

MENNONITE LIFE

JUNE 1983



In this Issue

The article on Gordon Friesen tells a story writ in many and diverse ways in the Mennonite historical record in America: the sensitive youth alienated from his church and community who seeks his liberty and identity in American society. In his past are bonds which will not let him go. In his later years he finds his thoughts curving back to a heritage hearth where he discovers embers that still glow if ever so faintly. In his April 7 letter to the author is this intriguing acknowledgment by Gordon Friesen: "Running through every thing I've done is the thread of my upbringing as a Mennonite—namely compassion for the oppressed."

There are a score of significant sub-themes in Allan Teichroew's article: the youth in the shadows who listens, observes, and ponders and then writes with an uncanny grasp of the whole; the grinding poverty of those years of the great depression; the restless movement of Mennonites in search of land and a fresh start; the once Anabaptist church where the compassionate life has faded; the indestructableness of the human spirit; and many more.

Allan Teichroew, who has the gifts of an investigative Washington reporter, is on the staff of the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.

James Juhnke writes of the keepers of the boundaries in the generation between World War I and II. Juhnke, Professor of History at Bethel College, wrote an article on Gustav E. Enss, which appeared in the December 1981 issue of *Mennonite Life*, which might be considered a companion piece to the article in this issue on John Horsch, George R. Brunk, and Gustav Enss.

Griselda Gehman Shelly, Regional Director of the Mennonite Central Committee, Central States, Newton, Kansas, has written a delightful historical footnote to the Mahatma Gandhi story in this year of the award-winning film.

Prof. Huang Xinqu, Chengdu, People's Republic of China, was a visiting professor on the Bethel, Bluffton, and Goshen campuses during the 1982-83 academic year as a part of the China Educational Exchange. Professor Huang has helped lay the groundwork for an expanding educational exchange with China.

MENNONITE LIFE

June 1983 Vol. 38 No. 2

Editor

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Front Cover

The dust jacket for the novel *Flamethrowers*, by Gordon Friesen, published by Caston Printers, Caldwell, Idaho, 1936.

Back Cover

Cover of *Broadside*, Vol. 9, edited by Agnes Cunningham and Gordon Friesen.

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Gordon Friesen

Writer, Radical and Ex-Mennonite

by Allan Teichroew

"For some people wars begin and end, and in the time between do not exist. For others less fortunate, there is no ending. . . ."

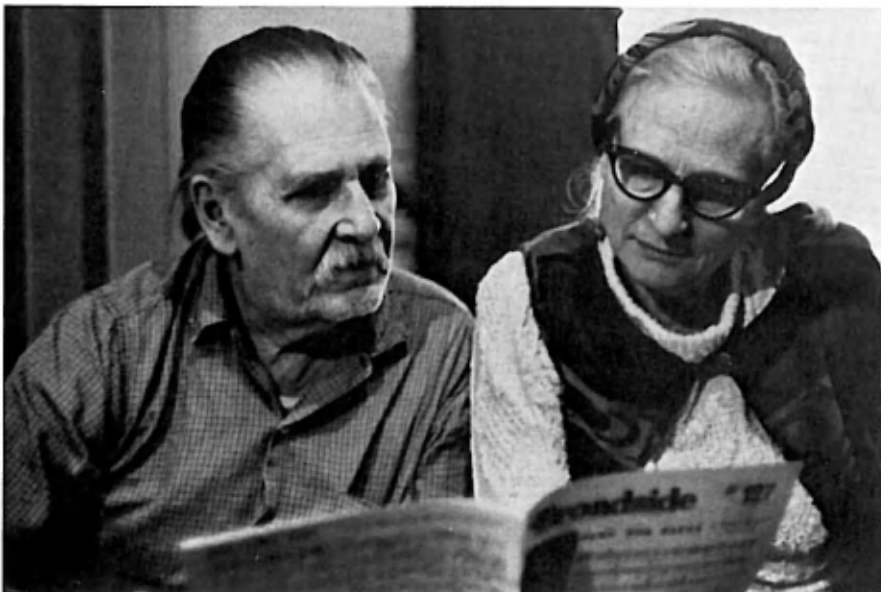
Flamethrowers (p. 248)

I met a man recently who remembers so much that a book would hold it. Gaunt and ailing, his tired eyes set deep back in a gentle drawn face, he spoke deliberately and painfully about a life gone past. He could have been a Mennonite, I thought, a patriarch with lean, unflinching opinions, a soft friendly moustache, and uncared-for white hair. He had the diffidence of age, and when he said just one word, "Molotchna, not with the flat pronunciation most others give it, but "Molaatschna," with a somewhat lifted and open-mouthed second syllable, I knew it was true. Here was *ferhää* (the Low German Mennonite word for past,

what has gone before), history before me. In my limited experience, only Russian Mennonites of another generation spoke that way, and maybe only those who really knew that river, not firsthand necessarily, but from their parents and *their* parents knew where it had led—through the Ukraine once, but then, by a leap of the mind, to America, to Kansas. The Promised Land.

Yet this was no promised land, and it was certainly not Kansas. Gordon E. Friesen, the second son of Jacob and Marie Duerksen Friesen, was born in Weatherford, Oklahoma in 1909 to Mennonite Brethren parents whose forebears had emigrated to the Krimmer village of Gnadenu, Kansas in 1874. It has been a long trek for him. The author of *Flamethrowers*, the first American Mennonite to write a nov-

el about Mennonites, Friesen has not been home since World War II. After drought, poverty, and almost every conceivable deprivation, including the tyranny of a blacklist, he ekes out a living in a rundown apartment building on New York's Upper West Side. There, with his folksinger wife, Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, one of his two daughters, a grandchild, and brother Oliver, a casualty of World War II, the Friesen family has since 1962 published a magazine of protest music called *Broadside*. The topical song sheet is a hardboil mix of folk music and commentary, harking back to the days when Friesen and Cunningham arrived fresh in New York as Communist organizers from western Oklahoma. They take pride in having been the first to publish or promote Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Janis Ian, and other folksinging greats of the 1960s, but *Broadside* as a struggling alternative press may be in its last days. Gordon is ill and rarely leaves their apartment anymore, while Sis, though she was recently honored by colleague Pete Seeger in a Carnegie Hall concert, also feels the effect of deteriorating health, the pinch of bad economic times, and what Gordon, who has seen the depths as a newspaperman—murders, suicides, fires, riots, and the horrid effects of blacklisting—calls "worse than all of this put together . . . growing old in New York City."¹



Gordon Friesen and wife, Agnes "Sis" Cunningham.

But still they fight on, although now mostly in recollecting their past. I talked with them for almost six hours after having tried to do my homework on an amazing life story. I went, it should be noted, to find out about *Flamethrowers*, and in the process learned a great deal more. Some of the story has been hinted at in a recent biography of the folksinger Woody Guthrie by Joe Klein. More is available in a Cunningham profile done in *Ms.* magazine in 1974, plus additional material in recent issues of *Broadside* and other publications to which the pair has contributed.²

Cunningham and Friesen are unswerving radicals of pre-World War II origin. They met two years before Pearl Harbor. She was a union organizer from the small town of Watonga, he a newspaper reporter from Weatherford outraged by the rightwing conservatism of Oklahoma politics and the Spanish Civil War. Radicalism came naturally to Sis. Her father had been a Eugene V. Debs socialist since 1912 when Oklahoma "voted red." Her brother William was both state director of

the Oklahoma Writers Project (for which Friesen also wrote) and author of *The Greencorn Rebellion*, a proletarian novel of anti-draft activity by blacks, Indians, and socialists in western Oklahoma during World War I. As if prodding were needed to stir her into action, the Depression provided it, and in the mid-thirties Cunningham joined an agitprop theater group named the Red Dust Players. By 1939 Sis was headlong engaged in the representation battles of both the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the DX Oil Workers. She had met and fought for the Scottsboro Boys, been music director at the Southern Labor School for Women in Asheville, North Carolina, and marched for the unemployed in Washington, D.C. She recalls with amusement the time she spied Gordon. He and a cousin Menno, both strapping Oklahomans, arrived at the Cunningham farm home with the advance billing of being socialist itinerants from New York City. They couldn't be from there, she realized at once, having visited the city and seen the two gangly Sooners' countrified

ways. New Yorkers neither came that tall nor invariably that quiet.

The second meeting between the two took place under more stringent circumstances. It was the summer of 1941, a lull before the storm for many Americans, but in an Oklahoma wracked by labor tensions and reeling from the after-shock of the Dust Bowl migration, a time of turmoil. Anti-red forces propelled by a tough local prosecutor and federal security agents were scouring the state for political dissidents. Arrests occurred, then jail sentences, some beatings; and finally book burnings, mounds of them, including Marxist literature and thirty-one copies of the Constitution, grabbed by vigilantes and put to the match in an Oklahoma City football stadium. "Oklahoma Witch Hunt," Friesen called the episode in a propaganda piece by the title. As head of the Oklahoma Committee to Defend Political Prisoners, an ad hoc branch of International Labor Defense, the legal arm of the Commu-

Maria and Jacob Friesen, parents of Gordon Friesen, a photo from the 30s.





Gordon Friesen c. 1936. Right cover of a pamphlet written and illustrated by Gordon Friesen, 1941.

nist Party, he chronicled the events while Sis hid out in the western badlands. The couple was already in love and would be married within three months. "What kind of insanity is this," Gordon quoted the *Tulsa Tribune* as saying about the trial of booksellers such as Ina Wood, soon to be immortalized as the "Union Maid" of Woody Guthrie's folksong. In a masterful polemic, twenty-three pages long and with a cover illustration which unfortunately misspelled his name, Friesen linked the series of injustices to a pattern of violence with deep social roots. "Now Oklahoma is a state of many fine men and women," it began. "But against their desire to be decent and human are set a number of forces. The economic system is painfully out of order."³

Friesen's own experience with economic and social dislocation was long and arduous. Once, after his father had traded their Weatherford

farm for a site near Dodge City, Kansas, the family harvested a lone paltry crop out of seven years' growth. Returning to Oklahoma, as he wrote, "just in time to enter the depression and be engulfed in the Dustbowl trauma," they suffered more lean years.⁴ Conditions got so bad that his mother, sisters, and one brother had to make the Okie trek down Highway 66 to California, while back at home he was the sole means of support for a downtrodden father. "I wish I had talked more with him, he was a harrassed man . . .," Friesen says, voice fading. Throughout much of the thirties it had been Gordon's work as a stringer for various area newspapers and national press services that kept food on the table. More than his own travail, however, the image that stands out is of an unemployed and penniless brother-in-law in California, waiting expectantly at a Bakersfield hospital for the birth of a child after five days without food. Another Okie, a stranger equally impoverished but with twenty-five cents to offer, emptied his pockets to give him money for a

hamburger. "This is an example of the poor helping the poor," Friesen concluded. A committed Marxist by then, one who saw in his own family's difficulties a microcosm of the class struggle, he depicted these events in an unpublished novel called "Unrest." "Steinbeck with the guts hanging out," is how a critic friend described the manuscript at the time. And indeed, Friesen's version of the Okie migration was darker by far than the *Grapes of Wrath* portrayal. The incomplete, unvarnished novel, said another critic, not knowing it would never be printed, is "one of the most powerful indictments of the folly, greed, and stupidity of modern life in America under the great depression that has yet been written."⁵

But the war intervened, and in addition to the fact that Friesen felt "Unrest" "did not hang together," he needed a job. He was also suffering from a heart condition, so a short time after their marriage in late 1941 Sis borrowed \$35 from her mother to head to New York. Medical attention was presumably obtained, while in the



By GORDON FRIESEN

meantime Sis and Gordon found temporary shelter with the noted documentary photographer Sid Grossman. Novices to city life, the couple sought other radical connections, especially in the music field, and after a short stay with Grossman found suitable quarters in a communal apartment at 130 West 10th Street in Greenwich Village. The move was auspicious not only in their lives but also for folk music. Joined in a loose and rambunctious arrangement were the indisputable greats of the modern folk boom—Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Josh White, Burl Ives, Bess Lomax, Millard Lampell, Lee Hays, Peter Hawes, and Sis herself, not as well known ultimately as some of the others, but in the estimable praise of another regular, blues singer Huddie Ledbetter, “the Queen of the accordeon players.”

The Almanac Singers, the core group called itself, and for a year or two their rousing combination of labor songs, basic folk tunes, and anti-fascist lyrics won popular recognition. U.S.-Soviet relations were uncommonly warm because of the wartime alliance, while for its part the Communist Party under the leadership of former Kansan Earl Browder was continuing the unity campaign begun in the thirties under the “Communism is 20th-Century Americanism” banner. Union locals beckoned the group, as did civic groups, business organizations, and for a time even, before conservative pressure was applied, Decca Records and CBS Radio.⁶ As a cultural branch of the communist Party U.S.A. (CPSUA), the Almanacs operated on a wide front. Friesen was not a singer, but in the role of “head accordeon carrier”⁷ in Guthrie’s twitting phrase, he accompanied Sis on many of her performances and wrote occasional articles for the *Daily Worker*. One of his pieces, strangely enough, appeared square above a critic’s review of a 1942 play entitled “Papa Is All,” about a dictatorial Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonite father “so demoniac that he literally jails his two active and post-adolescent children in a rural replica of a museum room.” The reviewer panned the



characterization—“He is surely a libel on the good Mennonites and the good Pennsylvania Dutch”—but Friesen may in any case not have noticed.⁸ He was hard at work on various freelance projects, and if a later allegation by the FBI was correct, doing such things as helping to arrange a “Kansas Barn Dance for Earl Browder” at his and Sis’s Greenwich Village address.⁹

There were other memorable events in their early New York sojourn. On February 14, 1942, all four radio networks featured the Almanacs on a morale boosting show called “This Is War.” Just the break they had been hoping for, with prospects dangled of long-term contracts and a national tour, the dream fizzled when the press caught hold of their Communist politics.¹⁰ Gordon had his own fling of excitement with a still-born photojournal named *Graphic Newsmagazine*. As reporter on a story involving congressional investigations into fraudulent war contracts which were hampering the production of U.S. weaponry, he interviewed Missouri Senator Harry S. Truman. Friesen raised questions about the scandal and its meaning; Truman talked on about World War I and Battery D and steadily pushed bourbon. The magazine soon died, at any rate, and Friesen was left tending an undeveloped sideline in the art of caricature. A sketch artist who drew blood-curdling images of fascists and their allies, he sharpened his focus to the point that in the summer of 1942 he exhibited his cartoons in a one-man show at the

Almanac Singers. From left to right: Woody Guthrie; Millard Lampell (later speechwriter, for Henry Wallace); Bess Lomax Hawes (sister of folklorist Alan Lomax); Pete Seeger; Arthur Stern; and Sis Cunningham.

National Maritime Union. Other labor organizations requested the black-and-white anti-Nazi drawings (satirically titled “The New Order,” according to a contemporary biography in *Who’s Who Among the Mennonites*),¹¹ but for unexplained reasons he stopped producing more. Life with the Almanacs may have been as much as could be handled. Sis sang when she could, Gordon wrote when he could, and in the quarters near them, in spacious Almanac House, Woody Guthrie as writer worked feverishly on the manuscript, *Bound for Glory*.

The stuff of legends, this book and author were, and Friesen was one of the few eyewitnesses to record their Almanac House phase. The singers’ arrangement really was communal, with a shared kitty, free-floating guests, and joint meals at a central table. Interspersed with spirited, some said dogmatic, discussions about the intricacies of Communism were musical jam sessions the group called hootenannies. Invariably at the center of these affairs was the unflappable Guthrie. Sis was present at his famous put-down of Manhattan business executives at the Waldorf-Astoria (“She’ll be wearin’ a union button when she comes,” Guthrie roared at the un-

attentive audience, to which the jaded cry rang out "Bring on the girls! Bring 'em on!"),¹² and all were there when because of anti-Communist publicity the money dried up and the heat dissipated. With only an oven to warm their dwellings, windows frosted, stalactites grew in the sinks, and "Woody, always ready to record in song what went on around him, wrote a blues, one verse of which went:

I went into the bathroom and I
pulled upon the chain
Polar bears on icebergs came float-
ing down the drain
Hey, Pretty Mama, I got those
Arctic Circle blues.¹³

The Almanacs were also present the day of their eviction when, "like ants moving from an old colony to a new one," they organized a mid-night foot migration of an entire household. As one stream proceeded "more or less steadily forward," loaded to the brim with second-hand paraphernalia, "it was passed by a silent file of empty-handed ants returning to Almanac House for fresh loads." Only Guthrie avoided the sidewalk expedition, typing obliviously away. "That's one way to get a book written," Friesen realized.¹⁴ As admiring as anyone of this living folk hero, Gordon could do what almost no one else dared—tweak the mystic figure who posed as a roustabout when in Gordon's words "You never did a day's work in your life." "You're an intellectual, a poet," the real former farmhand and cotton picker told Guthrie. With a shrug and a smile he accepted the jest, and during the last months of the book after Gordon and Sis found their own apartment, the friendship was deepened when Guthrie joined the couple in their tiny Hudson Street domicile.¹⁵

But for the Almanacs as a group the end was near. Seeger joined the Army, Guthrie went to sea, and in 1943, perhaps as much out of a desire to unionize war-tooled auto-workers as the search for employment, Gordon, Sis, and what remained of the singers moved wholesale to Detroit. Richard F. O'Hair, undercover informant for the FBI before the House Un-American Activities Committee, is moot source

BROADSIDE

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IN THIS ISSUE:
"TIME of the
TIGER"

BY
LEN CHANDLER

also songs by:

PHIL OCHS
ERNIE MARRS
TOM PAXTON
MALVINA REYNOLDS
WOODY GUTHRIE

and an article by

Bob DYLAN

for the information that Sis became literature director of District 7 of the Detroit branch of the Communist Party. Other government documents indicate that Gordon and Sis attended meetings and picnics set up to hear luminaries such as party leader William Z. Foster.¹⁶ They did some factory work, although Gordon's contribution was as news reporter for the Hearst-owned *Detroit Times*. He covered the city beat, a wide one locally, garnering a banner headline on occasion, interviewing military brass, but the event that stood out was as a police reporter on the night of June 21, 1943. "Day of Infamy," he termed the experience in a retrospective

"THE NATIONAL
TOPICAL SONG MAGAZINE"
JANUARY 20, 1964
Price -- 35¢



NEW YORK TIMES, seldom have the vicious effects of poverty on the richest city in the world been better illuminated. A quarter of the families in the city live in grinding, abject, hopeless circumstances. They provide most of the grist for the juvenile courts, the family courts, the jails. They swell the relief rolls. They provide an element of social dynamite in the existing order.

Cover of *Broadside*, No. 38, edited by Gordon Friesen and Sis Cunningham.

published twenty years later in the leftwing literary magazine *Mainstream*.¹⁷ The Detroit race riot, started by hostile whites who attacked black beachgoers at a public recreation area, exploded into violence such as few cities had seen. On duty when it began, Friesen was at hand on virtually every front. He saw the battered bodies of Negro factory workers whose injuries "had the fantastic appearance as if they, too, had been produced by an assembly line process;" he visited precinct stations; recorded anti-black



Agnes "Sis" Cunningham playing for the United Canning, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America meeting at Bristow, Okla., Feb. 1940.

sniper fire; observed a few acts of sacrificial heroism; and before it was over, rode with a convoy of federal troops called in to calm the disturbance.

The thesis of Friesen's article was that Detroit "fascists," a term he uses freely as a synonym, it sometimes appears, for nearly all non-Communists, had unleashed their hatred with the blessing of authorities. The hardhitting essay dealt hammer blows to the callousness of local officials. Riveted into the text as well, however, were two

subthemes important to the party as an organization and to Friesen personally. The first of these was an almost super-patriotic identification with the U.S. war effort, strange for a dissident who had opposed American involvement during the Hitler-Stalin Pact, but in keeping with the party's prowar switch after the German invasion of Russia.¹⁸ If it flowed logically from the premise that the riots in Detroit undermined the war cause, and therefore patriotism, it was also the case that Friesen and other Communists saw behind the events still a deeper betrayal. Where were the FBI, House Unamerican Activities Committee and other federal intelligence-gathering agencies during the Detroit episode, Friesen asked?

Why wasn't the government investigating "real subversives," those who peddled hate and greed to the detriment of America, "while thick dossiers are compiled on progressive groups and individuals . . . at the taxpayer's expense?"¹⁹

Friesen had his own answer to this question by the time of the article, for of all the issues that molded his and Sis' life, this was premier. Twice they had tasted censorship or suppression, first in Oklahoma City, then with the Almanacs, but the third and last chapter closed their careers. The rest would be addenda. In an irony true to the Cold War, the most critical phase began in 1944 when Gordon got a job with the Office of War Information in New York. The move was a fatal one, prompting an eventual government security investigation which as a Communist he dared not challenge. He was able to find employment as a news writer for CBS radio, but with a corporate revampment in the direction of television in 1948 lost his position. He did not get another for ten years. The Cold War brush off also hurt Cunningham. Burdened with two children between 1945 and 1948, she nearly stopped performing except for benefit appearances during the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace. Those engagements she desired were either unavailing or unremunerative. Gordon got a temporary job running a sound truck for Pete Seeger during the 1948 mayoral campaign of American Labor Party candidate Vito Marcantonio, and then, nothing . . . nothing in the writing and singing fields for either of them, only menial work on occasion, some periods on welfare, and an unremitting battle to find food, shelter, and a forum to be heard.

There is a folksong, Sis has written, which has the culminating line "Not enough to live on but a little too much to die." The phrase, she says, epitomizes their blacklisting. "We came to the conclusion that there was little or no difference between killing people and not allowing them to live. We were not being allowed to live. We were a man, a woman, and two children—a family

in the good old American sense—condemned not to live.”²⁰

Throughout the ordeal, their commitment to Marxist principles remained strong and confirmed. They were no longer active in any organized sense, but did march on behalf of the Rosenbergs, and in 1958, when the opportunity arose, Gordon took a minor position with the Polish News Service. Finally in 1962 Pete Seeger helped them found *Broadside*. Very much in the Guthrie tradition, the topical song magazine offered both a reprieve from enforced silence and a sounding board for pent-up views. They think of the sheet with its spinoff recording albums as their greatest contribution, and indeed, in its early years certainly, the mimeographed and now photocopied magazine was a wellspring for young rebel artists seeking a voice. Bob Dylan was little more than an underground cult figure striking self-conscious poses in the Guthrie mold when his first published song, “Singing John Birch Society Blues,” appeared in *Broadside*’s opening issue. Other major artists such as Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Buffy St. Marie, and Arlo Guthrie were also among the legion of singers befriended or printed by *Broadside*. More have joined since, although commercial stardom and political variances have depleted the circle as well as the quality. Dylan, for instance, has been attacked recently by Friesen and Cunningham. They criticize him not only because of his apolitical money-making, but also for breaking the ranks with a putative conversion to Christian fundamentalism. Additional targets include political writers who see McCarthyism as a short-term aberration, plus nonviolent liberals such as Joan Baez, who is accused among other things of pandering to anti-Communist sentiment through her support of Russian dissidents.²¹

Oddly enough, it is the mention of Baez which brings us full circle to the theme foreshadowed at the beginning of this article. Thus far, Friesen’s Mennonite past has barely been intimated, to the consternation of the reader perhaps, but for a reason which seems fitting. If the normal approach to a life or event is to treat it linearly, from start

to finish, the story of Friesen and his origins suggests a reverse typology. He himself is in the process of recollecting and describing a remarkable progression that had two distinct segments. Near the end of his productive life, he is able to analyze both partitions from the after-perspective of his latest experiences. How, he seems to be asking among other things (for he and Sis are working on a joint autobiography), did an Oklahoma Mennonite Brethren farm boy get wrenched from the countryside and converted to radicalism? What was the connection, and of almost equal interest, how does he view his Mennonite upbringing through the filter of his subsequent departure?

A clue to the latter question can be found in a 1967 commentary published in *Broadside*. In an editorial attack by Cunningham on the anti-black power opinions expressed by Baez, the singer was quoted from press notices as saying that nonviolence as a movement was “only 60 years old.” The statement was false, Cunningham retorted, for her own husband’s people had been steadfast pacifists for over four hundred years. They had suffered dearly on account of this principle, “as their thick ‘Book of Martyrs’ will attest,” and when Gordon was a boy he sometimes sang the “haunting refrain (roughly translated into English)”:

The way is red with martyrs’ blood;
Did you think you’d walk on roses?

The stanza, said Cunningham, reminded her that if scholars today studied these people, they would find “a crushing refutation to those—anthropologists, sociologists, plain every-politician, etc.—who claim that man is inherently a warring animal and ‘you can’t change human nature.’” Did the comment mean that she and Friesen identified with Mennonite pacifism? Or that they identified the refrain as a fitting description of their own thorny pilgrimage? Actually, not. Baez had stated that “Black Power is just as silly as any other kind of ‘power.’” To Cunningham and Friesen, however, “that other kind of power,” which through the centuries “has crushed, murdered

countless millions of human beings (including nonviolent Mennonites),” could only be opposed by a better, more militant power, be it down-trodden minorities asserting their rights or angry citizens fighting capitalist imperialism.²²

Friesen shows other signs of ambivalent feeling about his Mennonite past. He acknowledges that the taught precepts he learned as a child still have their pull. He finds them ultimately misguided, of that there is no doubt, but more to the point batters his tradition with example on example of its practical shortcomings. Many are personal illustrations, detailing, say, the morose cruelty of a minister or the collapse of his family due to drought and depression with no help from Mennonites. In the historical vein, he interprets Anabaptism from the Marxist perspective—that it was radical originally as a peasants’ land revolt. He is at once critical and proud of the economic wonders achieved by Russian Mennonites. Their excellence in wheat set the world’s standards, yet here and in Russia they exploited others while talking of peace. Through oral tradition he tells stories of Russia: how an addled step grandfather, from the old country believing himself still in the Ukraine, was ready with a whip “to lash Russians with”; and how a once young aunt, when she took pity on South Russian laborers and gave them dinner for a meal instead of sour clabber milk, was reproved by her parents for “spoiling” the workers. Mennonites are “the world’s worst hypocrites,” he has written in *Broadside*, “always renouncing war, they were doubly quick in taking advantage of others’ wars. In Russia they grew rich off land seized from the Turks by force of arms. In Kansas they prospered from soil still soaked with the blood of Indians. If honest, they would return this land to the Indians on this very day.”²³

An unusual statement for a Marxist, asking landowners to transcend their class by forfeiting their interest—does the remark hint slightly of a Mennonite conscience, his and theirs? When approached with a question that tries to relate

his current beliefs with his Mennonite Brethren upbringing, he answers unexpectedly that since the age of nine he has been destined for radicalism. During World War I he was expelled from the classroom and threatened with arrest for making an unpatriotic remark. "You goddamn American," he had shouted back at a bully who called him "a goddamn Dutchman." Pegged with the German Mennonite label, Friesen learned then about minority status. Earlier and throughout his youth he experienced ostracism from his own family's group for wanting to read English. Again as a Mennonite, Gordon learned the fear of being made an outsider. He cites few specific incidents to explain this condition, stating mainly that when he and his brothers were visited by neighbors and relatives they had to stash their American contraband. A story about his father explains their reaction. As a young man Jacob Friesen had found a non-Mennonite newspaper and was caught reading it. "We knew then that he was lost," an elderly aunt told Gordon, tears streaming down her face.

The day of such bulwarks seems itself lost now, but in talking to Friesen the era of his youth comes back like his accent. The history of his family is an Oklahoma saga of a young Mennonite couple leaving their Kansas village around 1900, locating on a homestead near the town of Weatherford, with all the attendant frontier deprivations, and failing economically. They were part of a small enclave of Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, huddled in a spiritual wilderness, clinging stubbornly, defensively, to a faith and a culture. "Boundary maintenance" is the sociological jargon, and the limits were strict: backward or forward immersion (depending on which group one belonged to), no musical instruments, severe separation of the sexes, an insistence on German, low or high, and no intermarriage with Yankee neighbors.²⁴

Gordon's father, whom he says was the second child born in Gnadenau, was a restless man plagued by misjudgment. He had a frontiersman's desire for the main chance.

He was always looking for just the right land but could not hit the mark. He bought in 1912 a small orchard in Reedley, California, held it for a year or two, then sold it; he set up a Weatherford real estate business, where the demands of the trade outpaced his ethics; and finally, after losing a bid to become owner of a Ford Motor Company distributorship, he made the fatal mistake of exchanging his farm near Weatherford for an abandoned plot near the ghost town of Wilburn, Kansas. Here, in the netherworld of Mennonitism, which Jacob Friesen may partially have longed for, having been of two minds about his religious attachment, the family starved — emotionally, physically, and intellectually. When asked about their plight, Gordon Friesen, a writer, shields his face from loss of

Running through every thing I've done is the thread of my upbringing as a Mennonite—namely compassion for the oppressed.

Gordon Friesen in a letter to the author, April 7, 1983

words. He remembers emphatically that when they appealed for help, they were told by church members to bear their difficulties as the will of God. "That's taking theology too far," Friesen remarks, noting that an uncle came to save them and bring them back to Weatherford.

The family never recovered as an economic or social unit. Marie Friesen as a child had been "orphaned out" to the family of Krimmer Mennonite Brethren founder and elder Jacob A. Wiebe. She remembered the experience bitterly, but despite unforgiving anger at what she thought was menial treatment, Gordon's mother became desperately attached to her religious faith. She would pray anxiously, woefully for her family's deliverance, and in a corresponding manner ask berating questions about her husband's ability to earn their bread. Economic worries tore the family apart. In the midst of the Depression, Marie and most of the family went west temporarily to Southern California to look for employment in the fields and war plants. One son, the eldest, had already enlisted in the U.S.

Marines. Another son, Oliver, who aids Gordon and Sis in the production of *Broadside*, also joined the military. Oliver fought with General George C. Patton's tank forces during World War II. Both sons came home to America psychologically or physically disabled.

Memories of death, disease, and injustice cloud all Gordon Friesen's thoughts about Oklahoma and Mennonites. It is the dark side of the frontier epic that he presents, a personalized version of Michael Lesy's photographic essay *Wisconsin Death Trip*.²⁵ He has lamented in print the calloused attitude that he inherited toward Indians. The former prejudice enrages him now, though he says warmly in private that when his father homesteaded in Custer County, Oklahoma, he grew several rows of corn specially

for the picking of nearby tribes. Another anecdote, absolutely unforgettable if true, concerns a neighbor's son in Kansas, wasting away from terminal disease, whose father put him on a party telephone line to broadcast his death throes. "Life is hard," is Friesen's laconic conclusion to this pathetic story. His other tales are as sad or worse: minorities being humiliated, barbarities committed in the name of healing, madness due to isolation and loneliness. The gothic version of life that he mounts is symbolized graphically by a relative of Friesen who had left the Mennonite fold to fight in the Spanish-American War. He returned from the Philippines to marry an "ootlander," a non-Mennonite woman, says Friesen, who had a scarlet reputation as bar girl or prostitute. The relative left her eventually, and in recompense perhaps turned to ecstatic religion. Embarrassed by his actions, the Friesen children would watch in horror as he danced to the spirit in local churches. He did this, no less, in a rundown church in the black part of town, but what scandalized them

most were his talks with God. He scaled their house during a rain-storm once, climbed to the roof, and stood spread-eagle at the apex, arms outstretched and mouth open heavenward, wailing for help, for divine intercession.²⁶

Friesen recoiled from such scenes, resolved never to repeat them. He looked to books for answers, never was baptized, and learned as a boy that he loved writing. Uneducated formally beyond high school, he got outside encouragement from a druggist who offered him large stacks of unsold magazines free of charge. Completing high school as he did was rare in Oklahoma then (a discrepant fact not fully explained in light of the family's marginal circumstances), but even rarer no doubt was the quality and extent of his reading list. Friesen devoured pulp magazines at first, then varied his taste with richer fare. He read *Harpers*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, a shortlived progressive journal called *Plain Talk*, and like so many in the twenties, was permanently influenced by the iconoclasm of Henry L. Mencken's *American Mercury*. He does not mention the expectable—Marx, Freud, and popular psychology—but says that Mencken and Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry* "finished off whatever religious sentiments still left from Mennonite childhood." His serious novel reading, which began as a boy when he finished every book in the state correspondence library, broadened still more during a three-year period when because of a heart ailment he was totally bedridden. Through borrowing privileges at the state library, he read all that could be gotten. He finished H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennet, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Theodore Dreiser (who was also, he found, part Mennonite in background); plus standards such as Lincoln Steffens, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, Dostoevski, and Anatole France. Later on a cousin brought second-hand books from Oklahoma City and Friesen focused totally on American contemporaries. Sinclair Lewis especially affected him, while Hemingway he disliked ("seemed superficial") and Faulkner, he thought, "rambled on and on about a South that no longer existed, if it ever

did."²⁷

Somewhere between the books and the libraries, between sharecropping stints and time in the fields, as cotton picker and wheat shocker, and between high school and the Depression, Gordon Friesen himself became a writer. Starting professionally as ghost author for college students at the local Southwestern State Teachers College, he graduated from there to area newspapers. The *Clinton News* picked up his copy, then the Weatherford paper, and next two Oklahoma City dailies, the *Daily Oklahoman* and the *Times*. National press services used his stories occasionally, and he also sold articles to papers in Tulsa, Denver, and Kansas City. Most stories were conventional. He did ambulance chasing, some sports work, a memorable fire at Southwestern State, and a lot of animal features.

By the mid-1930's, the money Friesen made as a self-taught free lancer was vital to the family's survival. He was and is, as Joe Klein reports, "very witty in a countrified way,"²⁸ a trait that came in handy when stretching his copy to get more column inches and thus increase his income. A few stories he wrote were pure fabrication. He claims invention rights, for instance, to a social event in Weatherford since called "Panther Days." The hoax was perpetrated when in reaction to stories he contrived about a crazed panther advancing on the town, an alarmed citizenry organized a posse to hunt down the beast. It turned into a liquor fest in dry Oklahoma and was repeated for years. Another tale in Friesen's repertoire of pseudo-events involved southwestern gold seekers. To confound the editor of the Weatherford daily, a good news man who boosted the positive and ignored the negative, he reported the fake announcement that the plains city had been designated as first annual host of the Amalgamated Brotherhood of Chemical, Mechanical, Physical, Spiritual Gold Restorers of America, Inc. Legends of lost buried gold, like those of behemoth panthers, were stock themes in Oklahoma lore. This event was special, however, since the intended aim of the group was the laudable purpose of uncov-

ering the riches which would at last and permanently restore the economy. Friesen named his cousin Menno Duerksen president of the brotherhood, and while Menno disappeared, conveniently, so he could not be interviewed, the announcement caught on. From everywhere they came, mountebanks, rogues, pseudo-scientists, and plain ordinary farmers, armed to the hilt with dip needles, gold buzzers, shovels of every description, anything with which to find gold.

Friesen can relate numerous such escapades, reportorial comeuppances which show the lighter side of his work, and yet the experiences which dominated had a gloomier aspect. Politicized finally by the real stories of the Depression—the Dust Bowl, starvation, mortgage foreclosures, and the Okie trek—he focused in the middle of this on a torturous diversion. Speaking in retrospect, he says that by the late 1920s the life he had known in the Mennonite value system, however he despised it, was lost or shattered by economic failure. What power this influence must have held then, how strong its grip, to inspire a novel which fictionalized his boyhood.

About twenty-two when he started it, in verse form at first, the book titled *Flamethrowers* was issued on January 2, 1936, under the imprint of Caxton Printers, Inc., Caldwell, Idaho. "Sophomoric" is how he describes the work now, noting in an aside that it did not sell well. *Flamethrowers* was among the first group of novels priced at \$3.50. One dollar more than the preexisting rate, the book lagged at sales counters in part because while beautifully printed, its remote Idaho publisher was small competition to the dominant publishing houses of New York and Boston. The press lacked popular recognition, but in compensation did have the highest reputation for superior book craft. Friesen chose Caxton Printers because it had previously been acclaimed for discovering ex-Mormon writer Vardis Fisher, author of an unusual series of fictional autobiographies. It was also a risk-taking concern, willing to gamble, and though Friesen may not have known it, famous for its owner, Eclectic

and individualist, J. H. Gipson was a reactionary westerner who hated nothing so much as the Franklin Roosevelt New Deal. Had he known Friesen's politics, or what they would become, he would not have published him.²⁹

For his part, Friesen had a hard time just finding the paper to complete the manuscript. The first draft, he says, was written on the backs of farm auction bills. A contemporary source, the *Literary Digest*, confirmed his adversity with a minor embellishment. As a struggling author, said the June 27, 1936, issue, he "was so hard up he wrote the first draft on the backs of unpaid bills [sic]. A newspaper editor lent him paper on which to type off a presentable manuscript, but the rewrite lay in a dresser drawer for months because Friesen couldn't spare the postage to mail it to a publisher. For final corrections, a friend 'swiped' a dictionary."³⁰

Nearly forgotten today, and dismissed by Friesen as unworthy of consideration, *Flamethrowers* when it appeared drew strong critical responses. Newspapers, press services, special interest magazines, and radio stations across the country featured the volume as a major publication. "This is a strange, dark, moody tale to come out of the West," captioned the eminent reviewer Fred T. Marsh in a representative commentary in the Sunday *New York Times* book section. "At its best it touches profundity, but it is often distorted, sometimes foolish, always youthful." A stimulating book, agreed Joseph M. Smith of the cross-town *Herald Tribune*, one that was immature and shaky in places but full of promise. Elsewhere, the *Saturday Review* of London saw even greater attributes—exceedingly impressive," it stated as did regional publications in the United States and Canada.³¹ "A first novel which is well worth reading," said Civil War historian Bruce Cotton, then writing newspaper copy for NEA Service. "Mr. Friesen contrives a moving and poetic protest against those blind human forces which keep life from being the vibrant thing it might be." So pleased was the reviewer for the Harvard *Crimson* that he compared portions of the

novel to Joyce and O'Neill. "There is complete and utter surrender on the part of the author to the emotions he portrays," concluded the writer, "and the end result is an amazing, complete, and very powerful book."

In the country as a whole, the most generous praise came from west of the Mississippi. "A few more books like *Flamethrowers* . . .," wrote the Dallas *Times Herald*, "and the whole world will know of him." Phrases such as "admirable and impressive" and "marks a new high tide for western literature" dotted book columns from Colorado Springs, Colorado to Portland, Oregon. "Without question . . . the finest modern novel we have read," raved Frank McNaughton, United Press reviewer from the novelist's home state of Oklahoma. "Ninety-ninths of modern writing rings painfully hollow when contrasted to this book." Don Hollenbeck of the *Omaha Bee Herald*, later famous as a CBS radio commentator, echoed a similar reaction. Calling *Flamethrowers* "one of the most remarkable novels ever written in America," he urged readers to purchase the volume whether or not it was accompanied "by the incense of New York literary teas." Perhaps the most significant exposure Friesen received, in size of audience at least, was from radio announcer Upton Close of the Mutual Broadcasting System. On an evening edition of *World Parade*, Close touted the volume as a fine example of the new writing in the American heartland, where artists and publishers were conceiving unique kinds of literature "undreamed of east of the Hudson."

Not all reviews displayed the same kind of interest or equal admiration. Some criticized the book for being rambling and disjointed, while others took offense at its coarse subject matter. The sour note injected by the *Los Angeles Times* critic was that Friesen was either an "emotional imbecile" or pulling the reader's leg with "clever, fantastic nonsense." The *Times* seemed bemused rather than angered by some of *Flamethrowers* unconventional themes, but to Gerald Frank of the *Cleveland News*, the book was as devoid of virtue as it was miss-

ing in levity. In an article that expressed conservative resentment against bohemian writers who laundered their private identity crises in public view, Frank ridiculed the novel for being "overheavy with Life—Life discussed at interminable length in long, involved Greenwich-villagy harangues, in moon-drunk sophomoric soliloquies."

Whatever the critics' final judgment, the book was, as seemed obvious, largely autobiographical. In 490 pages, 106 chapters, and 4 sections, Gordon Friesen's protagonist, a German-Russian lad named Peter Franzman, struggles to find identity in the horrible circumstances that his family has inherited. Members of a small subset of a pacifist religious group whose origins go back to Holland and Prussia, the family of Jacob and Theresa Franzman leaves Russia for America in about 1910. Tragedy strikes during a perilous river crossing. Peter's younger brother Joseph drowns in the water when the Russian guide Jacob has hired abandons the child for fear of his own life. Soldiers are after them, but the three who survive reach Germany and America and finally Kansas. The village they head for has relatives and acquaintances whom they hope will aid them. It is Blumenhof, a fictive rendition of the actual Gnadenu. Located near Gallwan, a mixed town of Russian Germans like themselves and some Americans, the village was founded in the 1870s by the subgroup's spiritual head, Isaac Liese. Americanization has since broken down the original settlement plan, and when the Franzman's arrive they face the loser's choice of coming late to a community where the land has been occupied and materialism prevails. Liese is troubled by this change, obsessed by it in fact, yet in young Peter's view he is a petty old fool, sex hungry for one thing, often casting glances at Theresa, Peter's naive mother, and in the meantime engaged in wild fantasies about God, war, and evil which when filtered through his slow-minded churchgoers serve largely as a cover for greed and ignorance.

Peter recoils from what he observes, for innocent that he is, the

death of brother Joseph at the dividing line to freedom has permanently wounded him. He sees as a child and mainly sees hate—hate, stupidity, greed, and cruelty. His mother detests him. She opposed the move to America, is convinced it was sinful, and blames the death of her child on her ambitious husband Jacob. Joseph had been her baby, while Peter was the seed of a sly, grasping spouse. Eager to get rich and finally gain the social status which his coreligionists have always denied him, Jacob represents a crude blend of the devoutly pious and the money-hungry peasant. He has one great urge: if he cannot himself become successful, then Peter will. For this he is prepared to sacrifice everything, including ultimately the little that he has to finance Peter's schooling.

And Peter does get educated, over the strenuous opposition of his mother, Liese, and others in Blumenhof who are adamantly against the learning of English. While Jacob, in his mad rush to *be* something, to establish a genuine foothold, is beguiled by Gottlieb Craft-holt into over extending himself on marginal land at too high a price, the religious forces in the village work mightily to save Peter. They plot revival meetings, speak ill of Jacob, and numb Peter with their mean parochialism. The book nearly groans with an endless array of stunted or evil characters. There is Liese to start with, who besides his physical longings is preoccupied with the collapse of Blumenhof and the loss of his former greatness. He sometimes thinks it would have been better never to have left Russia. He lives now in a disheveled shack at the edge of the former village, where he works feverishly but to no avail on a printing press and poems that others disregard. American-style greed having wormed its way into his utopian conception, nothing illustrates Liese's pathetic decline so much as the oily condescension which his very own son-in-law, the wily and much envied landowner who hoodwinked Jacob, dotes upon him.

But there are other, more disturbed characters, such as the half-demented Theresa, who in her un-

balanced state sees only purity in Liese's lost aspiration. Or Mrs. Rächting, the village gossip, who anticipates community irregularities almost before they occur, and then enhances them. Or Solomon Mull, a repulsive, deformed bachelor whose misshapen body attracts cruelty, and shows in the process what Blumenhof will do to persecute the weak. In perhaps the vilest scene in the book, Peter is forced by the mother of Susie Gunstan to look at the young woman's thigh wound, as if in seeing the alleged wages of a long ago sin Peter will finally be frightened onto the paths of righteousness.

Peter's sensitive and oppressed spirit resists these brutalizing experiences but cannot find escape. The shackles of his birthright—family, village, sect—have him trapped. The few Americans in the area are of little help, as he learns during World War I when he is suspected by his teacher for being Germanic in background. As a boy, Peter's impressions of the World War are picked up from photographs he has viewed in local newspapers and from the ugly tone of daily conversations.³² With the clarity of youth he sees the carnage for what it is. At the same time, Peter is witness to Liese and others of the group, whom he knows to be bigoted and intolerant themselves, take a stand against war on religious grounds. Some including Liese himself are actually fleeing to Canada to elude the crisis. The confusion of values is symptomatic for Peter of all that is wrong with Blumenhof, or for that matter the world. In the middle of the war his only role model, the son of a neighbor who has violated community taboos by attending an unapproved Oklahoma college, enlists in the fighting. Peter glories in this nonconformist decision, observes it in fact as a noble and sacrificial act. He too can break the mold; he can become a knight! But the hero is killed, and a horrible image is pressed on Peter's mind. The shooting fires of hatred, his child's thoughts tell him, are no more searing on the battlefield than they are at home, church or village.

The spectacle of *flamethrowers* emblazoned forever on his memory,

like a horror movie with accompanying scenes of Joseph's drowning, Peter cannot shed the image as the hideous motif of his everyday existence. Blumenhof—"the grotesque unreality!"—is mangling his being.³³ If escape routes exist, they do not seem evident because within the world that he knows there are no choices available. It is a closed life that he leads, an isolated one, cheerless and pathetic, in which the weight of history seems ominously present. Taken against his will to a revival gathering, Peter coldly describes the people who afflict him:

An air of dismal hopelessness hung over them all; it was as though they had completed their lives long ago and were merely hanging on, waiting for death. It was a strange thing that here in this religious gathering, among these men and women who professed themselves to be true followers of the Creator of all life, heirs of a close companionship with that Creator for which their ancestors had waded through blood, and had fought, unremittingly, for centuries, among these men and women who believed themselves closer than any other group of humans to that powerful regenerative force, there should exist such an atmosphere of exhausted and irrecoverable mankind. These people were almost sullen in their lethargy of spirit. Their clothes, their tones of speech, their few actions, their faces and hands, showed nothing of a creative, joyous life, nothing of a love and respect for creation, but rather a sour, total disinterest, a mistrust of life, and a decision, as though in spite, to live it as dully as possible. . . . It would have been difficult to find a group of men and women anywhere so devoid of all evidence of joy, so devoid of all zest for living, so devoid of all spirit.³⁴

The reprieve Peter has longed for finally comes when he enters Fenrow's University. The school is a small Oklahoma religious college, not of his background, where his idol had attended before going to war. In his past life Peter has been as unsuited for friendship as he has been for faith. He feels himself deformed by Blumenhof, a psychic casualty of daily village warfare, but through female history professor Duane Terrison, ten years his elder and the star of the faculty, he discovers a person who tries to un-

derstand him. Their meeting on the first day of classes is fraught with tension. Having caught glimmers of the homogenized student body, where few knew the *angst* such as he had gone through, he realizes at once that he will always be foreign. He clasps his books ashamedly, his mind in the self-conscious cell that Blumenhof constructed, when Duane inquires briskly about his interest in history. Rattled by his fear, partly in her own thoughts about a dissertation she is writing on the effect of the World War on Christianity, she finds herself intruding with insensitive questions about an event in the past that for her is academic but for him steeped with pain. More fear registers on Peter, followed by a scary mutual silence. Duane fumbles for escape, acknowledging to herself that she had never considered the World War as anything more than a case study of man's inevitable climb on the road to improvement. Because of the conflict, she had written in her dissertation the evening before, "we can look forward confidently to a better, more wholesome, more perfect religion in the future." She asks several further questions:

You are not a football player. And then, more recklessly, more huskily: "What is more cruel than a poet without words?"

His face was white with amazement. All at once he heard himself speaking as from afar, listened stupidly and helplessly to the shameful thing his fierce voice cried: "My mother!"³⁵

In Peter's murky psychology, Duane realizes, there are only illogical answers to implausible questions. She pities the student like a mother would a son, but is struck with deeper feelings than sympathy. Gradually, what begins as curiosity ends up as love. The two form a peculiar alliance, and as time passes make an odd couple at Fenrow's, deviant for the unacceptable nature of their student-teacher relationship and dangerous to school authorities because of Peter's unbent agnosticism. Fenrow's is a middle-brow school of one-part patriotism and one-part football. The glue that welds the halves together is a glossy revivalism that to Peter, having endured

Blumenhof, lacks even the honesty of weathered farmers' faces. He is a poor lost innocent to Duane, but he is also the child that leads her away from her own and Fenrow's suffocating aura of pious idealism. In the end they are too much for the school's administrators, who dismiss the pair as impertinent trouble-makers with no hope of salvation.

In the end also life at Blumenhof goes full circle. On a visit home, Mrs. Raching dies, then her disgruntled son (by suicide), next Peter's mother, and finally his father. The grimy deaths of his parents symbolize their failure. The mother who despised her family, whose grief over Joseph smothered reality and tortured Peter, has lost faith in God. She dies a terrible death in their old shack. Jacob could not afford more, having lost most of his land to a fatal combination of mismanagement, drought, and recession. Her search and failure had been a spiritual one, his was material. Bitter at Craffholt, angry with the pious villagers who in his opinion belied their faith with sharp business dealings, he collapses in a cornfield. From a distance, Isaac Liese ponders all that has gone wrong. He had brought these people from across the seas, raised their sod homes, laid out their village, and now, Theresa in her way and Jacob in his, epitomized the loss of a dream. "Yes, Kansas had been too productive . . . Craffholt and those who came after him had been changed by the insidious land; the land swept from their brains the words of the man who had cried: 'Sell all that thou hast and give unto the poor,' and, in their stead, had implanted a ghastly selfishness and a lust for more and more land, for the material, stifling things, gold and power."³⁶

Peter avoids replying directly to Liese's diagnosis (though in an odd, hard to pinpoint way he even seems to share it), but his own explanation goes a long stride farther. Blumenhof was indeed wracked by internal contradictions, and yet not for the reasons which Liese could fathom. His tragedy and that of his people was that they had grounded their lives on faulty ideals. In the manner of their overzealous ancestors,

they had defied man's nature, sought nonexistent answers, and in the process made life meaner and drabber. The final episode has Peter realize the philosophy which his sad years had quested. In a discussion with Duane which ends the book, he pounds home the truth that Blumenhof taught him: the world could only be accepted as it actually was. Hovering mysteriously in the background is the voice of his mother, who extolls from the far distance of his subconscious the very same realism which in life she had lacked.

Friesen cannot recall any Mennonite reactions to *Flamethrowers'* conclusion or even its contents. Though relatives read the book, and brothers Edward and Oliver must have since it was dedicated to them, language problems and other factors shut the novel off from his parents. Were Mennonites in general aware of the book? According to one authority, *Flamethrowers* raised controversies among Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren similar to the debate surrounding Rudy Wiebe's 1962 publication of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*.³⁷ The nature of the discussion is now almost impossible to recapture. Conducted *sub rosa* at the time, in oral rather than written form, the gist of the response is perhaps best intimated by an entry in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. Not under Friesen or his book, but in a passing note in a fairly long section on Mennonite literature by Harold S. Bender, the reference work published in 1957 described the novel as "highly inimical, and written from a 'leftist' point of view; its characters are not typical."³⁸ An individual who took issue personally with Friesen was Bethel College Professor Menno S. Harder. His Krimmer pastor-father and Friesen's father had been friends and neighbors in Weatherford. Remembering the relationship, Harder wrote Gordon what must have been a letter of complaint. The copy of his protest is unfortunately not available. In direct reply to the comments, however, Friesen answered with the statement that warfare kills "not only in the trenches with stalking soldiers hideously casting liquid fire in the faces of their fellow men, but

wherever life moves and men and women harbor fear of themselves and hatred toward others."³⁹

Harder, one might guess, rejected the defense. A lament over man's nature and fate was not the motif he or the next generation of novel-reading Mennonites found central to *Flamethrowers*. Of the two scholars who discussed the book eventually, Gerhard Baerg and Elmer Suderman, each treated the novel as a defamatory attack on Mennonite character. While they granted, in Suderman's words, "that man's inhumanity to man is all too prevalent in the world," they criticized Friesen for using Mennonites to depict it. "There are no normal human beings (and certainly no normal Mennonites) in the book," Suderman argued. Could anyone conceive of an actual Jacob Franzman, the cynical combination of greed and piety; or of Isaac Liese, who besides being "the most unbelievable Mennonite" stood out as "the most unbelievable character in the story?" To Suderman as to Baerg, they lacked credibility because in addition to allowing his characters no room for growth (the reader had to *know*, absolutely, that Jacob was clumsy, Liese a fool, and so forth) the author of *Flamethrowers* was bent on a caricature. "It is poor taste to use any particular religious, cultural, racial, or ethnic group for themes of this nature," Suderman concluded. "Friesen would have been more successful had he made his community an anonymous one."⁴⁰

By the time these criticisms were written, in 1947 and 1949, Friesen's departure from Mennonite circles had long been completed. Somewhat mysteriously, he did leave two parting messages in the unlikely pages of *Who's Who Among the Mennonites*. In the first edition published in 1937, he summarized *Flamethrowers* as a novel about "a Mennonite boy trapped between the old world and the new."⁴¹ Its title, he wrote in the second edition published six years later, "derived from the conflict of pacifistic ideals against a world in which battle for preservation seems inescapable." Almost as an after thought, he notified readers that his parents were at the time members of the Corn, Oklahoma,

Mennonite Brethren Church.⁴²

Anyone who reads *Flamethrowers* today will find that it owes far more to Freud and psychology than anything to Marx. Peter's acceptance of what is, as opposed to what might be, is nothing if not anti-revolutionary, a quality Friesen must have recognized in later years when he demeaned it. Except in the most parochial sense, the novel conveys no battle of social classes. It certainly has no proletarian heroes, none at all, and proposes no grand solution to economic inequality. At the center instead is a neurotic child whose vision of life is so twisted that he cannot react normally even in a rebellious way to abnormal circumstances.⁴³ Knowing nothing beyond Blumenhof, he has nothing else to rely on. So little does he know about the outside world, his own country, that in the last analysis *Flamethrowers* is a novel about America that has no inkling about what Americanization is. This may be its uniqueness and also its most Mennonite quality. Unromantic and anational, *Flamethrowers* is a culturally fixed novel driven by one anguished question: how can a man be human in a world that inflicts moral pain?

Mennonite readers interested in their history will not accept Friesen's conclusions, may not even abide his descriptions. The question is worth considering, however. Is it possible that beyond the anti-image resemblances to Gnadenu and to real or imagined traits of the group as a whole that *Flamethrowers* somberly betrays what prudence would normally conceal? That it is not an issue, finally, of revisionist portrayals or selective focus on the "underside" of a community, however that may be defined, but rather a concentration on a peculiar and once self-determined community whose values redound on itself? Despite his unpalatable narrative and resolution, Friesen suggests that the values of a separatist faith might be lost in preserving them. He also brings to light the social and economic group exemplified by his actual and fictive parents. For this alone *Flamethrowers* is valuable. Not to be forgotten, moreover, is Friesen's own remarkable achieve-

ment. Decades before anyone else, he took the private experiences and thoughts of an intensely private sect into public discourse.

Gordon Friesen at age seventy-four has done a very Mennonite thing. Not that it is peculiarly Mennonite by any stretch of any imagination, but he has forgiven his parents, and with the very word "forgiven." Whether they needed forgiveness precisely may be unclear to the outside observer. From *Flamethrowers* and the material Friesen has assembled for an unfinished autobiography, however, it is evident beyond words that his mother's anguish and his father's failure wreaked torment on Gordon. Out of that torment he derived his own private guilt for which the novel may partly have been an act of expiation. Jacob Franzman, when all was written, did not emerge unsympathetic in Peter's eyes, while Theresa Franzman, for every destructive behavior she manifested, was made by a sleight-of-hand to come to Peter's side.

Friesen's current explanation of his family members' agony was that they, like he, were shared victims of "an anarchistic system." He reached this conclusion through Marxist-Leninism. Lenin, it is said, thought the most interesting question in life was "who whom?" Who exploits whom? Who sentences whom to death?"⁴⁴ In the tangled history of twentieth-century American socialist movements, few if any individuals took the question more personally than Friesen and Cunningham. Say what one will about Friesen, that he overthrew one perceived dogma for a more rigid system, that some of his beliefs are disagreeable, upholding as they seem to a myth about Communism that has long been exploded, his concerns were honest ones. He saw poverty aplenty—and hated it. He observed Oklahoma vigilanteism—and fought back. The saddest chapter for him and Sis was their blacklisting. Unacceptable as some of their views would seem to have been, for Stalinism and its variants are as indefensible as fascism, it was never said that they *were* Stalinists. And even if they had been, their beliefs were opinions which should have been

honestly rebutted without persecution.

Cunningham and Friesen have kept up their vigil. In an old apartment on the West End of Manhattan, they relive Oklahoma, never having left it in spirit, determined from their enclave to advance the message of a socialist brotherhood. Their receptive audience is small now, especially compared to the 1960s, and they must feel in one respect like Isaac Liese with his printing press that their words fall wastefully on barren soil. They acknowledge that conditions for them have changed for the worse, but still they speak. Despite many bleak experiences going back the decades of a lifetime, Gordon exalts as his hero the protest singer Guthrie. He was positive, effervescent, not just a doomsayer. He fought in song and in deed for a more just society. A tune the editors of *Broadside* like to repeat had the following stanza:

There's a better world a-comin',
Can't you see, see,
There's a better world a-comin',
Can't you see.⁴⁵

Therein lies Gordon Friesen's hope, and also his belief.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Interview with Gordon Friesen and Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, New York City, Dec. 4, 1982. Quote is from Friesen "Thumbnail Autobiography of Gordon Friesen by Author Himself," *Broadside* (April-June 1976), no. 131, n.p. Unless otherwise stipulated or cited, quotations and background for this article were obtained from my December interview. Shortly after the meeting, Friesen and Cunningham graciously sent me copies of their unfinished autobiography and related tapes and material which they hope to publish. By then the bulk of this article had been completed, and since I used their manuscript more as verification for what had already been related to me than for any new data it contains, I decided to credit the firsthand conversation. Efforts are now being made to get some or all of the Friesen-Cunningham memoirs published.

² Klein, *Woody Guthrie, A Life* (New York, 1980); "Sis Cunningham: Songs of Hard Times, As Told to Madeline B. Rose," *Ms.* (March 1974), 29-32; Cunningham, "And a Personal Experience," *Meeting Ground*, undated and unnumbered photocopy received from author; and Cunningham, "The Red Dust Players," *Cimarron Review* (June 1977), 38-43. David Dunaway's biography of Pete Seeger, *How Can I Keep From Singing* (New York, 1981) uses Friesen and Cunningham as a source and thus sheds light on their own activities.

³ Gordon Friessen [sic], "Oklahoma Witch Hunt," Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Committee to Defend Political Prisoners

(Oct. 1941). A photocopy of this rare pamphlet has been deposited in the Mennonite Library and Archives.

⁴ "Thumbnail Autobiography," n.p.
⁵ The latter quote is from Abram Warkentin (ed.), *Who's Who Among the Mennonites* (Bethel College, 1937), 47.

⁶ In the mid-1930s and again during the war, party meetings sometimes opened with the singing of the Star Spangled Banner. For background see Joseph Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-57* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972). The story of the Almanac Singers and their near-rendevouz with popular success has been told by various sources, including Klein, Chapter 6.

⁷ Woody Guthrie, *American Folksong* (New York, 1947), 46.

⁸ The article by Friesen was titled "Aunt Molly Jackson," January 10, 1942, and the review of the play was by Ralph Warner.

⁹ The FBI allegation appears as a question in "Interrogatory of Gordon Elmer Friesen," U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1945, Question XII, referring to an article announcing the dance in the *Daily Worker*, March 28, 1942.

¹⁰ Klein, 215-219.

¹¹ Abram Warkentin and Melvin Glingerich, *Who's Who Among the Mennonites* (N. Newton, 1943), 74-75.

¹² Henrietta Yurchenco, *A Mighty Hard Road, The Woody Guthrie Story* (New York, 1970), 118-119; and Friesen, "Woody Guthrie: Hard Travellin'," *Mainstream* (Aug. 1963), 8-9.

¹³ Friesen, "Winter and War Come to Almanac House," *Broadside* (June 1962), No. 8, n.p.

¹⁴ Friesen, "The Almanac Singers—End of the Road," *Broadside* (Nov. 1962), no. 15, n.p.

¹⁵ Klein, 212-213.

¹⁶ Testimony of Richard Franklin O'Hair, *Communism in the Detroit Area, Part I, Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 82 Cong., 2nd Sess.* (Feb. 1952), 2716, 2740.

¹⁷ Friesen, "Day of Infamy," *Mainstream* (Feb. 1963), 3-18.

¹⁸ Starobin and David A. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism* (Chatham, N.J., 1959) are two in a steady stream of books which describe the party's changing responses to World War II and American involvement.

¹⁹ "Day of Infamy," 3, 16-18.

²⁰ "And a Personal Experience," 36.

²¹ See for instance the following examples in *Broadside*: "New Joan" (July-Sept. 1977), no. 136, p. 10; "Joan Baez's 'Cruel and Wanton Act'" (July-Dec. 1979), no. 142, p. 4; and "Joan Baez and Pol Pot's Supplies" (1980), no. 143, n.p.

²² "An Editorial" (Aug. 1967), no. 83, pp. 8, 12-13.

²³ "Thumbnail Autobiography," n.p.

²⁴ On the history of the KMB Church see David A. Wiebe, *Grace Meadow, The Story of Gadenau and Its First Elder, Marion County, Kansas* (Hillsboro, 1967). See also John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, Calif., 1975), 25 New York, 1973.

²⁵ More on his "Aunt Millie" and "Uncle Dave" has been published in a brief reminiscence, "Weatherford, 1912-14," *Broadside* (1980), no. 144, pp. 15-16.

²⁶ Outline to unpublished autobiography, 6-7.

²⁷ Klein, 212.

²⁸ On Gipson see Vardis Fisher, *The Caxton Printers in Idaho* (Cincinnati, 1944).

²⁹ *Literary Digest* (June 27, 1936), 24.

³⁰ The *Saturday Review* of London quote is from an article "Some Fine Novels" (April 4, 1936), 440. All other quotes are from a pamphlet of reviews compiled by Caxton Printers under the title "Reviews of *Flamethrowers*," by Gordon Friesen:

"When Doctors Disagree" (Caldwell, Idaho, 1936). The complete or abridged reviews were organized alphabetically by state and city and the newspaper or periodical thereunder. Caxton Printers generously provided me with gratis copies of this and other promotional matter regarding the novel. Because of a fire at the printers in 1957, correspondence and other editorial data concerning the writing and publishing of the book no longer exist.

³¹ Chapter 17, pp. 243-247 describes a "Kill the Kaiser" demonstration in Gallivan which despite its seeming exaggeration and peculiar ending was not untypical of small towns across the country during World War I. See for instance James H. Fowler, II, "Tar and Feather Patriotism: The Suppression of Dissent in Oklahoma During World War I," *Oklahoma Chronicles* (Winter 1978-79), 409-426.

The reader of *Flamethrowers* might contrast Friesen's fictional super-patriotic rite with the positive, almost lyric recollections of an actual celebration in Hillsboro, Kansas during the perfervid Spanish-American War: Adolf I. Franz, *Water From the Well* (Philadelphia, 1978), 28-31. Frantz, like Friesen was of Mennonite Brethren origin.

³² *Flamethrowers*, 258.

³³ *Flamethrowers*, 213.

³⁴ *Flamethrowers*, 301.

³⁵ *Flamethrowers*, 432.

³⁶ Telephone interview with Elmer F. Suderman, Professor of English, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., Feb. 22, 1982. Wiebe's book was published by Eerdmans, 1962.

³⁷ In v. 3, "Mennonites in Literature" (Scottsdale, Pa., 1957), 372.

³⁸ Quoted in Suderman, "The Mennonite Character in American Fiction," *Mennonite Life* (July 1967), 128 and fn. 6, 130.

³⁹ Baerg, "Mennonites in Fiction—Gnadenau," *Mennonite Life* (Oct. 1947), 22-23, 28; and Suderman, "The Mennonite Pioneer," in Cornelius Krahn (ed.), *From the Steppes to the Prairie* (Newton, 1949), 106-109. Both writers were of Gnadenau or Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren-related background.

⁴⁰ *Who's Who Among the Mennonites* (1937), 47.

⁴¹ *Who's Who Among the Mennonites* (1943), 74-75.

⁴² The alienation of children and young people was a common, perhaps dominant theme among thirties writers who were radical or Communist at the time they completed their major works. According to Marcus Klein, *Foreigners, The Making of American Literature* (Chicago and London, 1981), "these writers . . . tended to write about the growing-up—the emigration, as it were—of children and adolescents" (p. 34). On the further point of emigration and acculturation, Joseph Starobin, a former party official, ventures the assertion that "American Communists had become a melting pot of their own. Second generation Americans found the Communist movement a channel for their rebellion, a cure for their anomie, a vehicle for ambitions to make their mark in the country adopted by their parents. . . . Children of the disintegrated 'middle border' of Hamlin Garland's day, the uprooted Populist farmers, as well as young people of a more Brahmin and 'eastern' tradition . . . sought to resolve their rootlessness in a changing America by the camaraderie and the apocalyptic hope that Communism offered. Thus an 'un-American movement turned out to be the vehicle of Americanization.'" (Italics mine.) Starobin, 23.

⁴³ A. J. P. Taylor, *From Napoleon to Lenin* (New York, 1966), 168-169.

⁴⁴ Epigraph to Chapter 10 of Friesen and Cunningham's unpublished autobiography, from Guthrie's Folkways album "Bound for Glory."

Mennonite Church Theological and Social Boundaries, 1920-1930— Loyalists, Liberals and Laxitarians

by James C. Juhnke

Theological questions and social issues were intertwined in the troubled quest for group identity in the MC Mennonite Church in the 1920's and 1930's. The MC Mennonites, known in those years as "Old Mennonites," set limits to acceptable theological discourse as well as social behavior in a process of defining and enforcing the group boundaries. The changing character of MC Mennonite Church life took shape in part out of restrictions on what ideas members could discuss as well as what style of clothing they could wear.

The stories of two documents illustrated the complex relationships between theological and social developments. One document was a "fundamentalist" book by John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism* (1924). Another was a "neo-orthodox" treatise by Gustav Enss, "First Steps in Christian Theology, A New Theological Orientation based upon Barthian Principles." (1932) Both publications had implications for the emerging denominational role of Goshen College in northern Indiana.¹

Anti-Modernism and Protecting Goshen

In 1924 John Horsch, editor for

German publications at the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, published his 143-page book, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*. He did so at a moment of acute crisis in the MC Mennonite Church. It was a crisis of both church and college. The Indiana-Michigan Conference Committee revoked the ministerial status of six ministers; about an eighth of the conference church members withdrew to other churches or new congregations; the Mennonite Board of Education closed Goshen College for the 1923-24 school year to reorganize the school on a new basis.² Hereafter MC Mennonites would speak of an "Old Goshen" and a "New Goshen," often disagreeing whether Goshen College had truly left its modernist or liberal tendencies behind.

The social or cultural implications of "liberalism" were probably more important for most MC Mennonites in this context than were theological questions. The enforcement of rules for distinctive dress and the prohibition of life insurance were the two major questions upon which the Indiana-Michigan Conference Executive Committee examined congregation leaders and members in 1923. Goshen College appeared to

many to be deeply infected with the spirit of modern worldliness. There were rumors of unacceptable student behavior, offensive pictures in the college yearbook, and non-Mennonite teachers on the faculty.

For John Horsch, the most important issues of this time of upheaval were theological. A battle was raging between fundamentalism and modernism. The fate of the Christian faith hung in the balance. Horsch was an interesting figure in the MC Mennonite Church. He was not a "typical" MC leader but a South German immigrant who moved across several American Mennonite boundaries. The two great contributions of his prolific writing career were his pioneering researches in Anabaptist-Mennonite history and his passionate defense of the Christian faith against the encroachments of liberalism and modernism. He carried on both efforts simultaneously, and neither can be properly understood without taking the other into account.³ There was a fundamentalist bias in Horsch's Anabaptist writings, as well as a Mennonite bias in Horsch's anti-modernist writings.⁴

The spirit and the shape of Horsch's antimodernist crusading were in part the product of eight



Harold S. Bender, left, and his father-in-law, John Horsch outside the Horsch home in Scottdale.

years (1900-1908) he spent at various places with John A. Sprunger and the Light and Hope Society. Sprunger was a fringe Mennonite from Berne, Indiana, who recruited idealistic Mennonite young people to a multi-faceted benevolent institutional endeavor which included hospitals, orphanages, deaconess work, publications and overseas missions. Horsch worked with Sprunger first in Berne, Indiana, where he experienced a personal religious renewal, and later at Cleveland and at Birmingham, Ohio. Two of his friends, who also came away from the Sprunger association with strongly fundamentalist orientation, were Heinrich J. Dyck, General Conference Mennonite of Elbing, Kansas and Heinrich Bartel, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren of Hillsboro, Kansas, who pioneered Mennonite mission work in China.

By 1924 Horsch had written extensively on the dangers of modernism, beginning most vigorously in Mennonite papers in the new *Gospel Herald* of 1908.⁵ His most significant publication, however, was a 331-page book, *Modern Religious Liberalism: The Destructiveness and Irrationality of the New Theology*

(1920).⁶ This book, with its clear exposition of the issues in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, found an audience among American Protestant evangelicals. It sold more copies among non-Mennonites than any previous book written by a Mennonite. The second edition came out in 1924, the third in 1938.

Horsch's *Mennonite Church and Modernism* in 1924 was explosive, then, not because his theological approach was new to Mennonites, but because the author now claimed that modernism had infected the Mennonite Church and because he explicitly identified the persons and the institutions involved. In a time of upheaval, fear and crisis, John Horsch was willing to name names. Seldom in Mennonite history has such a distinguished group of Mennonite leaders and their institutions been so specifically, publically, and eloquently denounced. Horsch gave one chapter to an explanation of why it was appropriate to call these modernists "traitors." H. S. Bender read the book in Tuebingen and wrote to his father-in-law that it was "sort of an epoch-making event."⁷

The names named had social and institutional focus, and their center was Bluffton College and Witmarsum Theological Seminary in Bluffton, Ohio. Named were the Witmarsum President, J. E. Hartzler, and the Bluffton President, S. K. Mosiman. Also named were Noah E. Byers and C. Henry Smith, academic dean and history professor at Bluffton, as well as Samuel Burkhard, Lester Hostetler, the *Christian Exponent*, and others. Byers, Burkhard and Hartzler responded to the charges in defense of their positions. Thereupon, Horsch attacked again with another pamphlet, "Is the Mennonite Church of America Free From Modernism?," copies of which were mailed to Mennonite ministers free of charge across the country.⁸

Horsch's attack had special meaning in the context of evolving Mennonite educational institutions. There were two Mennonite colleges in the midwest.

Goshen College in northern Indiana was an MC school which grew out of the Elkhart Institute founded

in 1894. Bluffton College in northwestern Ohio was a school with inter-Mennonite ambitions, founded in 1899 by the Middle District of the General Conference Mennonite Church. The two schools competed to some extent for Mennonite students, teachers and money. The competition was especially dramatized at two moments: In 1913 when the Goshen College President, Noah Byers,⁹ and Academic Dean, C. Henry Smith, resigned and moved to a reorganized Bluffton; and again in 1921 when J. E. Hartzler, who had succeeded Byers in the Goshen presidency but resigned under fire in 1918, became president of the new Witmarsum Seminary on the Bluffton campus, Paul Whitmer, from the Goshen Bible Department, joined the Witmarsum faculty as dean.

Bluffton and Witmarsum, then, functioned as a kind of Goshen College in exile. They were the progressive institutional alternative to Goshen. In January 1924 the concerns of this "Old Goshen" group found a public voice with the founding of the *Christian Exponent*, a bi-weekly journal which countered the ascendant MC Mennonite Church conservative line. The first editor, Vernon Smucker of the Oak Grove Church in Ohio, switched from the Mennonite Publishing House at Scottdale where he had edited the *Christian Monitor*. Most of the Bluffton-Witmarsum-*Exponent* men who moved to Bluffton initially became members of the (MC) Zion Mennonite Church five miles west of Bluffton rather than joining the (GC) First Mennonite Church of Bluffton.

In 1923 MC conservatives closed Goshen College for one school year, so it appeared that the Bluffton-Witmarsum-*Exponent* group was strongly positioned to win the competition for the loyalties, minds and pocketbooks of midwestern Mennonites. John Horsch's 1924 book was perfectly timed to protect a beleaguered Goshen by dramatically discrediting the alternative to Goshen in the eyes of the Mennonite constituency. Horsch helped to isolate Bluffton from Mennonites and to gain time for Goshen College to reorganize and reestablish on a

more conservative basis. "Let us, who believe in prayer," wrote Horsch, "not forget Goshen College. There is no more valuable service that we can render." (p. 130) Goshen College eventually emerged as the overall winner in this competition for the heart of the limited midwestern Mennonite constituency. The *Christian Exponent* ceased publication in 1928; Witmarsum Seminary closed in 1931; Bluffton's College's inter-Mennonite dreams flourished only briefly and she had to struggle to overcome the limits of a small GC constituency by recruiting non-Mennonite students and faculty.

Horsch's relationship to his youthful, ambitious son-in-law, Harold Bender, illustrates how the boundaries were drawn in specific cases. Bender was studying in Germany at the time of Horsch's 1924 book and had recently accepted a teaching position at the "New Goshen." However, Bender was too much identified with the young progressives, some of whom were publishing *The Exponent*, to be given the full time position he wanted in the Bible department. First he would serve in the history department and as librarian until he could prove himself safe and reliable to the conservatives. Bender had many friends in the *Christian Exponent* group and wanted to keep in touch with them. In 1924 it was still not clear whether future academic employment for Mennonite educators would be at Bluffton or Goshen. When John Horsch and S. C. Yoder,¹⁰ the new Goshen president, asked Bender to stop writing articles for the *Christian Exponent*, Bender chafed under the restriction and protested as follows:

The difficulty is that the Exponent is read by most of the thinking people of the church and a lot of the young people who often pay little attention to the (Gospel) Herald. Are we to cut ourselves off from the privilege of speaking to and influencing this group of people and leave them entirely to the liberals? I am not sure that we can safely do so. Either the Herald must be reformed and improved, or a new journal or review must be started. . . .¹¹

Bender speculated that if he were

to be dismissed from the Goshen College faculty it would be over the issue of distinctive clothing, for he could not in good conscience defend regulated dress on Scriptural grounds.¹² Such a showdown never came. Bender wore the plain coat at Goshen as a pragmatic concession, soon won the confidence he needed to work creatively and productively at Goshen College, and founded a new journal addressed with rhetorical flourish "to the Youth of the Mennonite Church." The *Mennonite Quarterly Review* was Bender's answer to *The Christian Exponent*.¹³ Already by the spring of 1926, Bender published his own boundary-setting attack on President Hartzler of the Witmarsum Seminary in the form of a devastating review of Hartzler's new book, *Education Among the Mennonites of America*.¹⁴ Along the way, Bender scolded Hartzler for perpetuating "the fiction of a united Mennonite support of these institutions (Bluffton and Witmarsum) . . ." (p. 40). A youthful Mennonite progressive thus certified his own conservative reliability and helped secure his institutional base for (MC) Mennonite Church renewal.

Horsch's anti-modernist writings found a non-MC Mennonite audience which had something to do with the modernist-fundamentalist polarization in other Mennonite groups. In the Horsch archives are over sixty letters from 1924 to 1926 commending him for indicting Mennonite modernism. Included are letters from Mennonites of Russian or Prussian background, such as Gustav Enss of Hesston, Kansas; J. J. and Louise Schrag of China; H. J. Dyck of Elbing, Kansas; J. B. Epp of Meno, Oklahoma; C. H. Friesen of Buhler, Kansas; Michael Klaassen of Morden, Manitoba; P. R. Schroeder of Berne Indiana; J. E. Wiebe of Newton, Kansas.¹⁵ Approving letters also were received from J. R. Thierstein of Newton, Kansas; P. J. Boehr of Princeton, New Jersey; and A. S. Shelly of Philadelphia. Horsch was pleased with this response, as he noted in a letter that C. H. Friesen, "probably the most influential layman in the Mennonite church in the west, has written in the *Herold* of Newton

very appreciating (sic) about the new pamphlet—far more so than the editor of the *Gospel Herald*."¹⁶ There were also critical responses, such as that of A. S. Bechtel of Summerfield, Illinois, who saw the social-institutional implication: "I feel that we as Mennonites need to uphold our Institutions as long as we can conscientiously do so. We need them very much and we need to do constructive work in our Church."¹⁷

Horsch's dismay at his failure to earn the blessing of *Gospel Herald* editor, Daniel Kauffman—a feeling exacerbated when Horsch was dropped from the Mennonite Church Historical Committee in 1925¹⁸—may be seen as symptomatic of a thread of alienation that ran throughout his life. But it cannot be denied that John Horsch performed yeoman service for the MC Mennonite Church in critical formative years of denominational and institutional organization. He not only helped the church recover its Anabaptist historical memory, but protected the MC Mennonite Church from the presumed dangers of "modernism" and helped secure the future of Goshen College against the prospects of the Bluffton-Witmar-



Gustav Enss, professor of philosophy and Bible at Goshen College.

sum-*Exponent* alternative.

Anti-Neo-Orthodoxy or Holding Indiana and Virginia Together

In the July, 1932 issue of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Editor in Chief Harold S. Bender announced the forthcoming publication of a four-part theological treatise by Goshen College Professor of Philosophy and Bible, Gustav Enss, a man "passionately devoted to the historical evangelical faith of Christianity."¹⁹ The four articles were to be entitled, "Christianity and Religion, Christianity and Mysticism, Christianity and Philosophy, and Christianity and Revelation."²⁰ The subtitle of the treatise, which Bender did not mention, was "A New Theological Orientation Based Upon Barthian Principles."²¹ A controversy emerged over the publication of Enss' new theology which throws light on the role played by Mennonite Conservatives to limit the range of acceptable theological discourse in the MC Mennonite Church.

Gustav Enss was apparently the first North American Mennonite to come to terms with neo-orthodox theology. In 1931 Enss took a course in "Recent German Theology" under Wilhelm Pauck at Chicago Theological Seminary. He wrote a 46-page manuscript in German, "Der Offenbarungsbegriff in Karl Barths Theologie," and exchanged letters with Barth to confirm that he had understood Barth's thought rightly.²²

The Barthian theological approach, mediated by Enss, could surely seem strange and threatening to MC Mennonite leaders whose doctrinal cues came from two doctrinal books mainly by Daniel Kauffman, published in 1914 and 1928. According to historian Theron Schlabach, Kauffman's Bible Doctrine was "for many Mennonites the last word on what to believe."²³ Two points in particular were bound to touch sensitive Mennonite nerves—the definitions of "religion" and of "revelation." In the first article Enss drew a strong dichotomy between Christian faith and religion, insisting that religious form was "incidental, concurrent or attendant" rather than "essential" to real

Christianity. "Religion is essentially phenomenalist, it glories in outward appearance, clings to things and forms and rituals; while true Christian faith reckons with ultimate spiritual realities."²⁴ For MC Mennonites of the 1920's and 1930's, religious forms such as the prayer covering and footwashing were indispensable rather than incidental—they were an incorporation of God's word as clearly as commanded in the Bible. They functioned as distinctive behaviors which set MC Mennonites apart from many other Mennonites and from most Christians in America.

A second point of tension was in Enss' fourth article, the climax of the series, where he defined revelation positively as God's self-disclosure, an event over which man has no power. The Bible was seen as "witness" but not as "revelation":

As the divinely inspired witness concerning God's self-revelation, the Bible must be accepted as the truth about this revelation, but it must never be identified with revelation itself. When the revelation of God is the subject of discussion, then the witness must take the second place.²⁵

Such a definition of the place of the Bible would hardly be acceptable to Mennonite leaders of the Bible Doctrine mold who had accepted a fundamentalistic definition of biblical authority in an effort to defend the faith against the challenge of higher criticism, evolution, and, more generally, "modernism."²⁶

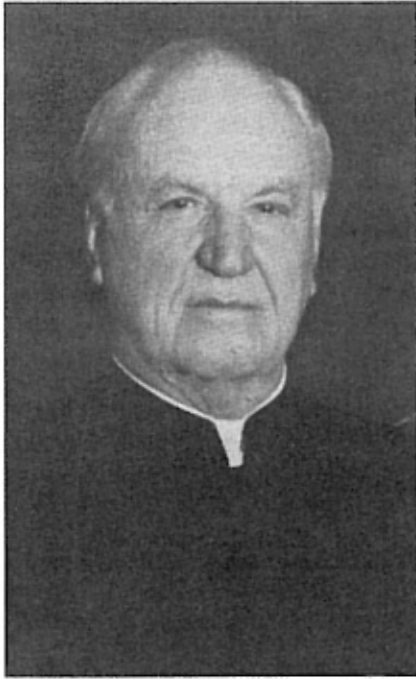
Why did editor Bender choose to give such prominence to the new Barthian theology in the pages of the journal which was his primary publishing instrument for his great endeavor of Goshen-based Mennonite peoplehood renewal? Perhaps Bender didn't realize the implications of what Enss was saying. Perhaps Bender was attracted to something in Barthian theology and thought that an airing of these issues in Mennonite circles could serve a useful purpose. And perhaps, also, Bender was using Enss, an outsider, to float a trial balloon.

Gustav Enss carried strong credentials as a Mennonite fundamentalist. He was an immigrant from

Russia who had studied at the University of Odessa, the University of Berlin, and the University of Kansas, but did not receive a bachelor's degree until one was granted to him by Hesston College (ca. 1921). He taught German Language and Literature at Bethel College, 1915-18, during which time he took the conservative side in a bitter public dispute with Bible Professor J. F. Balzer, focusing initially on the question of the date of authorship of the book of Daniel. Enss later taught German and Bible at Hesston College, 1922-28, where he helped attract General Conference Mennonites to a presumed safer school than a nearby GC college, Bethel, which some thought was influenced by modernism. By the time he came to teach Bible and philosophy at the New Goshen in 1928, some of his ideas were beginning to change. John Horsch, who in earlier days had used Enss as an informant about the extent of modernism at Bethel College,²⁷ had reason by 1929 to think that Enss was a "dangerous modernist." H. S. Bender assured his father-in-law that such a charge was preposterous, and that if it were made public Horsch would lose all credibility and respect at Goshen.²⁸ Enss was orthodox, said Bender.

Enss' first two articles, "Christianity and Religion" and "Christianity and Mysticism" appeared in the July and October, 1932 issues of *MQR*. The last two articles, however, never appeared as announced. George R. Brunk, conservative Mennonite leader of Virginia, published an attack on Enss' views in the January 1933 issue of *The Sword and Trumpet*, even suggesting that Enss should resign his position.²⁹ Bender defended Enss vigorously in private correspondence with Brunk and allowed Enss to publish a defense and explanation of his definition of religion in the January, 1933 *MQR*.³⁰ Yet the final two articles never appeared. After the 1933-34 school year, Enss was released from Goshen College. It was depression time, and money for faculty salaries was tight.

Brunk had some difficulty in identifying and classifying this new theological position. In his first



George R. Brunk, Mennonite leader in Virginia.

Sword and Trumpet article he suggested that Enss had been influenced by modernism. In later correspondence he called Enss (as well as Bender) a "Laxitarian Fundamentalist", albeit one who had also apparently absorbed a "big dose of Darbyism."³¹ The point of dispute was the Barthian disparaging definition of religion, and the consequences this would have for Mennonites. Brunk put his key concern in capital letters for emphasis:

IF ENSS (*sic*) CAN CAJOLE THE CHURCH INTO ACCEPTING HIS THEORY THAT RELIGION HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH CHRISTIANITY HE THEN HAS TRAPPED THEM INTO THE CONFESION THAT THERE IS NO RELIGIOUS GARB IN CHRISTIANITY AND THE GATES OF NON-CONFORMITY ARE DOWN AND THE CHURCH THROWN WIDE OPEN TO WORLD FORM AND FASHION FORM, IN DRESS, IN DOCTRINE, AND IN LIFE.³²

Brunk did not know Enss personally, but he asked if the man was "safe and loyal throughout? Does Enss (*sic*) teach the devotional covering for single sisters? Does he support the Church standards of regulation dress? Does he teach and uphold close communions?" Cultural issues were critical, and Enss got

the message. In his last year at Goshen Enss for the first time started wearing a plain coat and having his daughters wear the prayer coverings.³³

Bender reacted to Brunk's *Sword and Trumpet* attack on Enss with a vigorous defense and counter-attack. The closing of the "Old Goshen" amid charges of modernism and worldliness was still a vivid memory, and now again the conservative wing of the church was attacking the Goshen Bible Department and the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* on the same old grounds. Bender's reaction was intense. Perhaps he initially thought Brunk's arguments were groundless and therefore it was an opportunity to put this Eastern critic in his place for once. Perhaps he feared that Brunk's arguments, if unopposed, would be convincing to Goshen's constituency.

Bender moved to isolate and embarrass Brunk by sending copies of Enss' first two *MQR* articles to four leading American fundamentalists (Dr. James M. Gray, Dr. A. C. Gaebelein, Dr. J. Gresham Machen and Dr. Harry Rimmer), telling them that the author was charged with modernism, and asking for their evaluation. After responses from all four which found no taint of modernism in the articles, Bender wrote to Brunk with copies to Daniel Kaufman, J. B. Smith, S. E. Allgyer and other MC Mennonite leaders, telling what he had done and ending, "There is still time for you to withdraw your charges." Implied of course, was the threat that Bender could go public with all this material.³⁴

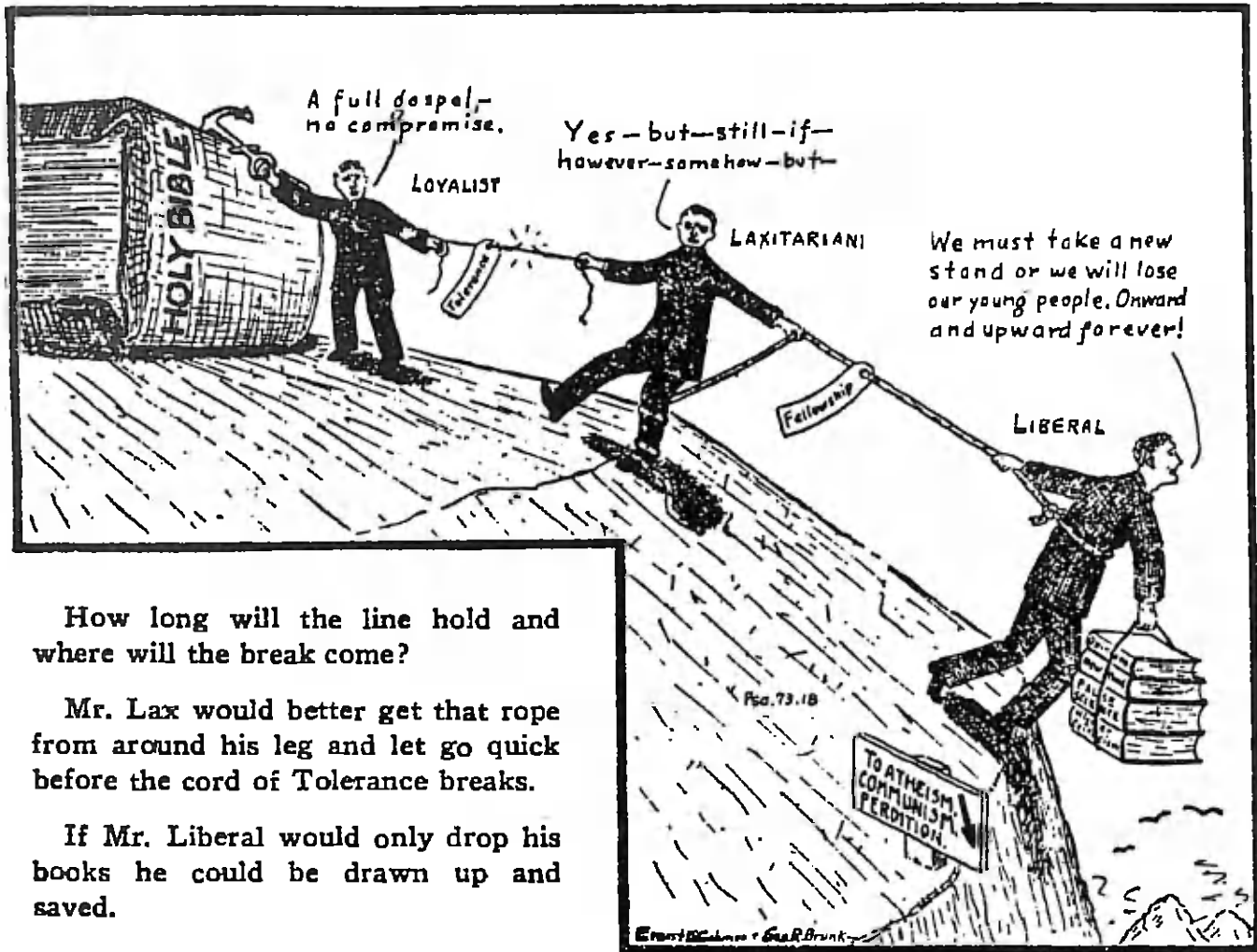
Bender was lavish in his personal praise of his colleague in the Goshen Bible department. Enss was, he wrote, "a devoted believer, an honest and sincere seeker after the truth of God in his Word, and a staunch and able teacher of the fundamental truths of Christianity and of a full Gospel. . . . He is deeply interested in our Mennonite faith and principles, and believes in them all from beginning to end including non-conformity to the world." Bender also said that Enss was a premillennialist, the only one in Goshen's Bible Department. He hoped Enss would continue at Goshen "for many

years to come."³⁵

Bender counter-attacked on the "religion" issue, arguing that Brunk's positive view of religion expressed in social forms was a theological error akin to that of the modernists who espoused a social gospel. "Religion" is not a Biblical category, Bender said in echoing Enss, and the confusion is due in part to a mistranslation in the King James Version, James 1:26-27. Furthermore, he lectured Brunk, "If you should come to Goshen College and preach a sermon on 'pure religion' as you propose, defending this idea, we would stop you in the middle of your sermon and tell you to sit down because we will not tolerate such modernist teachings at Goshen College."³⁶

It is most interesting to observe what new twists the Barthian categories brought to Mennonite labeling. The progressive Bender denounced Brunk as modernist, and the conservative Brunk denounced Bender as fundamentalist. More important was the fact that Bender and Brunk did manage to compose their differences, or at least reach an accommodation, within the framework of the church that was so important to both of them. The MC East and the MC Midwest held together. The accommodation, however, made Enss and Barthianism the sacrificial goats. Not only did Enss leave Goshen College, but the pages of MC Mennonite publications remained closed to explorations of Barthian neo-orthodox theological categories. The limits of acceptable theological discourse had been defined at a critical juncture in Mennonite history.

The process of group boundary definition is a dynamic and ever-changing one. Conservatives such as John Horsch and George Brunk did manage to set limits for the church. The conservative correctives served a significant function for the time being in shoring up Mennonite identity and protecting Mennonites from outside influences. The archival records can reveal only some of the more formal and dramatic cases in which venturesome MC Mennonites were told what ideas were non-discussable, what books could not be published in the historical



How long will the line hold and where will the break come?

Mr. Lax would better get that rope from around his leg and let go quick before the cord of Tolerance breaks.

If Mr. Liberal would only drop his books he could be drawn up and saved.

series, and what ecumenical peace meetings could not be officially attended. But peoplehood boundaries were being set in Mennonite daily life in manifold other ways, both verbal and nonverbal, from the subtle discomfiture inflicted upon the marginal member who lacked a "Mennonite name" to the ways in which the women discussed young people who had gone to the state fair. "The raised eyebrow," says Kenneth Boulding, "is the most potent force in human history."³⁷

Benefits and Costs of Denominational Boundary Definition

The boundaries of MC Mennonite peoplehood were never totally rigid. It was the role of the progressives such as H. S. Bender at Goshen and Orié Miller at Akron creatively to test those boundaries—trying out new ideas, meeting new people, interpreting and mobilizing the Mennonite presence in the broader

American society. The fruit of such persistent probing of the boundaries included such inter-Mennonite developments as the international witness of the Mennonite Central Committee and the cooperative Civilian Public Service Program in World War II.

At the same time, the conservative limits contributed to a theological and hermeneutical impoverishment of the MC Mennonite Church between the World Wars. The career of H. S. Bender can illustrate this point. Bender began his academic career with the intention of pursuing Biblical studies, but he discovered that there was much greater freedom and promise in Anabaptist historical studies as a base for Mennonite renewal. As a historian Bender was free to use historical-critical methods, and to bypass or ignore the explosive issues of Biblical higher criticism. Not until 1959 did Bender publish a

Cartoon by Ernest G. Gehman and George R. Brunk in The Sword and the Trumpet, July 1982, p. 4.

major statement on the basis of Scriptural authority, and then it was a relatively brief statement which identified the *wrong* ways of Biblical interpretation without taking a clear position on the methods of historical-literary criticism.³⁸ The great postponement of vigorous and scholarly Mennonite hermeneutical study was a product, then, not simply of the abstract development of ideas, but also of the way Mennonite theological dialogue was restricted by the efforts of conservatives to maintain the social-cultural boundaries of MC Mennonite denominational peoplehood. For good and for ill, Mennonite theology and Mennonite styles of life and institutional development were inextricably interwoven.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Research for this article was assisted by Rodney Sawatsky's pioneering study on the role of fundamentalism in the MC Mennonite Church: "The Influence of Fundamentalism on Mennonite Nonresistance 1908-1944," MA Thesis, University of Minnesota, May 1973, 194 pp. Also helpful was the extensive critique by Guy F. Hershberger, "Comments on Sawatsky's Thesis," 1979, 145 pp. Copies of both manuscripts are in the Hershberger Collection, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Hist Mss 1-171, Box 57.

² See J. C. Wenger, *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1961, 41-3; John Sylvanus Umble, *Goshen College, 1894-1954* (Goshen: Goshen College, 1955), 111-114; and Hershberger, 1979, 58a-61.

³ The July, 1947, issue of *MQR* is a John Horsch Memorial Number and includes a number of helpful articles. For more recent contrasting views of Horsch, see the differences between Sawatsky (1973) and Hershberger (1979). One major gap in the information and understanding of Horsch relates to the period 1900-08 with J. A. Sprunger's *Light and Hope Society*. The *MQR* "Bibliography of the Writings of John Horsch" 205-228. Includes none of his writings in *Licht und Hoffnung*, even though it is probable that he did considerable writing for this publication. Horsch's anti-modernism was something of an embarrassment for his son-in-law Harold Bender, who understated Horsch's "semi-participation" in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. (*MQR*, July 1947, p. 142).

⁴ Letter from Horsch to Bender, May 18, 1924.

⁵ "The Danger of Liberalism." June 20, 1908, 178-9.

⁶ This book was published at Scottsdale and bore the imprint not of the Mennonite

Publishing House, but of the "Fundamental Truth Depot."

⁷ Letter from Bender to Horsch, June 6, 1924, Horsch Collection, Box 8, Folder 1.

⁸ Horsch, "Is the Mennonite Church of America Free from Modernism?" (Scottsdale: Horsch, 1926), 31 pp.

⁹ Byers, wrote Horsch, "went to Bluffton, Ohio, to undertake, with the help of others to make of Bluffton College what for lack of support he failed to accomplish in Goshen." *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, p. 114.

¹⁰ Yoder to Bender, Mar. 12, 1924.

¹¹ Bender to Horsch, April 19, 1924, Horsch Collection, Box 8, Folder 1.

¹² Bender to Horsch, June 6, 1924.

¹³ *MQR*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan. 1927, inside front cover.

¹⁴ The review appeared in the predecessor to *MQR*, *The Goshen College Record Review Supplement*, May-June 1926, 35-44.

¹⁵ John Horsch Collection, Boxes 2 and 3.

¹⁶ Horsch to Bender, June 18, 1924. This was an exaggeration of Friesen's influence. *The Gospel Herald* editor was Daniel Kauffman.

¹⁷ Bechtel to Horsch, June 29, 1925.

¹⁸ Bender to Horsch, Nov. 9, 1925.

¹⁹ For a summary of Enss' life see James C. Juhnke, "Gustav H. Enss, Mennonite Allen (1885-1965)." *Mennonite Life*, Dec 1981, 9-15.

²⁰ "Editorial," 131. *MQR* had carried an earlier article by Enss, "The Relation of Philosophy to Christian Theology," July, 1929, 159-168.

²¹ The manuscript for this treatise is located in the Jacob Suderman Collection in the Archives of the Mennonite Church. The four articles together were the first 62 typewritten pages of a longer theological study which was projected to 250 pages, according to the table of contents. The later sections beyond page 62 are not together with the manuscript, however.

²² The English title on the paper in the Suderman collection is "Karl Barth's Concept of Revelation in the Light of Ancient and Modern Christian Thought." A note regarding the exchange of letters with Barth is in Suderman's hand.

²³ *Gospel Versus Gospel* (Scottsdale, 1980) 110-1.

²⁴ Ms. 16.

²⁵ Enss ms. 55.

²⁶ See C. Norman Kraus, "American Mennonites and the Bible," *MQR*, October 1967, 309-329.

²⁷ Enss to Horsch, Sept. 11, 1919; Horsch to Enss, Sept. 16, 1919; Jacob Suderman Collection, uncatalogued.

²⁸ Bender to Horsch, Dec. 28, 1929, Horsch Collection, Box 4, 1919 A-H.

²⁹ "Teachers and Teaching," Jan. 1933, 20-21.

³⁰ "The Term 'Religion' not a Biblical Concept," 61-64.

³¹ Brunk to Bender, Mar. 16, 1933. H. S. Bender Collection, 1/8, 1931-38, George R. Brunk. For a visual representation of Brunk's definition of "Laxitarian," see the cartoon p. 26.

³² Brunk to Bender, March 27, 1933.

³³ Carl Kreider, interview, April 16, 1981.

³⁴ The correspondence on this exchange is located in the H. S. Bender Collection, AMC 1/8, 1931-38, George R. Brunk. The most important letter is an eight-page epistle from Bender to Brunk, March 21, 1933.

³⁵ Bender to Brunk, March 21, 1933, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁷ Lecture at Bethel College, Kansas, Spring 1980.

³⁸ Harold S. Bender, "Biblical Revelation and Inspiration" (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959). My understanding of the role of H. S. Bender has been shaped by conversations with Theron Schlaabach, Marlin Jeschke, Leonard Gross and others at Goshen College, although the interpretations in this article are my own.

A Letter from Mahatma Gandhi

by Griselda Gehman Shelly

My first introduction to Mahatma Gandhi (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) came at age seven when my father received a letter from the renowned Hindu spiritual-political leader of India. Dated December 17, 1931, the letter was written at Port Said, Egypt, while Gandhi was sailing to India following the Indian Round Table Conference in London. Posted at Aden, Saudi Arabia, on December 23, the letter arrived at our parsonage in Columbia, Pennsylvania, on January 13, 1932.

Gilbert T. Gehman, my father, was then the 34-year-old pastor at Cookman Methodist Episcopal Church in Columbia, and had preached a sermon on the life of Gandhi at a Sunday evening service on November 15, 1931. At that time, he wrote a letter to Mahatma Gandhi, addressed to London, expressing appreciation for Gandhi's nonviolent way of life. Although my father died six months after receiving the letter, my mother, and later I, became the guardians of this simple one-paragraph message for the past 51 years.

Roots of both my parents are in southeastern Pennsylvania. However, my paternal grandparents moved to Delaware where my father was born in 1898. Since there were no Mennonite connections in the First State, the family joined the Methodist denomination. My mother, Lizzie Kratz Hiestand, whose maternal line is traced to the Schwenk-

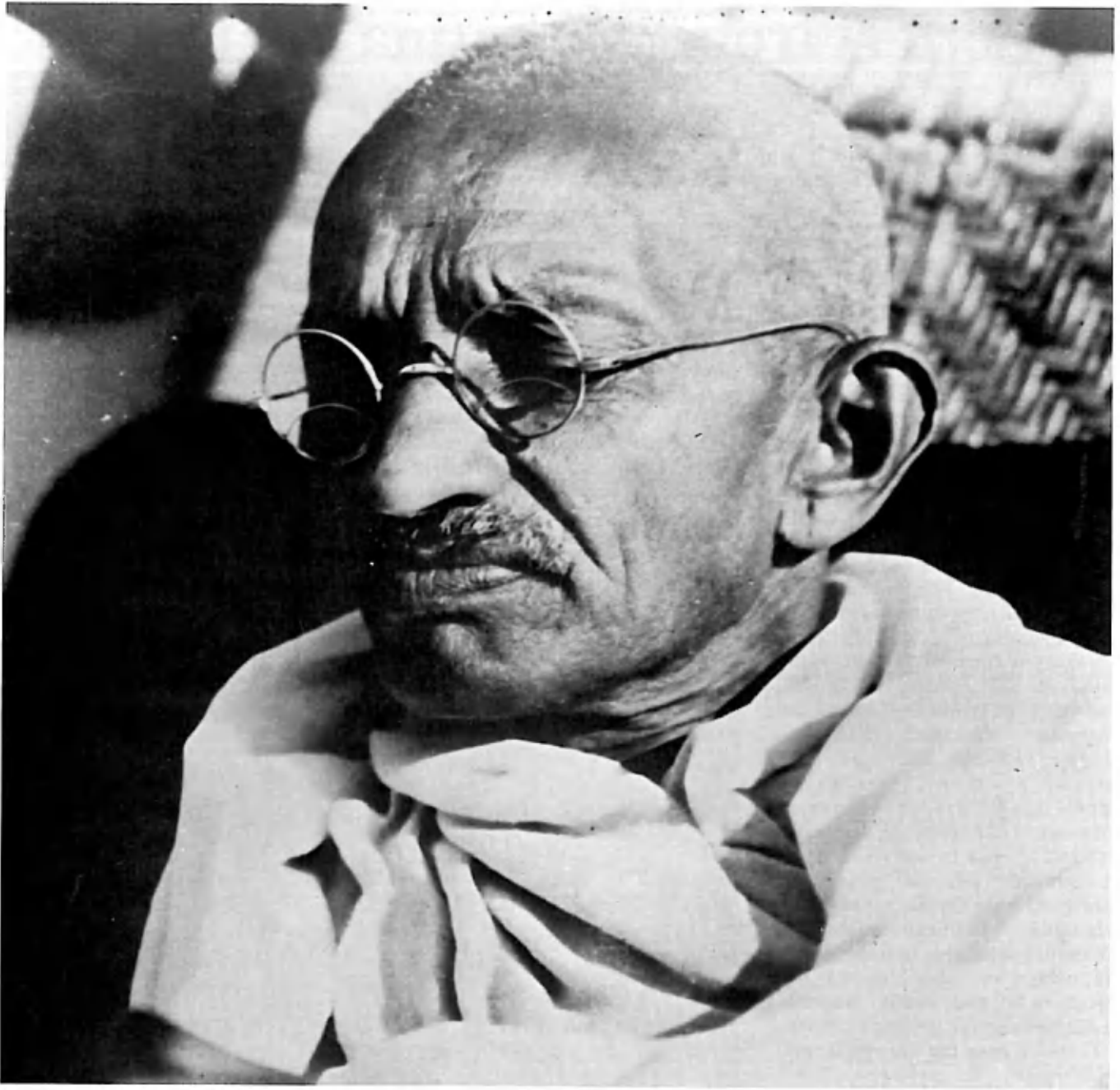
felder migration of 1734-36, grew up in Montgomery and Berks county regions of Pennsylvania, at Corn-ing, Hendricks, and Chapel. Churches with which the family had membership at various times were Hereford Mennonite, Bally; Eden Men-

nonite, Schwenksville; and Upper Milford Mennonite, Zionsville. My parents served Methodist congregations at Ebenezer, Delaware (where I was born); Elam, Pennsylvania; and Columbia, Pennsylvania.

Following my father's death in



Gilbert T. Gehman and his wife, Lizzie Kratz Hiestand Gehman, and their daughter Griselda.



July 1932, Mother and I lived in Washington, D.C., for two years with my paternal grandparents and Father's brother and his wife. Mother and I then moved to Pennsylvania in 1934 to live with my mother's sister and brother where we helped care for my bedfast grandmother for several years.

Following graduation from East Greenville High School in 1942, I attended Bluffton (Ohio) College and graduated in the class of 1945. Maynard Shelly, my husband, also graduated the same years from both

of these institutions and from Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Chicago, in 1949.

The life and philosophy of Mahatma (great soul) Gandhi have always been of interest to me because of this unique link between Gandhi, my father, and myself. While serving with Mennonite Central Committee in Bangladesh (1971-74), Maynard and I had the opportunity to meet one of Gandhi's disciples, Charu Chaudhry in Noakhali District with whom we still have correspondence. Chaudhry had walked

Mahatma Gandhi (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi).

with Gandhi on a pilgrimage in this region of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) to settle the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in the mid-forties. In New Delhi, India, we were able to visit the memorial at the location of Gandhi's funeral

cremation which then brought the story full circle.

Seeing the motion picture, *Gandhi*, once again revived memories of past associations with India, Bangladesh, and my father's keen interest in Gandhi's statement on peace and nonresistance and, of course, the letter. My hope is that the message of Gandhi and the film, a dramatic work of art, will have a benevolent effect on our national leaders as well as people of all ages who will see a portrayal of the life of a man who changed the world with his powerful message of justice and peace.



Rev. Gilbert J. Gehman

Parsonage
625 Chestnut str
Columbia Pa

Right, letter to Gilbert T. Gehman posted at Aden, December 23, 1931. Below, letter from M. K. Gandhi to Gehman, December 17, 1931.

Dear Friend,

I must thank you for your letter of 15th Nov. last. I am glad that your congregation appreciates the non-violent means we are adopting to regain our lost liberty.

Post Said
17th Dec '31

yours truly,
mk Gandhi

Reflections on America

by Huang Xinqu

Professor Huang Xinqu from Sichuan Teachers College, Chengdu, Sichuan, People's Republic of China, came to the campuses of Bethel College, Bluffton College, and Goshen College during the 1982-83 academic year as a visiting professor and one of the vanguard in the newly-developed China Educational Program. This grew out of a program first initiated in 1980 between Goshen College and Sichuan Teachers College under the sponsorship of the Sichuan Bureau of Higher Education. In 1981 the base was broadened to include a consortium of North American Mennonite colleges and agencies.

Professor Huang, a poet and a teacher of English, became the first visiting professor from the People's Republic of China to be hosted on the Bethel and Bluffton campuses. He is distinguished as the translator

Professor Huang Xinqu teaching a course on Chinese history and culture, fall semester, 1983.



and annotator of Lu Hsun (1881-1936), China's most famous writer of the twentieth century and founder of Modern Chinese revolutionary literature. Professor Huang is himself an able poet. He graduated from West China Union University in Chengdu and then from the Department of English, Beijing Foreign Languages Institute.

The China Educational Exchange Program is viewed as an important bridge in the promotion of friendship and understanding between the people of China, accounting for one-fourth of the world's population, and the people of the United States. The goals of this exchange program have been identified "to provide opportunities to learn about and to experience each other's cultures, to understand better the achievements and the problems of the Chinese and American peoples, to contribute in a small way to building a more peaceful and just world, to share knowledge, training, and personnel which may be mutually beneficial, and to be a presence demonstrating to each other our common humanity, interest, friendship and respective value systems."

We have invited Professor Huang to respond to a few questions about his experiences as a visiting professor on three campuses and in his visiting and travels in the United States. The three campuses are indebted to Professor Huang for pioneering in a program which might be expected to grow in significance.

—Editors

1. *How did you first become acquainted with Mennonite college students and faculty? Would you*

please tell us your first impressions of these relationships?

In the fall of 1980, the first group of Goshen SST came to the Sichuan Teachers College for a 4-month stay. The Goshen SSTers were led by Dr. Atlee and Mrs. Winifred Beechy. I had a rather good impression of the Goshen College undergraduates who were well-behaved and cooperative with the Chinese faculty and students. We got along pretty well with Dr. Atlee and Mrs. Beechy, later with Professor Howard and Mrs. Verda Kauffman. They are very nice people.

2. *What have been your first impressions of American college students and small liberal arts colleges as observed during your stay at Bethel College and Bluffton College?*

Well, I had some contacts with the Goshen students back in China. However, it's interesting to teach American students Chinese history and culture in the USA. Most of the students in my class are very attentive and courteous. They try to understand the New China through this course. They are more active in raising questions than the Chinese college students. Sometimes I have found out that they know so little about China. We hit it off wonderfully with both Bethel and Bluffton students. They seemed to enjoy my courses quite a bit. I was certainly very much moved when some students at Bluffton placed a big apple on my desk before each class. You might say, this is a special favor to be honored with such a graceful gesture. I really appreciate their willingness to learn and their openness to understand and their easy manner to relax.

3. *You have studied and taught English for years. What have you noted as to how English is spoken on the Bethel campus as compared with English which you have studied and taught in China?*

You have surely put a nice question. What I have studied and taught in China was a little different from the English spoken by the American students. First, we have actually studied and taught quite a few courses in written English, rather formal and sometimes even a little pedantic. During my daily conversation with the Bethel and Bluffton students, I have noticed with great interest that their English is very simple and expressive. Second, they use quite a few slang expressions. Sometimes a couple of slang words or local colloquialisms would make me rather refreshing. It's great fun to listen to their talk.

4. *What are the particular experiences during your fall semester on the Bethel College campus which stand out most vividly?*

I enjoyed the friendship with some of the faculty and international students on the Bethel campus. The Fall Fest is quite fascinating. Some of the interesting field trips I made stand out most vividly in my mind. The Kansas State Fair was quite interesting. It was the first time that I saw cow girls. I also enjoyed the chitchats with Bethel faculty during lunch time in the cafeteria. Sometimes I was kidding with some professors there. The jokes we cracked set the table laughing, which worked up our appetite as well as our friendship.

5. *If you were to spend an additional semester on the Bethel College campus, what would you be interested in teaching? What experiences would you like to have to supplement the ones already had?*

I might teach Chinese literature and American literature if I were to spend an additional semester at Bethel. Of course, I need some time

for preparation. The English majors at Bethel studied quite a bit of English literature but not American literature. This came to me as a big surprise!

6. *You are a poet and a translator of poetry. Do you have any poem or poems which you have written since coming to this country which you would be prepared to share?*

As a matter of fact, my poetry and translation are not up to much. Since I came to the United States, I have written quite a few poems. I shared some of the poems with my students in class. I was also invited to read my poems in the Bluffton writers' club meeting. The *Bethel Bulletin* published one of my poems dedicated to my first host college in North America.

7. *Your wife is a medical doctor and your two sons have studied English. One of them is an English major at Sichuan Teachers College. What dreams and expectations do you have for your sons?*

First of all, I wish my two boys would be patriotic Chinese citizens. They should contribute their talents to China's modernization. Since my oldest boy will get his BA degree this July, if possible, I hope he might further his English in an

English-speaking country. If this dream could come true, so much the better. Anyhow I hope he could do something for mutual understanding and international friendship with his knowledge of English in the future.

8. *You have read widely in American literature. What American novels and poems have been especially enjoyable and meaningful to you?*

I like to read Mark Twain, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser's novels. Longfellow, Robert Frost, and Walt Whitman are my favorite American poets. All these great American writers and poets presented me with a realistic picture of America.

9. *What do you envision as the future of American-Chinese cultural relationships particularly with relation to the China Educational Exchange Program?*

To me, cultural and educational exchange is an essential step toward mutual understanding and international friendship which is the first step toward world peace. I hope the China Educational Exchange Program could continue on the basis of mutual equality and mutual benefit. Thank you.

Professor Huang Xinqu with Bethel College students, fall semester, 1983.



Book Reviews

A Wilderness Journey, Glimpses of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, 1925-1980, by Heinrich and Gerhard Woelk, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, Ca., 1982, 169 pages.

This book describes an outward but also an inward journey of the MB church in the Soviet Union. Wilderness conditions (hardships, privation, persecution) from the outside often contributed to wilderness conditions inside (dissension, cliquishness and divisions). It is a shocking and yet a faith-building book. It is an especially valuable contribution to the Russian Mennonite literature because it is written by eyewitnesses.

Two unfortunate themes dominate the otherwise helpful reporting, German nationalism and rejection of the Baptists. And yet both need to be told if in fact they accurately reflect historic reality.

German nationalism (or is it just German culture?) surfaces many times. For example. At one point during the war some 6,000 persons waited at a railroad station for deportation when suddenly two planes appeared overhead. A dogfight ensued. One plane was shot down. "We praised God" is the comment, but was it a German or Russian plane? The enemy plane was Russian. "After this remarkable event in which the Lord (sic!) had dealt a blow against our enemies" the German troops moved in. Even when finding fellow believers after the dispersements they do not have fellowship with Mennonites or MBs but with "Germans". "Here we soon found German brothers and sisters" (p. 49). And always there is "the common goal of reaching Germany." (p. 130)

Rejection, not to say animosity, of the Baptists, especially in Sect. IV, is not always based on historically verifiable facts. For example, on pages 71-72 the life and condi-

tions of the MB and Baptist churches are compared, contrasted would be more accurate, in two columns. Overall one gets the impression that while MB churches were either closed and ministers imprisoned, the Baptist churches generally fared reasonably well. Fact of the matter is that most Baptist leaders were also arrested and suffered along with the Mennonites and others.

On the other hand it is correct to say that "from the origin of the MB church onward the Baptist church has tried to absorb it". (p.75). Origin here refers, of course, not to 1860 but to the new start of the MB church during and after WW II. "But to the present day no joining of this Union has taken place". Only individual MBs have joined the All Union of Evangelical Christians, Baptists (AUCECB). On the other hand Walter Sawatsky says in *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, that "Heinrich K. Allert, a preacher from Karaganda, was persuaded to ask the delegates to accept the Mennonites into the union . . . Initially the AUCECB claimed that 16,000 Mennonites had joined; by 1968 Kriger claimed there were 18,500; and more recently 30,000 have been claimed for the AUCECB." (p.281).

Noticeably absent in the book is any mention of relationships with the Mennonite Church ("kirchliche"). Only two brief references occur: "There was also a Mennonite church with some 300 members" in Karaganda (p.83) and "Members of the Mennonite Church who are converted and born again are admitted upon their wish and after an open declaration as 'communion guests' in the church, as before." (p.99). That members of the Karaganda Mennonite Church helped build the church and that for a while both groups used the building is not mentioned.

Even though "The existence of some MB Churches has been legal-

ized in recent years, their activities have not," it is evident that not even a hostile regime and innumerable wilderness conditions have been able to squelch the MB fellowship, prevent the private and very courageous training of pastors, and stop the proclamation of God's Word. When the men were taken, the women carried on. But "as soon as there were young men who were converted and baptized, the women turned over the meetings, the reading of the Word, to their sons. Our women knew the place of women in the church and observed it" (p.46). That story of how the women carried on when the men were in exile needs yet to be told. One gets a brief glimpse of it in passages as the following: A daughter was converted by her mother. In turn she spoke to her fiance who that night could not sleep and woke his mother. Together they went to the goatshed, because "there was no other place where they could be undisturbed." The young man also made his peace with God. Soon young people from as far away as 100 km were swept into the churches. (p.45)

The first post-war MB church was organized in Karaganda in 1967. Heinrich Woelk, co-author of the book, was the first elder. He and his son Gerhard are to be commended for their efforts to share their experiences and observations with the rest of us and Victor Doerksen for translating it.

Peter J. Dyck
Akron, Pennsylvania

Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: O Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1983, Pp. 257. Paper \$9.95.

The first four paragraphs of *Mennonite Women* include eleven questions about the women in the immigrant group that came from Krefeld, Germany, to Germantown,

Pennsylvania, in 1683. Thus the author deliberately emphasizes the scarcity of available information about Mennonite foremothers. Thanks to the *Martyrs' Mirror*, we have known more about Anabaptist women than about 18th and 19th century American Mennonite women.

When the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the (MC) Mennonite Church commissioned this 300th anniversary study, it sent out a call to all churches and WMSC groups in the denomination, requesting historical information on women. But it was the task of Elaine Sommers Rich to follow up the leads in this fragmentary material, sending hundreds of letters, and searching through many decades of *The Herald of Truth* and *The Gospel Herald*. The "WSMC Collection," which she cites so often in her footnotes, is her own compilation of the resulting materials, now lodged in the Archives of the Mennonite Church at Goshen, Indiana.

Dozens of "unknown" women come to life in Rich's lively biographical sketches.

—Eva Yoder and Esther Bachman successfully petitioned the Pennsylvania Assembly to revoke its severe punishments of 12 Mennonite men during the Revolutionary War.

—Horse-and-buggy doctor Sarah Gross Lapp delivered 1200 babies in late-19th-century Nebraska and was also the mother of four bishops of the Mennonite Church.

—Ella Shoup Bauman started a church almost singlehandedly in Youngstown, Ohio, in the late 1940's, in connection with her frequent visits to that city for medical treatment.

Many of the anecdotes are told in the words of the women themselves or of their granddaughters.

Rose Lambert worked with Armenian orphans in Turkey from 1899 to 1910, at a time when Armenian Christians were being massacred. She recalled:

"After peace was restored and I was ill with typhoid a mounted Turkish officer met one of our boys on the street. He stopped his horse and asked him if he was one of our boys and then asked, 'How is Miss Lambert?' The reply, 'She is very ill.' He said, 'Allah willing she cannot die! The Gregorians in their churches are praying for her recovery and we in our Mosque are praying for her recovery. Allah must hear some of us.'"

A decade or two later in Colorado, when the new LaJunta hospital became crowded and student nurses complained about giving up their beds to emergency patients, the nursing director, Lydia Heatwole—always the first to give up her own beds—exclaimed, "Why girls! That's just what we need! It's up to us to make room."

Stories such as these give an overall impression of Mennonite women's energy, courage, and insistent self-sacrifice, in their surprising range of activities. However, there is little analysis of their situation and limitations or of the trends in women's activities and the conflicting ideologies of "women's place" that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rich has alertly gathered raw material for such analysis and has categorized it for wives, mothers, and "aunts," or for areas of work such as home congregation, education, overseas and home missions, health care, and sewing and mission organizations. Readers can draw their own conclusions from each chapter or follow Rich's warm comments of appreciation, indignant exclamations,

and questions for further research.

Mennonite Women provides a solid foundation for further research. Most of the chapters have appended lists of women whose contribution to education, missions, etc., is sketched in four to ten lines each. Rich has been particularly scrupulous in tracking down full names and dates, even for women mentioned most briefly, such as "Barbara Bowman (Mrs. David) Shuh (1857-?), president" of Sisters' Aid in Kitchener, Ontario. The index includes more than 600 women. However, they usually are listed only under their maiden names. Thus, Mrs. Gustav Enns, who taught at Bethel, Hesston, and Goshen Colleges (and is one of the few General Conference Mennonites in the book) is listed as "Greaves Sudermann Enns, Amy Evelyn."

The lives of women in other Mennonite branches should soon receive the same careful documentation and lively expression that Elaine Sommers Rich has given to MC Mennonite women. (Unfortunately, her title, the foreword by Barbara Reber, and the text itself give the misleading impression that "Mennonite women" is an inclusive term. Only the author's preface explains the limitations of the study.) Many more women's biographies need to be researched and written. But the time will soon be ripe for a chronological, in-depth study of American Mennonite women, of the sociological and theological forces shaping their lives, and of their interaction with Protestant Sunday School and women's missionary movements as well as the broader tides of women's experience in America.

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SUNDOWN

BY **agnes cunningham**

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Down in the cotton row- pickin in the sun Wishin to the Lord that the day was
done Sack gettin heavy -- Sun gettin hot I'm wishin for a little what the boss has
got A dipper a-water -- fresh from the well A patch a-shade to sit for a
spell Down in the cotton row- bendin low Think I'm goin where cot-ton don't
grow. (CHO) Get a- way from here Get a- way --- Get a- way. (continued)



"Sharecropper's Family, Hale County, Alabama, March, 1936," By WALKER EVANS