier* Mennonites.

The use of 'religious' melodies also followed an interesting pattern. Both *Russlaender* and *Neueingewanderte* used High German 'religious' tunes like *Ihr Kinderlein Kommet* for children's songs, while *Kanadier* did not. English choruses, in Low German translation, came from Mennonites immigrating to Canada from Mexico, Paraguay, Belize or Bolivia, i.e. returning to Canada after their exodus to South America in the 1920s. Chorale tunes were used by *Kanadier* or *Russlaender* for social comment or criticism.

As stated earlier, the words of the Low German songs provide insight into the role of the individual within the family or community, relationships within the community, and attitudes toward outsiders.

We have already referred to the teaching function of children's songs such as *'Tiep Heenaches.'* The Low German verse of *Allemal kann ich nicht lustig sein* also had an indirect

The "Heischratje" (Locusts) of the Landmark Drama Club at the Koop en Bua presentation night several years ago. L-r.: Dayton Plett, Jeff Plett, Dennis Reimer, Gerald Reimer, Ray Plett (director) and Pat Plett (piano).

teaching function, for the young people in the community.

Bruckst ye die goanich sou prautzich han
Chickt ye doch cheena noh die.
En vann du ves gohne met Russe Meyalles
Dann bruckst du nich kohme noh mie.

One man who found it difficult to live up to the expectations of the community rationalized his attitudes in this fashion:

. . .
Eck mucht dit leefste nich shaufen,
De sonn febrennt mie den Riggen.

Eck voa ea daut uck noch saiyen,
Eck drink en beyt beeya uck vien,
Eck drink ohba nich daut mie darshat,
Eck drink daut aus medicine.

De chinga gohnen boafout en hungrich,
Ons yeit et sou feimeysich oam.
Eck mucht daut leefste nich shaufen,
De Sonn febrennt mie den Riggen.

In *'Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden'*, mentioned earlier, the melody of a hymn on mercy, is used for words which talk about a neighbor whose action must obviously be beyond the limits of anyone's mercy. Singing this song may have been the only acceptable way in which this individual could express his anger or frustration.

One last example of social comment or perhaps even protest is found in the *Heishratje* song *'Blingal (Bilingual) Lament.* The song is a ballad describing the gradual decline of Low German usage. Various factors, they say, have influenced this decline: public school education in High German and English, the media—even CFAM which claims to be a Mennonite radio station and has very little Low German programming, the proximity of other ethnic groups and consequent intermarriage patterns, or perhaps the ease with which many Mennonite assimilate to the dominant culture. The song ends with the chorus

Daut Plautdietsh es ons aule vach,
Daut es ne truaye sach,
Vie seiye bould, "Bonjour, Monsieur,"
Ennesteyd 'Mien Frind, Goun Dach!'

Low German Drama Study

A Research Report

by Peter Petkau

During my recent studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, one of the courses, Mennonite Studies, offered a choice of topics for research. Having an interest in the Low German language, I chose to examine Low German drama. What began as an assignment has now become a matter of genuine personal interest for me.

This interest began to develop some years ago when I had the opportunity to act in our church young people's production of Nicholaus Unruh's *Aufscheed von de Heimstäd.* At another time our group asked Gerhard Ens, currently editor of "Der Bote," to write a Low German drama for us. In conjunction with the Mennonite Centennial celebrations he then wrote, and we later performed *Dee Brotchuld,* the story of a much-needed loan of money which helped early Mennonite settlers get started in Manitoba.

So it came about that presently I am collecting and studying as many Low German dramas as I can acquire. This collection includes full length dramas, skits, and dialogues. As this project developed, I realized I had to limit myself to Mennonite writers. Even with this restriction I have copies in my annotated bibliography from many different parts of the world. While looking for such material, I am also interested in the author. For each work I receive, I attempt to learn some of the reasons why the author wrote the drama, when it was written, whether it is published or if it has been performed.

My list now includes some sixty different dramas and skits written in the Low German language. These have been authored by more than a dozen writers. Geographically, Paraguay, Russia, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan are represented. George Epp's *Peta en Lena* series originates in Volendam, Paraguay. Some of Jacob H. Janzen's drama come from the Ukraine. But most of the ones I have received have been written in Canada.

In terms of time, a span of 75 years separates J. H. Janzen's 1912 edition of the *De Bildung,* and Kay Friesen's 1977 writing of *De Feyetzama Jake Tjela.* It is interesting to note that most of these dramas have been penned in the last decade.

Jacob H. Janzen (1878-1950), Mennonite teacher, minister and author. He spent his later years at Waterloo, Ontario.

The Mennonite Centennial celebrations in the early 1970's may in part account for this. Another reason is expressed in Nicholaus Unruh's statement that there was a "dearth of interest in the Low German language." He also felt that there was lack of regard for Mennonite culture and history. With the rapid rate of acculturation in the most recent Canadian decade, this resurgence of interest in the Low German may be a positive development which could alleviate this "dearth" somewhat.

There are other observations to be made from such a collection. One is about the reason why the author chose to write the drama. From portraying the humorous viewpoint of an overweight person towards a weight problem, to attempting to provide a means of keeping alive Mennonite cultural history, the purposes are actually as varied and as interesting as the dramas themselves. The way in which each author uses the Low German language is another unique aspect of the collection. Arnold Dyck's form is generally regarded as a standard, but there are some variations. These differences may be attributed to the author's personal history, usually going back to Russia. They are also related to the local community in which each author learned to speak the Low German language.

Many of the dramas are short and relate closely to the community in which they were written and initially performed. Kay Friesen's *Landmark Alumni Yesaltshaft* is an example, as is George Epp's *De Volendamschi Tiejajacht.* Other dramas portray more universal themes of suffering, love, joy and hope. Nicholaus Unruh's *Aufscheed von de Heimstäd* is an example, as is J. H. Janzen's *Utwaundere.* One thread running throughout all these writings is the attempt to portray the Mennonite way of life. This the authors have done by depicting its culture, its application of faith to every day living, its educational emphases, and its relationship to the land. Teacher W. Neufeld's *Mennoniten Land zu Land* is an attempt, with the use of flashbacks, to incorporate these themes into one drama.

Many are humorous like Wilmer Penner's *Koop'n Bua (en Dietschlaund),* an adaptation from one of Arnold Dyck's books in the *Koop en Bua* series. On the other hand, George Ens' *Dee Brotchuld* is a serious drama depicting the conflicts found in our Mennonite story.

Only a few of the dramas have been published so as to circulate

A scene from the waiting room of a Mennonite bonesetter in the drama De Trachtmoeka *written by Ben Dueck of Steinbach, Manitoba.*

among the different Mennonite communities. Arnold Dyck's *De Fria* is one of the best known. If any one drama could be singled out as a classic, this would be one. From the numerous authors who have written shorter or full length dramas, Arnold Dyck's are probably the best known and most often performed. As a writer he has been influential in providing a good calibre of dramas in the Low German language. Other authors, such as Janzen and Unruh would also fall into this category.

But it needs also to be said that many of our Mennonite authors who have written drama in Low German have not received the exposure and support they deserve. J. J. Enns of Ontario has written four short dramas. His portrayal of the Depression years in *Onsi Hendritji Ditji* is poignant and empathetic. Margaret Tiessen, also from Ontario, has written three dramas. Olga Rempel's *Wer nimmt uns Auf* is really a trilingual (English, Low German, High German) drama depicting the struggles involved in emigrating to Canada from Russia during W.W. II.

Although one is impressed by the quality of some of these dramas, there is also room for criticism. Some tend to be melodramatic, or else every romantic in their character portrayal and plot development. Others need to be criticized for failing to use the stage effectively in their drama. Although more could be said critically, the purpose of this article is not so much to critique, as to provide a comment on the development of Low German drama in our Mennonite communities. I would venture to say that this literary form of preserving and presenting our way of life is meaningful. As such, Low German drama is an area of literature which we need to consider as an important part of our literary endeavours.

Note: A copy of an annotated bibliography, as well as all the unpublished, and most of the published dramas, are located in the archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre at 600 Shaftebury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Centre also has the books of Dr. J. W. Goerzen for sale: "Low German in Canada. A Study in Plautdietsch" (1970); "Ute Helije Schrefte" (1968), and "German Heritage: Canadian Lyrics in Three Languages" (n.d.).

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Book Reviews

Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910.* Translated from the German by Dr. Abe Friesen, et al. Fresno, California, Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978. 1065 pp. $29.50 (Can.)

The publication of a translation of P. M. Friesen's *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)* published at Halbstadt, Russia, in 1910, is a major step in helping readers who use only the English language to become familiar with their heritage. The largest historical work by any Russian Mennonite is now available for these, and other, readers.

In 1886, while still a teacher at the *Zentralschule* in Halbstadt, Peter M. Friesen was asked by the Rückenau Mennonite Brethren Church to write a brief history of the M.B. Church in Russia and America. This publication was designed to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the M.B. movement. One M.B. member remarked facetiously that Friesen would probably complete the project in two weeks.

The research and writing was, however, not completed until twenty-five years later. By then it had become a volume of 931 pages. It included two sections, one dealing with Russian, and the other with American Mennonitism. In each chapter Friesen included interpretations along with collections of both primary and secondary documents. When the book was finally completed, the M.B. Church refused to be associated with it, and Friesen had to publish it privately through Raguda Press in Halbstadt.

For English readers the question is what this translation of the Russian section of Friesen's study contributes to their knowledge of nineteenth century Russian Mennonitism. Friesen in his Preface stated that he had expanded his work from a mere M.B. history into a history of Mennonites in Russia. Did his study accomplish this aim?

In the first three sections (200 pages) Friesen discussed the background to the M.B. movement. For the sixteenth century Anabaptist and the later Prussian Mennonite story he quoted primarily from non-Mennonite German published studies. English readers have not had these studies available to them, but since they are secondary materials they are not especially significant.

Friesen's interpretation of early pre-M.B. Russian Mennonite history is however important for understanding his study. Although Friesen's survey of the earlier history is rather brief, his document collection from this era is valuable. Of particular significance is Friesen's attitude toward early Russian Mennonite history. It becomes evident that he considered early Russian, as well as Prussian and Dutch Mennonites to have fallen from the ideals of Menno. Except for his description of the more Pietistic circles in Ohrloff and Gnadenfeld, his adjectives of these early Russian Mennonites was primarily negative. Friesen expressed very little sympathy for, or understanding of, non-Pietist Russian Mennonitism. Even the *Kleingemeinde* was described by him in negative terms like "narrow-minded" and "stubborn."

The core of Friesen's work is the lengthy section of 275 pages on the history of the M.B. Church from its origin in 1860, up to the publication date in 1910. Both the interpretations by Friesen and the documentary selections are significant for understanding the early M.B. movement. His study included both the Molotschna origins influenced by Lutheran (Württemberg) Pietists, and the Chortitza origins under the impact of German Baptists (Johann Oncken).

Throughout this section the reader will note Friesen's relentless pursuit of documentary evidence. He used the interview method extensively, but then attempted to substantiate such verbal assertions with documentary sources. Although he admitted he could often not find adequate sources to answer all his questions, the documents he collected are invaluable since so much of this was destroyed in the Russian revolution. It is an indication of Friesen's objectivity that he included documents which expressed both the negative and positive aspects of the M.B. origins. With some heaviness of heart he included documents concerning divisions, quarrels and enthusiastic excesses.

In this section Friesen also developed his argument that the M.B. revival was based upon the dual foundation of Menno and Pietism; or Menno and Wuest (E. p. 211). In later sections he frequently attempted to document this (e.g. E. p. 296).

A careful examination of his case however raises serious questions about whether he accomplished this goal. The most important issue is his view of Pietism. In his discussion of M.B. background and development, it becomes evident that he considered Pietism as essentially a revival of Menno's theology (cf. E. p. 47,103,212,295).

In this view that Pietism was a revival of Anabaptism Friesen followed nineteenth century German scholars, especially Max Goebel and Albrecht Ritschl. But in this particular case, where Friesen was attempting to show origins, he ended in fact with only one immediate origin for the M.B. Church, namely Pietism. Only to the extent that Pietism included Menno's theology, was the M.B. movement also based on Menno.

In the last four hundred pages English readers receive a topical introduction into late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian Mennonitism. Friesen did historical surveys of such topics as militarism, alternative service, missions, education, and geographic expansion. In these discussions Friesen included the whole Russian Mennonite community, not only the Mennonite Brethren. Both Friesen's interpretations, and his extensive documentary sections, are invaluable. This section comes closest to being a history of Russian Mennonitism.

A few comments regarding the translation are in order. The trans-

lation job was obviously a heavy undertaking. The English translation, including footnotes comes to more than one thousand published pages. Numerous people participated in the original round of translation. The editors have done a remarkable job in arriving at a reasonably standardized style. Some weaknesses should be noted, though.

It is unfortunate that the footnotes were removed from their original place at the bottom of the pages, and placed at the end of the volume. Because of the size and complexity of the book, it is difficult to use the footnotes. In the process at least one footnote was omitted (E. p. 998 No. 6).

In some cases translators omitted sub-titles to sections (e.g. German p. 61). Furthermore, the translators seem to have had the policy of not translating the Russian documents (e.g. G. p. 288,293,487,504-505,522-523). This caused some German introductions to these Russian documents to become superfluous and so they were omitted (e.g. G. p. 488).

Most Russian documents had German translations in the original. However, where this was not the case, whole documents were thus omitted from the translation (e.g. G. p. 504,505). The decision not to translate the Russian documents was based on the assumption that there were no discrepancies of any significance between the German and Russian documents. Since many of these were government documents or correspondence from the government, it would have been of interest to see if that were actually the case.

Translators had problems with numbers. Some of the errors are: E. p. 615, should read 8000 rubles instead of 800; E. p. 614, should read 40,954.63¾ rubles instead of 50,954.63¾; E. p. 614, the table under "Expenses" is missing a line, and some of the numbers included on the third line are wrong; E. p. 76 should read 5000 instead of 500.

It is unfortunate that the "Supplement" to Section 1 was not included in this translation. In it Friesen listed the various Mennonite Churches in Western Europe outside of Holland, including their date of founding, membership, and *Aeltesters*. Since this information is not generally available to the English reading public, it would have been a service to include it. It also indicates what P. M. Friesen made available to his readers.

The M.B. Church must be congratulated for having provided this translation. English readers will however have to be careful not to assume that this tells the whole story of the nineteenth century Mennonites. The non-Pietist story is largely omitted. They will also have to recognize Friesen's pro-Pietist bias. He equated early Mennonitism with Pietism, oblivious to any differences between them. However with these quaifications in mind, readers who invest time and effort to read this study will be richly rewarded. *John Friesen*

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Neufeld, Dietrich, *A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine.* Translated and edited by Al Reimer. Winnipeg, Man.: Hyperion Press, 1977. 140 pp. $6.95.

Leonard Sudermann, *From Russia to America: In Search of Freedom.* Translated by Elmer F. Suderman. Steinbach, Man., Derksen Printers, 1974. 47 pp. $2.50.

A Russian Dance of Death and *In Search of Freedom* have several things in common. They have a common subject, the Mennonites in Russia. They share a common format, basically diary. Both are translations, the second entirely from German, the first from German and French. Both diaries have been written by keen observers with an eye for interesting and significant detail.

The differences, however, are even more conspicuous than the similarities. *A Russian Dance of Death* is largely a three-part horror story. The first part, 64 pages, covers Neufeld's experiences in the Old Colony villages during the Nestor Machno "reign of terror" from 15 September 1919 to 5 March 1920, and ends appropriately with the haunting rhetorical questions: "Does crime have no limits then? Is there no end to atrocity? . . ." (p. 64). The second part, 24 pages, describes the killings at Zagradovka, including the author's family, as he received the details from eye witnesses. The third part, 38 pages, is an account of Neufeld's escape from Russia to Germany, a thirty-three day trek ending on 15 October 1920.

This final part contains touches of humor, an element foreign to the first two parts. For example, one dark night Neufeld and his companions become aware of sentries "behind the highway" with gun barrels levelled at them. One of them already "heard" the clicking of gun bolts. Should they dive for cover or "casually" move on? When they discover that the "sentry" is a stook of sheaves they "explode with laughter" (p. 123).

In Search of Freedom, by contrast, is a story of faith and hope at a time when North American authorities are rolling out the welcome carpet for Mennonites. It is primarily a record of the experiences of a twelve-man Russian Mennonite delegation exploring settlement possibilities in the USA and Canada. It covers the period from late April, 1873 when the delegation left South Russia till its return on September 14, 1873. The book follows a chronological order based on extensive journals kept by the author. Ocean voyages, land inspection trips, accommodations in hotels and private homes, all receive the same detailed attention.

One would expect a keen member of a delegation sent out to find a new agricultural homestead to observe land formations, soil conditions, water supplies, crops, natural vegetation, climate, insects, governmental regulations, transportation facilities and other details pertaining to settlement. Sudermann does not disappoint the reader. He, however, goes beyond that. He seems to take an interest in everything that goes on. For example, when their ship pulls into Plymouth at 2:30 a.m. simply to transfer some freight and pick up additional pas-

sengers, Sudermann is on deck. He observes that "various loads were transferred, among others, fifteen bars of silver, each weighing about 100 pounds" (p. 43). He describes the raising of the anchor at 4:00 a.m. with the sailors pulling in unison to a song with each verse ending in, "Hey hee halalala, faladra, faladra" (p. 44).

Such scrupulous attention to detail is also applied to dimensions of rivers and bridges, to production of industries, to names and locations of hotels they frequented and to the mannerisms of their various hosts. Sudermann is obviously an interested observer of life, and because such a man kept an accurate diary, the book is both interesting and valuable.

Religious faith is central to the delegation according to this journal. They conduct their own services, join Mennonites and non-Mennonites in worship and lead church services on ships. Repeatedly they praise God whether it be for the beauty of prairie vegetation, or for rescue from the terror of a hurricane at sea.

A few observations are disturbing, however, in this short history of faith and hope. When the delegation members reached the reserved area of south eastern Manitoba, they sang, Sudermann records, "Thus it was that the first songs praising God and His love resounded from the lips of poor sinners in the wilderness of Manitoba" (p. 16). Was this a bit presumptuous? Could Canadian natives or other whites have sung praises to God from the Manitoba wilderness, or were Mennonites alone capable of this?

Later in the account, Sudermann mentions a farmer who "owned a large farm . . . so large that he can, as he said, plow a furrow one and a half mile long with his plow. We Europeans respected him for that" (p. 27). Do possessions form the basic criterion of respect for this Mennonite delegation? Jesus used a different measuring device.

Faith is also important in Neufeld's diary, but it is demonstrated differently. Neufeld experiences surprising strength when called upon to protect some hysterical girls from a band of terrorists (pp. 17-19). He is very impatient with those Mennonites who gave up their 400-year-old convictions of non-violence and took up arms. He says, "We will not imitate the Spartans by taking up arms. If we are truly nobler than our tormentors, we will also use nobler weapons" (p. 38). There is an absence of hate and/or desire for revenge in spite of massive brutality.

Reimer's translating and editing must be commended. The brief introduction contains carefully selected, significant details. Maps, a short biography of Neufeld and a chronological summary of events are equally useful. His footnotes often help interpret and/or correct Neufeld's statements. Reimer has checked out many details with scholars of Mennonite history. For example, when Neufeld claims that "40 per cent" of one village died of typhus, Reimer offers a more correct estimate of "10-12 per cent" (p. 60). This careful editing together with attractive lay out, impressive wood cuts, effective cover design and good binding all enhance this significant book. The original was obviously written by a man with a flair for writing, and the translated version retains the pleasing style. The many virtues make it easy to disregard the few technical or typographical errors such as an "is" for an "it" (p. 98) or a "1971" for "1917" (p. 85).

Elmer Suderman claims he has tried to present a readable translation and has "erred on the side of clarity rather than on the side of scrupulous accuracy" (p. ix). The translation is certainly readable. There are, however, many "heavy" if not clumsy expressions. Here are a few examples. "From forenoon on I had always driven with this dear old man, and while driving we had many chances to talk about and come to understand each other about all kinds of things" (p. 8). "There were two small steam mills here, and we came to the conclusion that if they were necessary, grain must also be growing, since both are involved" (p. 21). A more fluent style would certainly improve readability.

The text also contains too many disturbing grammatical and typographical errors. A tense error, "is ready" (p. 12), "or" for "nor" (p. 21), and "didn'" for "didn't" (p. 20) are simply typical examples.

Neither book is entirely a first in its field of information. The sense of immediacy offered by the diary form, is nevertheless refreshing. This is true especially for the civil war story because one does not expect a harassed person always unsure of his life to keep a running diary of atrocities. Both books offer significant material for Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike.

Both translators have had long periods of service in university faculties, Dr. Elmer Suderman at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, USA, and Dr. Al Reimer at the University of Winnipeg in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

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Lohrenz, Gerhard, *The Odyssey of the Bergen Family,* Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978, Pp. 145. $6.00 pb.

Nickel, John P., trans. and ed. *Thy Kingdom Come. The Diary of Johann P. Nickel of Rosenhof 1918-1919,* Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1978. Pp. 104. Index of names. $6.50 pb.

Paetkau, Irene Friesen, ed., *Just When We Were . . . The Story of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada,* Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978. Pp. 60. $6.00 pb.

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