MENNONITE LIFE

MARCH 1991

In this Issue

In this issue John McCabe-Juhnke, child of the Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite settlement in McPherson County, Kansas, reports on the story-telling patterns of his people. These stories, and the way they are told, are windows into group experience. Long-time *Mennonite Life* readers may be reminded of the article by Naomi Preheim, "Schweizer Mennonite Nicknames" (December 1974) which chronicled another part of the oral tradition of these same people. McCabe-Juhnke's article is drawn from his Ph.D. dissertation at Louisiana State University, 1990. He teaches in the department of communication arts at Bethel College.

James Urry's article on the context of Mennonite migration from Russia to America in the 1870s shows that oral tradition may not be the most reliable guide to the reasons for migration. Urry teaches anthropology at Victory University of Wellington in New Zealand. In April 1990 he gave a lecture at Bethel College, sponsored by the Western District Conference Historical Committee with the support of the Mennonite Library and Archives. This article is a revised version of that lecture.

Peter Penner is Professor of History at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada. He is working on a book, *Mennonite Brethren Mission to India*. In this article, part of his wider study, Penner revises some commonly accepted views of the relationships between Mennonite Brethren mission groups in India. The story and viewpoint of Mennonite Brethren missionaries from the Molotschna Colony in the Ukraine have not been given adequate coverage in standard North American accounts.

Mennonite Life has completed forty-five years of publication. This issue includes our regular five-year index, for the years 1986-1990.

James C. Juhnke

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March 1991 Vol. 46 No. 1

Front Cover

Aerial photograph taken in 1954 of the Jacob D. Schrag farm northwest of Moundridge, Kansas.

Back Cover

Abram J. Friesen, Mennonite Brethren missionary to India, 1889-1914.

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Limits and Latitude: Everyday Expressions of Community and Individuality in Swiss Volhynian Mennonite Storytelling

by John McCabe-Juhnke

Narrative performance is a pervasive act in everyday experience. As we tell others about events in our lives and listen to what others say about us, we cast and recast our experience in ways that affirm our individual and relational identities. In recent years, I have been especially interested in the ways in which telling a story sustains and reshapes social relationships. Because story re-enacts and interprets the past, captures emotion, and expresses value, it is a fundamental mode of human communication. Our ability to understand each other depends on our facility as storytellers.

My personal story has been shaped by the experience of growing up within the community of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in Moundridge, Kansas—a community in which individual identity almost always is defined in relationship to the community ethic. However, until I left my home community to pursue a graduate school education, I was only minimally aware of how my Swiss Volhynian heritage distinguished my story from those of many mainstream Americans. Whereas experiences of faith, family, and farming were absolutely intertwined in my story, others regard them as distinctly unrelated and perhaps even foreign experiences. During graduate school, I became increasingly interested in the Swiss Volhynians as a cultural subgroup—as a distinctive "speech community"[1]—within which I could investigate the relationship between narrative performance and social experience. I was certain that the distinctive set of beliefs, values, and expectations of the Swiss Mennonite community would find expression in the personal narratives of its members.

Because Swiss Mennonites migrated primarily as church congregations and made their living as farmers in isolated rural areas, they have generally remained separate from the various societies in which they have lived. Sustained by their Anabaptist Christian beliefs, these Mennonites worked to establish a community of mutually accountable believers, or *Gemeinde*, that was independent of the social and political structures of mainstream society. As a result, a distinctive cultural identity has endured among the Swiss Volhynians as evidenced by their ethnic foodways, Swiss-German dialect, and religious orientation.

I chose to focus specifically on oral narrative for several reasons. Swiss Mennonites have a reputation for their distinctive style of speaking. People in surrounding communities frequently identify natives of Moundridge simply by listening to them speak. Since references to oral discourse are prominent in local descriptions of what makes Swiss Volhynian Mennonites unique, the ways of speaking among this group of Mennonites warrant special focus.

In addition to a characteristic rhythm, energy, and pattern of emphasis in their oral style, Swiss Volhynians are known for their boisterous manner of interaction. As R. C. Kauffman observed, speaking at the Seventy-fifth Anniversary celebration of the Swiss Volhynian migration, "You can always tell what a Schweitzer [Swiss German] thinks or feels, for he will tell you."[2] For years people within the community, as well as outsiders, have openly acknowledged the Schweitzers' reputation for spirited, candid talk.

Though Swiss Volhynians demonstrate their verbal ingenuity in a variety of ways, oral narrative is a mode of discourse that dominates their everyday experience. Nearly all traditional Schweitzer expressions, Swiss-German rhymes and sayings, and patterns of family nicknaming are either framed within or accompanied by narratives—stories that establish the significance of the events, people, and/or places that gave rise to the expressions or encouraged their dissemination. Thus, narrative emerges as a way of speaking that encompasses a broad range of experiences shared by the folk in this traditional Swiss Mennonite community.

The enduring influence of *Gemeinde* has shaped the development of storytelling in the Moundridge community. Stories about people and events in the community express *Gemeinde* by affirming community "connectedness." For many Swiss Volhynians, oral narrative has become the primary expressive medium for reinforcing and sometimes questioning the norms and expectations of the community. The creative process of storytelling in everyday experience constitutes a context for the negotiation of *Gemeinde* among members of the Swiss community.

A brief historical sketch of the Swiss Mennonites provides an appropriate context for the discussion of themes and stories in their oral culture. The Swiss Volhynian Mennonites migrated to the United States from the province of Volhynia in Polish Russia in the 1870's. The greatest majority of Swiss Mennonites originally came from Canton Bern in Switzerland, where they were persecuted for their Anabaptist beliefs.

In order to escape religious persecution and to seek new agricultural opportunities, the Swiss Mennonites moved from Switzerland to South Germany, and then to the province of Volhynia in

Russia. In 1861, a Swiss Mennonite congregation was founded in the small town of Kotosufka in Volhynia. However, the passing of the military conscription law during the reign of the Russian Czar, Alexander, required yet another emigration. On August 6, 1874, seventy-eight Swiss Mennonite families (nearly everyone in the village) left Kotosufka for New York. According to Swiss Mennonite historian Solomon Stucky, nineteen families chose to settle in South Dakota, while the remaining fifty-nine settled on the prairies of central Kansas.[3] There the Kotosufka congregation established the Hopefield Church and became some of the most significant founding members of the Moundridge community.

For the Swiss Volhynians in the late 1800's, the church was the community and the community was the church. Swiss Mennonites strove to maintain the inter-dependence and mutual accountability of the *Gemeinde* in Kotosufka. Although more than a century in the United States has diminished the sense of *Gemeinde* for the Swiss Volhynians, prevalent traces of this idea remain in their oral culture. One retired Mennonite farmer remembers it this way:

> [W]e were conscious of the fact that to misbehave—there may be punishment, and to fall out of favor with the community—the church family—was a real disgrace. And you'd really feel isolated . . . . We were considered, at that time—when I was growing up—we were considered a closed group.

As a second generation descendent of the Russian immigrants, this gentleman still maintains a strong sense of accountability to community expectations.

As I anticipated the task of analyzing the storytelling practices in my home community, I was faced with the challenge of presenting an "objective" interpretation of Swiss Mennonite oral narrative. Realizing that objectivity is problematic in any study of human interaction, I resolved to take advantage of—rather than deny—my personal perspective on Swiss Volhynian culture. I am a Swiss Volhynian, and in many ways this is my story. My position as a community insider has enabled a natural entrance into the daily lives of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. The people I interviewed recognized me as an insider. Some know me as a nephew, or great-nephew, some as a former student or family friend. In the few instances that the interviews were first time encounters, I was at least identified as John and Ethel Juhnke's youngest boy. I was known, welcomed, and almost always offered food or drink. In most cases, my hosts freely conversed with me before, during, and after the "formal" interview. Thus the tape-recorded interview, though an atypical communication experience for many of these Swiss Volhynian informants, did not altogether preclude spontaneous conversational interaction.

Monument commemorating the arrival of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in 1874.

Of the fourteen informants from the Moundridge community whom I interviewed between the spring of 1986 and the summer of 1989, all were either first or second generation descendants of the immigrants from Volhynia. As a result, their perspective reflects a distinct sense of community identity that has no doubt diminished in subsequent generations. Although third and fourth generation descendants may have a passing interest in their Swiss Volhynian heritage, their emotional involvement is less intense than that of those who interacted closely with parents and grandparents who came from Russia. As a result, the perceptions of "community" as they emerge in this article are those of a

specific group of older Swiss Mennonites, who range from 60 to 98 years of age.

This particular group of Swiss Mennonites is a transitional group. They learned English as a second language. While these people spoke German to their parents and siblings in their childhood homes, they speak English to their own children. They have seen remarkable changes in farming practices, from the primitive methods of the horse-drawn plow to the modern technology of motorized tractor. Whereas their childhood experience was limited to activities in an isolated rural community, they now have the freedom and mobility that modern forms of transportation provide. Although their experiences with religion, social life, work, education, and family relationships have altered significantly in the course of their lifetimes, they recognize the link between each of these aspects of contemporary life and their past experiences.

Any description of the Swiss Volhynian community ethos must acknowledge the complex intermingling of ethnic identity and religious practice, since both ethnicity and religion are at the heart of Swiss Mennonite identity. As a result, community standards and expectations reflect Russian-German peoplehood as well as Mennonite doctrine. No doubt both strains of experience have shaped general qualities such as industriousness, humility, rigor, and neighborliness. The convergence of Swiss Volhynian identity and Mennonite identity creates a distinct cultural heritage that permeates the experience of individual community members.

This group of Swiss Mennonites has maintained a community in which the concern for activities and experiences of those within the group dominates the storytelling in the community. One Moundridge native identified the narrow scope of Swiss Mennonite oral narration. This local critic observed, "[W]e developed a lot of little stories [when we were together with our cousins], but no one—they didn't amount to anything outside of your group." Thus, storytelling in the Moundridge community is not associated with a stock repertoire of traditional folk tales. Rather, the oral narrator tells personal experience stories, family reminiscences, stories about unusual community events or personalities, and oral histories. Indeed, creating one's own story is a primary function of Swiss Volhynian oral narration. Drawing from personal experience, narrators not only can affirm their personal identities in oral narration, they can also adhere to the enduring Anabaptist expectation of truthfulness thereby upholding the integrity of narrative discourse.

A researcher hoping to discover the most "practiced" oral narrator in the Schweitzer community will clearly miss the mark if he or she pursues the storytellers with the largest repertoire of traditional folk tales. Rather, one should look for those persons who have been consistently engaged in the commonplace activities of community life. Oral narrators generally acknowledge that they have attained their repertoire through informal interaction in everyday events. One retired farmer observed:

> I think I got some of my information about situations and the background just at random. When we—when they had their butchering days or their—and the former generation—my uncles got together. Just listening in I got more—more of that stuff came out than really we inquiring [about specific stories].

Social involvement for the Swiss Mennonite breeds the "stuff" of storytelling: everyday experience. Storytellers in the Moundridge vicinity are farmers, doctors, housewives, teachers, anyone in contact with others in the community who has an inclination to share himself or herself with others. Though a few individuals who are especially engaging speakers may be called "clowns" or "real characters" and may be known for their ability to "*mach Spass*" (or "make fun"), the role of "storyteller" is primarily an informal one that can be assumed by virtually anyone in the community. This egalitarian approach to storytelling attests to the living out of *Gemeinde* in the narrative performance practices of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites. Storytelling sustains the community; it supports the ongoing social interaction rather than drawing attention to the performance skills of any particular individual.

Swiss Volhynian storytelling expresses *Gemeinde* not only in behavioral practice but in thematic development as well. The personal narratives of Swiss Mennonites expressly acknowledge and generally affirm the collective value system of the Swiss Mennonite community. Storytellers have a keen awareness of the individual's relationship to the larger community of Mennonites. The common bond of their agricultural experiences has nurtured among Swiss Mennonite storytellers a regard for hard work and commitment to a task. Several retired farmers told stories involving runaway horses or mules. In all these stories, the unfortunate victim of the runaways manages somehow to "hang on"—whether to the seat or the lines—and to brave the dangers of colliding or being drug on the ground in order to see the task through. The basic assumptions of hard work and responsibility preclude the option of abandoning a task, even in the face of danger or injury.

Besides the shared value of dedication to work, Swiss Mennonite storytellers have a common understanding of the tension between individual interest and community and/or church expectations. This tension, one of the most predominant themes in Swiss Volhynian storytelling, is apparent in the following story.

> One of the things [my mother] brought out an awful lot was—. In my dad's family—she married into the Schrags. And that was a bunch of boys. But there was one—that was Andrew—that went off to school. Then he came home and brought culture back home. Like pressing your pants and folding handkerchiefs—something like that. That was unheard of, you know—that type of thing. And the ridicule he had to take because he didn't wear overalls anymore then—. The one thing that really struck me was: One time he came home after he had been teaching a while or at the University or something. And Grandma Schrag—because at that time, Grandpa was dead—asked him to lead the morning devotions. And he refused. You know what that could do to a family!

In bringing "culture" back home, the narrator's Uncle Andrew violated family and community expectations. Of course, the ultimate challenge was Andrew's refusal to lead the morning devotions. This move toward individuation brought about ridicule and caused disappointment in the family. The narrator identifies the pain of transition as members of the Swiss Mennonite community break from the closed group and refuse to conform to its standards.

Although expectations today are less rigidly defined, many Swiss Mennonites still feel deeply obligated to uphold a community code of conduct. For divergent insiders, this mutual accountability among community members can be stifling. One woman, who left the community when she married and re-

turned more than thirty years later, observed. "I was not comfortable—especially comfortable coming back.... [In Moundridge] everyone knows what everyone else is doing." For her and others who have deviated from the status quo, the close-knit nature of the community has been more burdensome than comfortable. Whether individuals adhere to it or challenge it, virtually everyone forthrightly acknowledges the powerful influence of the community standard.

Indeed, the religious and ethnic heritage of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites establishes an experiential common ground for the oral narrators who have had sustained involvement in the Moundridge community. Yet, individual traits and personal experiences precipitate a diversity of perspectives among storytellers. One simply cannot assume a conventional pattern of attitudes and beliefs for all Schweitzer narrators. Rosan Jordan stresses the need for researchers to consider individual traits that affect an informant's relationship to his or her ethnic culture.

> Any study of the folklore and culture of an individual member of an ethnic group . . . must assess the extent to which ethnicity dominates (or fails to dominate) that individual's psychological, sociological, and cultural orientations, and, since other matters than ethnicity may influence that orientation, it must assess the degree to which such factors . . . impinge upon the particular traditions under scrutiny.[4]

Therefore, attention must be given to the unique characteristics of individual Schweitzer storytellers in order to determine how each perspective reveals a distinct view of the Swiss Mennonite experience.

One legitimate method for probing features that are unique to individual storytellers is to identify the demographic factors that influence personal perspectives. Jordan identifies social class, gender, rural or urban background, and "personal-accidental factors" as elements that merit consideration.[5] In this study, age (or generational positioning) and occupation have significant influence as well.

Of course, not every demographic factor is of equal consequence for each oral narrator, and many personality traits have more to do with the psychological patterning of an individual than with demographic considerations. Nevertheless, factors such as age, gender, and occupation have enduring impact on individual narrative perspectives and are more readily accessible than is knowledge regarding individual psychological functioning. Therefore, I have chosen to identify the most notable demographic influences for each person interviewed and to discuss the effects of these influences on individual storytellers.

One cannot assume a conventional mold for oral narrators in Swiss Mennonite culture. To do so would be to deny the distinct differences in perspectives engendered by the individual traits of each storyteller. An examination of different versions of a common experience among Swiss Volhynians reveals noticeable variations that illustrate a distinctive perspective for each storyteller. The *Bücher Bähr* stories are prime examples of variable perspectives on a common experience.

Almost every informant recalled a bookseller in the community who was nicknamed "*der Bücher* (the books) *Bähr*." He travelled around the community in a horse drawn buggy selling books and devotional materials. Since *Bücher Bähr*'s home was some distance from Moundridge, he had to depend on the hospitality of his customers for his food and shelter. When he made a sales call at mealtime, he expected to be fed. He spent the night and stabled his horses wherever he made his last call of the evening. All the informants agree on these few basic facts, and yet recollections of specific details surrounding *Bücher Bähr*'s character are often quite different.

A number of factors have contributed to the *Bücher Bähr*'s notoriety in the community. His unorthodox manner of making business calls tested the bounds of propriety in the community. Swiss Volhynians are generally prudent, industrious, and frugal people. At the same time they also place a value on hospitality as a mode of Christian servanthood. Depending as he did on his customers for food, lodging, and feed for his horse, Mr. Bähr could easily be judged intrusive, lackadaisical, and improvident according to community standards. Yet, his need for hospitality was obvious since he was far from his home in Indiana and had no relatives in the community with whom he could stay. The apparent tension between the salesman's imprudence and the community's obligation to service has nurtured a diversity of responses to the bookseller's antics.

One informant, a 60-year-old teacher in the Moundridge school system, recalled an incident involving a challenge to Mr. Bähr's intrusive behavior.

> He made a run of the community from house to house. And wherever he landed for dinner, that's what he had. And wherever he landed in the evening, that's where he slept. His horse was taken care of in the barn. I remember him . . . . Somebody asked him once about going where you're not invited. And he said, in German, "They didn't ask me not to come."

Here the storyteller withholds personal judgement on the actions of the bookseller. Instead, he offers a brief cata-

Bücher Bähr.

logue of the salesman's typical behaviors. The only indication of the narrator's personal involvement in the story is the acknowledgement of his remembrance of Mr. Bähr. Although a negative evaluation of Mr. Bähr's behaviors is implied by the report of the challenge, the storyteller attributes the confrontation to "somebody" else.

This account of *Bücher Bähr*'s behaviors reflects the characteristic objectivity of the storyteller's narrative perspective, which I would suggest has been influenced directly by his profession as a teacher. Patterns of learning have enabled him to become a scholar of oral history in his own right. An awareness of the value of storytelling in preserving a people's culture has encouraged an objective inquiry into oral narration that goes beyond a novel interest in personal reminiscences. He even has assigned a family folklore project to his students, encouraging them to collect their own family stories. As a teacher and local historian, he is most interested in reporting the facts and is careful to leave out any obvious personal evaluation. When compared with other storytellers, he is singular in his guarded, detached manner of narration.

In contrast to the school teacher's minimal description, one 70-year-old retired farmer recalled his experience with the *Bücher Bähr* with abundant specific details. He described his discomfort with the lack of hospitality his parents showed to Mr. Bähr.

> There's another place I was just a bit embarrassed. Maybe I was too sensitive. But some of my uncles in the area—he was there time and time again for the night. They fed his ponies and kept him for the night. And I don't know whether he ever stayed at our place or not. I always thought the folks had a good reason because the rooms were filled with children. They didn't have an extra spare bedroom. Another reason I think they weren't too anxious to have them in the home was because he insisted on playing rook. And he'd play solitaire!... No, we were not very hospitable to that man. That sort of bothered me that other people took him in and we just hardly ever at our place.

This reminsicence reveals a very personally involved point of view. The storyteller invests more feeling and is much less concerned with statements of objective fact than the previous narrator. This recollection reveals as much about storyteller as it does about Mr. Bähr. His embarrassment about his family's appearing inhospitable in comparison to his uncles and his desire to provide sound reasons for his parent's behaviors indicate the narrator's firm sense of obligation. He notices others' willingness to share the responsibility for housing the *Bücher Bähr* and is uncomfortable with his family's lack of participation.

This storyteller's perspective has been shaped by seventy years of life on the farm. With his natural intelligence and educational background, this individual clearly had the potential to attain a professional career. However, as the oldest son in a farm family, he was naturally predisposed to pursue an agricultural career.

From his experience on the family farm the storyteller has learned the importance of shared responsibility in the face of unpleasant tasks. If one person refuses to take responsibility for his or her share of the farm work, the success of the whole operation may be in jeopardy. This narrator recognizes that no matter how personally inconvenienced a person feels, one has to do his or her part to accomplish the greater good.[6] These resonances of the storyteller's life-long experience on the farm lend a distinctive color to his narrative perspective.

One farmer who had retired from teaching but continued to farm in his retirement years remembered the *Bücher Bähr* spending the night with his family, acknowledging that the salesman was welcomed in his parents' home. At the same time, this narrator's description of Mr. Bähr indicates an understanding of the reasons others in the community may have been reluctant to welcome the man.

> He'd come over here—they called him the *Bücher Bähr*—and try to sell books. But I don't remember that he was ever here for a meal or anything . . . . This *Bücher Bähr*, he'd make it a point to stop in about meal time. He'd unhitch his horse and stay over night. Feed his horse. Then he'd have a little sack and take a little oats along for his horse on the way out . . . . It wasn't that he wasn't welcome. But, you know, I guess at some places he wouldn't have been.

This account is clearly more detached than the preceding remembrance. The storyteller never directly evaluates the bookseller's behavior. However, a personal judgment is implied in the extended description of the provisions that the visiting salesman requires: the *Bücher Bähr* not only "makes it a point" to be fed by his customers, he feeds his horse and takes a little extra oats for the road! This catalog of Mr. Bähr's immodest behaviors reveals the narrator's concern about limited resources on the family farm.

Earlier in our conversation, this storyteller had shared memories of those "rugged" days when his parents had to "scrounge for an existence." In light of his family's frugality as they coped with scarce resources, this storyteller may have regarded the *Bücher Bähr's* behaviors more negatively than he was willing to admit. A man who comes and takes that which he has not worked for may be welcomed overtly, but an underlying annoyance is certain to accompany the reception.

This storyteller's wife seemed more

Hopefield (Hoffnungsfeld) *Mennonite Church, west of Moundridge, Kansas.*

willing than her husband to acknowledge the annoyance people felt toward the *Bücher Bähr*. Her husband requested that she tell a story of a family whose daughters wearied of washing Mr. Bähr's dirty laundry.

> [The *Bücher Bähr*] used to spend all night at different people's houses. Well, these Herman Wedel's had a whole bunch of kids and they lived in a four room house. And he'd go there and stay all night. Then he'd bring his dirty clothes along with him. 'Course, they had a lot of washing to do with all [those kids]. So the girls got kind of tired of it. And they took his underwear [laughs] and starched them real heavy. [laughs] And that was the last time he brought them over. [laughs] That's the end of the story.

Resonances of this woman's traditional role as nurturer and sustainer of the home are evident in her description of the *Bücher Bähr*. Whereas most men recall the necessity of providing a stable and oats for the travelling salesman's horses, she focuses on the added burden of the laundry. Naturally her experience in the social role of a traditional farm wife has influenced her perspective on Mr. Bähr. Although she withholds personal judgement as she describes the salesman's typical behaviors, her delight in the ingenuity of the Wedel girls' plan suggests that she believes that in some way, the *Bücher Bähr* received his just due with the over-starched underwear. Even though the storyteller did not experience the events of the story first hand, she seems to identify strongly with the role of the women in the story. Out of necessity the Wedel girls had to handle Mr. Bähr's imposition creatively, since a direct complaint or confrontation was not within the expected role of the traditional farm women of the time.

The recollection of a 90-year-old retired farmer, describes the book salesman in a terse, matter-of-fact style. Vested with the authority and wisdom that accompanies old age, this storyteller was much more concerned with providing truthful information than with analyzing social decorum. He states simply that "if people invited him, he stayed overnight," and he withholds any comment on the appropriateness of *Bücher Bähr*'s behavior.

> Oh, yes. Yes. I knew the man . . . . He was never married. He was a victim of arthritis badly, or rheumatism. He was a bookseller . . . for Mennonite Book Concern, Berne, Indiana.

This account avoids the murky waters of opinion. Instead, the narrator focuses on certainties: the salesman's marital status, physical condition, and place of employment. One can easily understand why each of these considerations is important to someone speaking from the perspective of old age. The loss of companionship, physical health, and gainful employment are often primary concerns for senior citizens.

Unlike the other informants, one man, a retired dentist, candidly acknowledged his family's refusal to welcome the *Bücher Bähr* in their home.

> There were a lot of incidents. He was an unwelcomed guest in a lot of places, for one thing . . . . The story is that he would pretty well time himself so he would get there at dinner time—that type of thing . . . . He came with a horse and buggy. So he had to have feed for his horses . . . . Now, we didn't welcome him. He still came, but he never stayed at our place. We didn't have a spare bedroom for him.

Here the storyteller assumes that his own family's treatment of the salesman was representative of a community norm. From his perspective, Mr. Bähr was generally unwelcome, so the narrator expresses no regret or embarrassment at refusing to entertain the bookseller. Furthermore, the *Bücher Bähr* had every reason to recognize that he was unwelcome and yet he continued to call. The storyteller implies that the salesman was responsible, not community members, for his widespread rejection among them.

The storyteller's emphasis on personal responsibility for individual actions relates directly to his particular experience as a trained professional. At a time when most of his peers were seeking their livelihoods by taking over their portions of the family farm, he separated himself from the farm community and pursued a career in dentistry. His stepping out of the mainstream in order to achieve professional advancement has fostered an attitude that is much less dominated by the concerns of the rural community. His strong sense of self sufficiency has had an indelible impact on his perspective as an oral narrator.

The retired dentist's description of the visual appearance of the *Bücher Bähr* is more vivid than any other account.

> . . . the thing that I remember more than anything else—I remember his face, his beard. But I remember the plaque on his teeth. It was just thick. Oh, you know, soft stuff. Ooh!

Of course, one can easily attribute this focus on the distinctive appearance of the bookseller to the retired professional's perspective on the significance of the individual. However, I am tempted to interpret his careful depiction of Mr. Bähr's unhealthy teeth, as an avid argument for the utter indispensability of the profession of dentistry. Whatever the case, the trained dentist's powers of observation certainly enhance the description.

The tension between identification with the group and individual expression is fundamental to Swiss Mennonite oral narrators. Despite their common cultural heritage, Swiss Volhynian storytellers express their individuality in a variety of ways. Age, gender, occupation, and other personal-accidental factors influence the level of identification each has with the community standard. The variety of responses to the *Bücher Bähr* demonstrates that despite a generally assumed Christian responsibility to help the needy—an assumption that promotes the community norm of hospitality—individual storytellers interpret legitimate need and appropriate response differently. At the same time, virtually every narrator—irrespective of age, gender, or occupational role—implies a sense of reservation about Mr. Bähr's immoderate expectations for community assistance. Thus, the storytellers exhibit a measure of conformity despite their individual differences. Through storytelling, they evoke a context that enables them to test their position as individuals within the *Gemeinde*.

This investigation of individual and community perspectives in Swiss Mennonite storytelling has demonstrated some of the complexity of expressions of ethnic identity in the Moundridge community. Obviously, no common mold exists for the narrators who contributed to this study; one cannot conclusively identify a typical narrative stance among Swiss Volhynians. Each storyteller's perspective is shaped by individual traits as well as collective experience. Thus, the most apparent fundamental attribute of Swiss Volhynian storytelling is the special tension between conformity and individuality—between limits and latitude. This tension attests to the distinctive position of the storyteller in the Swiss Mennonite community somewhere between tradition and

progress, between community norms and individual uniqueness, between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

ENDNOTES

[1]Dell Hymes, "Ways of Speaking," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 440.

[2]R. C. Kauffman, "A Critical Evaluation of Ourselves (The Swiss Mennonites)," in *Addresses and other items of interest connected with the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Services of the Swiss Mennonites (Schweitzer-Mennoniten)*, ed. Harley J. Stucky (North Newton: n.p., 1950), p. 57.

[3]Solomon Stucky, *The Heritage of the Swiss Volhynian Mennonites* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1981), pp. 130-131.

[4]Rosan A. Jordan, "Ethnic Identity and the Lore of the Supernatural," *Journal of American Folklore*, 88 (1975), p. 382.

[5]Jordan, p. 382.

[6]The obvious parallel with the Mennonite concept of *Gemeinde* may suggest that this perspective is more culturally than individually derived. However, I believe the storyteller's individual experience as the oldest son in a farm family has reinforced this cultural attitude, thus distinguishing his perspective from that of the other oral narrators.

This 1944 photograph of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites in central Kansas was taken on the steps of the Eden Mennonite Church west of Moundridge. Most of those pictured in the first few rows had been born in Volhynia.

The Russian State, the Mennonite World and the Migration from Russia to North America in the 1870s

by James Urry

In an article published in 1977 Waldemar Janzen called for a theology of Mennonite migration.[1] He noted that Mennonites, especially those of Russian background, have had a tradition of emigrating for reasons of faith starting with their movement to Russia at the end of the eighteenth century and continuing into recent times. Russian Mennonites moved to North America first in the 1870s and today some of their descendants, particularly Canadian Mennonites, are found scattered through Latin America. Religion, it seems, is the major motivation behind all such migrations. But is this so? Were other reasons also involved in Mennonite migrations?

I do not intend to challenge the view that religion has played a part in all Mennonite migrations. Religious experience is so intimately bound into the existence of all Mennonites that it would be very silly to claim that religious principles were not involved in all Mennonite migrations. But Mennonites themselves often question whether religious reasons really lay behind many Mennonite migrations. The implication is that something else "caused" the moves. Usually economic explanations are suggested: material rewards motived Mennonites to migrate. A search for land, the desire for wealth, are seen as important factors in the decision to migrate.[2] Of course such factors were often important. But that is not what some questioners want to hear. They seek a single explanation, a simple motivation. They do not want to hear about other factors, or listen to complex arguments. If migration was not totally for religious reasons, it must have been solely for some other reason.

I do not intend to provide simple answers to very complex issues. Instead I intend to provide some detail of the broader context in which Mennonite migration from Russia to North America occurred during the 1870s. In doing so I hope to reveal how complex the issues involved in the migrations were. In doing so I will directly or indirectly challenge many of the accounts written by the participants in the migration and later commentators.

The Evil Empire

Recently I saw a cartoon originally published in the *Christian Science Monitor*. It showed a couple in a travel agency decorated with posters of Eastern European tour destinations. "Look," they are saying to the agent, "we don't want to visit Russia and view its treasures, we want to see the Evil Empire!"

Whenever I find myself talking to people without a good background in pre-Soviet, Russian history I find myself facing similar clients as the poor travel agent. In the decades following the migration of the 1870s many interpretations of the causes of the migration were "firmed up" in the accounts written by those who had emigrated. According to these accounts Mennonites left in the 1870s because the Russian government threatened to take away all their privileges. This interpretation focused on the alleged withdrawal by the Russian authorities of the famed Privilegium which was supposed to grant Mennonites total autonomy in their affairs including freedom from military service "for all time." Behind this withdrawal lay a deeper conspiracy in which the ultimate aim of the Russian state was to assimilate Mennonites forcibly into Russian ways.[3]

Later writers, often the descendants of the immigrants, developed more elaborate explanations of events. The Russian state had threatened to replace the Mennonite's real *Muttersprache*, German, with Russian. As a consequence not only the continuation of faith was threatened (God, after all, was German or at least Christ had spoken German—was not the Bible written in German?), but also the Mennonite's real *völkisch* identity. This lay with German culture and the German Reich as a geopolitical entity. The myth even developed that the German Chancellor Bismarck had somehow successfully intervened on the Mennonites' behalf to get the Russian authorities to release these "Russian Germans" who somehow had remained citizens of Germany, a political entity which, of course, was not in existence when most Mennonites emigrated to Russia![4]

Such views are at best tinged with naive political images, at worst with racist overtones. The political and cultural imagery was particularly strong in the USA prior to the First World War; the racist imagery in the inter-war period. Following the Russian Revolution the vision of an exodus, of a people being "saved" like the children of Israel from Egypt, became a dominant theme for some Mennonites writing about the migration from Russia. Mennonites not only escaped from slavery, but also discovered the promised land of milk and honey. This view was heavily influenced at first by the "rescue" of the Russian Mennonites from Bolshevik ("Red"/Soviet) terror during the 1920s. As the Cold War intensified following the Second World War, this vision of emigration as exodus became imbued with even greater significance.

The books and articles on the 1870s migration published after 1945 have an air of the Cold War atmosphere of the period. Mysteriously, visions of contemporary Communist Russia (more correctly the USSR) were transferred back into Imperial Russia's past.[5]

To understand the role of the Russian government in the Mennonite emigration of the 1870s in its historical context requires a closer examination than is normal on the changing nature of Mennonite relations with the Russian state between 1789 and 1870, and the political situation which emerged in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s.

Mennonite/Russian state relations 1789-1860[6]

Unlike the "wild west" of North America, the eastern and southern frontiers of the Russian state were strictly controlled as people settled the new lands seized from the Ottoman khanates in the eighteenth century. The first Mennonite settlers occupied an independent vice-regal zone ruled by Catherine the Great's favorite Prince Potemkin. Until the time of Catherine's successor, Paul, Russia had no governmental bureaucracy, especially at the local level in the countryside and particularly in the new frontier areas. But Paul, and his son, Alexander I introduced new forms of central and local government based at first on Prussian models, to strengthen the role of the autocrat and to enforce his authority. Alexander introduced the first ministries to central government and the Mennonites, as foreign colonists, initially came under the jurisdiction of the new Ministry of the Interior. Within the Ministry they were placed under the administrative control of a special section for foreign colonists, the Guardian's Committee *(Fürsorge Komitee)*. They were administered in their own language which for Mennonites was deemed to be High German, the closest official language they could find to the Mennonite *Platt* (Low German speech) the colonists used in everyday communication among themselves. In 1800 Mennonite use of High German was restricted to religious affairs and most senior religious leaders were less than one generation removed from the use of Dutch in religious matters and some could still read Dutch texts.

Contrary to the widely accepted view that Mennonites in Russia had total self-government, protected by their own special charter of rights, Mennonites in fact were integrated into the Russian state and its various administrative apparatus from the outset of settlement. Within their colony districts and villages, local administration after 1797 was organized according to rules drawn up for state peasants (people "owned" by the state as opposed to privately owned peasants often referred to as serfs). Up to the 1860s Mennonites were administered with state peasants and throughout the Imperial period they were classed as members of the peasant estate in the official Russian system of estates *(soslovie)*, whether or not they were millionaires, members of the Russian Duma (parliament) or people with a University education. Mennonite settlements, as opposed to the people themselves, also were placed within the jurisdiction of the regional governments in which they were situated. In southern Russia these were the administrative area of New Russia and the system of provinces *(gubernii)* and counties *(uezdi)*.

At the local level the representatives of civil government were Mennonites, chosen by male Mennonite landholders in a "free" vote. But this voting, and the administrative rules under which Mennonite officials operated, was carefully controlled and regulated by official Russian regulations, overseen by Russian inspectors, monitored by regional offices. These regional Russian officials were controlled by bureaucrats in St. Petersburg. The Mennonite Privilegium itself consisted of little more than a reformulation of rights already contained in the official decree issued in 1763 by Catherine the Great to entice foreigners to settle in Russia. The only special clause in the Mennonite charter did not involve special rights concerned with non-resistance (freedom from military service had been promised to all immigrants in 1763 and subsequent decrees), but the right of Mennonites to follow their own customary inheritance practices within the restrictions on the subdivision and sale of state lands already enshrined in the colonist's legislation. The Mennonite Privilegium did not become a legal document until Alexander's successor, Nicholas I (ruled 1825-1855), had all the old Imperial feudal decrees issued by his predecessors enshrined in Russia's first legal codification in the 1830s.

The entire history of Mennonite relations with the Russian state is one of intensifying governmental control and closer central administration. By 1820 the Mennonites were so well integrated into the Imperial governmental system that new immigrants, like the Alexanderwohl community who came to the Molochnaia at this time, had to conform to a well established administrative structure at the local level. Beginning in the 1820s Mennonites, and some other foreign colonists, were singled out by the Guardian's Committee for special programs of economic development. From the mid-1830s the central government became more intensely involved with the colonists and particularly Mennonites. The formation in 1836 of a New Ministry of State Domains to control state peasants, including the Mennonites, saw the implementation of reforms in economic practice and educational institutions in the colonies. Nicholas I planned to modernize Russia's backward peasant economy and society by initiating reforms among people under the state's direct control. Mennonites were one of the groups singled out for special programs so they could act as models for larger reforms among the millions of Russian and other ethnic state peasants. This is where the Mennonite view that they had been brought to Russia to act as models for the larger population first began.

In the Mennonite colonies the most intense period of these reforms lasted only from about 1840 to 1848 and were closely bound-up with the career of that strange Mennonite from Molochnaia, Johann Cornies. They did not end because Cornies died suddenly in 1848; he just had his timing right. Cornies was born in 1789, the year of the outbreak of the French Revolution; he died in the year of Europe's next great outbreak of revolutionary fervor, 1848. Nicholas was so frightened by events outside Russia (his accession in 1825 had seen an attempt by officers influenced by French revolutionary thinking to seize control) that after 1848 he abandoned his plans for reform and retreated behind the security of his secret police.

So the Russian state, from the very outset of Mennonite settlement, was actively involved in all aspects of Mennonite life in Russia and this involvement intensified throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Up to 1870 the Mennonites had not been living in a closed-off world of their own, protected by their Privilegium and running

their own affairs completely separate from outside interference. During the 1840s Russian officials, with Cornies' connivance, had even removed Mennonite religious elders from control of their congregations when these religious leaders threatened to stand in the way of his reforms.[7] So why was there such a strong reaction by Mennonites in the 1870s to the further intervention of the Russian state? To understand this reaction the political situation of the 1860s and 1870s must be examined.

The Great Reforms 1861-1880

In Russian history the period between 1861 and 1880 is often referred to as the age of Great Reforms. Starting with the so-called emancipation of the privately owned serfs in 1861, further reforms attempted to redirect the path of Russian society.[8] Government agencies were revamped, a proper system of local government was introduced (the *volost'* or canton and the *zemstvo* or municipality were established), educational programs were initiated, the basis of a modern legal system was established with courts, magistrates and trial by jury. Finally, one of the most important institutions of Russian government and society, the military, especially the army, was also reformed. Why did all these reforms occur?

During the first half of the nineteenth century Russia increasingly began to assume its place as a major player in European and hence world affairs. Russian troops had been instrumental in the defeat of the French armies of the Emperor Napoleon which had occupied large areas of Western and Central Europe at the turn of the century. It should be remembered that during the first half of the nineteenth century the French were seen by the established rulers of other European states as the equivalent of the Bolsheviks during the 1920s. Republicanism was seen to be as great a threat to other governments as the doctrine of communism has been feared in more recent times. Napoleon was viewed by some as the anti-Christ (in modern terms a combination perhaps of Lenin and Stalin). So the defeat of Napoleon and French forces raised Russia's reputation in much of Europe. And this reputation was based primarily upon Russia's military capability. Russia was a great power because of its vast military resources, especially the size of its army.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century Russia expanded its frontiers in Central Asia and in the southwest pushed towards Constantinople, seeking access from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Constantinople was to become a Russian city, Tsarograd. But the western European powers, especially the French and the English, were unwilling to allow Russian naval forces free access to the Mediterranean and challenge their control of the seaways. So they supported the Ottoman Turkish Empire in its disputes with the expansionist Russian state. In 1853/54 this lead to war between Russia and the allied nations of Britain, France and Ottoman Turkey. The conflict was taken to Russian soil when, in order to seize the naval base at Sebastopol, the allies landed troops in the Crimea. The Mennonites living in southern Russia became closely involved in this war, supplying transport for Russian military supplies and aid and comfort for the wounded.[9] Two years of fighting and the abandonment of Sebastopol after a massive siege lead to Russia suing for peace in 1856.

The outcome of the war shook Russian society to its roots. Russian armies had been beaten in battle after battle on their own soil. The Russian economy was in tatters. The war had revealed how backward Russia was compared with Western Europe. The army consisted mainly of illiterate peasants, brave, but poorly armed and trained. The economy could not cope with the demands of modern warfare; the transport system was hopelessly inadequate. If Russia was to maintain its claim to

a voice in European and world affairs, massive change was required. Hence the need for a general reform of Russia's economic, political and social institutions including the military.

During the war the Emperor Nicholas had died and his successor Alexander II immediately set about creating the basis for reform. It resembled the perestroika currently under way in the Soviet Union. Among the leading officials involved in the planning of reforms were those very people who had been involved in the 1840s in the Ministry of State Domains' reforms abandoned by Nicholas I. In fact the Minister of War was Dmitri Miliutin who had visited the Mennonite colonies in the late 1830s with his brother Nikolai to examine how the Mennonites organized their social and economic affairs.

The reforms unleashed in the 1860s and 1870s touched every section of Russian society. It was not that foreign colonists, or German colonists or Mennonites were singled out. Instead of being administered by special sections in the German language, the colonists were merely to be integrated more closely into the reformed Russian bureaucracy. District offices became *volosti* (cantons) and Mennonite settlements were made more subject to Russian regional government. There was nothing sinister in this. At the local level, except for the requirement that the language of central colony administration be Russian instead of German, there were hardly any changes in administrative practice except the titles of officials and the office were Russianized. The introduction of justices of the peace and courts merely brought Mennonites into line with the legal system of the state in which they lived.

Throughout the late 1860s, however, Mennonites complained bitterly of these reforms. Many did not like change in any form and they believed that old titles and ways of administration were "Mennonite" and somehow essential for the continuation of their faith. Why they believed this is a little mysterious. Most of the things they considered distinctly Mennonite, including street villages *(Strassendörfer)*, village mayors *(Schulzen)*, colony mayors *(Oberschulzen)*, and the teaching of German in schools had been introduced by the Russian state and had not been brought from Prussia. In fact German had been improved in the school system during the 1830s and 40s, more for administrative than religious reasons. And most of these customs and practices were in fact not enshrined in the famed Privilegium. They had become customary "Mennonite" practices only in Russia.

But it was the announcement of the plans to introduce compulsory military conscription which proved the straw that broke the camel's back. Already disturbed by the rush of reforms, this change caused many to doubt their future in Russia. In fact the reform was just part of the larger reform program although, given the Crimean defeat, it was a crucial part of that program. Military reform also was motivated in part by the rise of Prussia as an aggressive military power on Russia's western borders and the creation of the Second German Reich in 1871 after Prussia's defeat of the French merely hastened Russian planning. During the 1860s the Prussian Mennonites had lost their right to exemption from military service. All had now to be conscripted into the armed forces although conscientious objectors could elect to serve in non-combatant roles.[10] The Russian government, as it turned out, was to be far more generous to its Mennonites than the Prussians and later the German state. So much for later Mennonite fantasies of solidarity with their supposedly fellow German *Volk!*

What is little understood by contemporary and later Mennonites is how generous the Russians were to Mennonites from the very outset of negotiations concerning their place in the planned military conscription law. Many interest groups besieged the government seeking special exemptions once it became known that all citizens were to be conscripted. Most powerful among the petitioners were the nobility who did not want their sons conscripted into a peasant army. But the committee reviewing the law rejected their appeals. All citizens were to serve the state. Mennonite objections to service on religious grounds, however, were listened to carefully. Sympathetic officials and leading governors appeared before the committee to support the Mennonite position on exemption.[11]

From the outset it was agreed that the Mennonites would never have to carry arms. The central issue though was what kind of exemption the Mennonites were to receive. The Russian government favored the Mennonites fulfilling non-combatant roles, providing the kind of assistance they had given in the recent Crimean War. But this still meant serving in the armed forces. This was unacceptable to most Mennonites as they wanted total exemption. This was denied because as citizens they too had to serve the state. After long negotiation what they got was conscription, not into the military, but into the Forestry Service. This Service was outside military jurisdiction and nominally under Mennonite control. The exemption from military conscription, the right to establish the Forestry Service (and permission for those who disagreed to emigrate) were remarkable acts of tolerance on the part of the Russian government. It also reflected how important the state saw the Mennonites as citizens of Russia.

Differences in the Mennonite world

The Mennonite emigration of the 1870s was triggered by reforms of the Russian government, not specifically aimed at Mennonites but which were viewed by some as threatening their cherished way of life. But was this something so new to Mennonites living in Russia? There were those earlier reforms and the Russian state had intervened in the Mennonite world from the outset of their settlement. Before the 1860s and 70s, however, most ordinary Mennonites were unaware that the state had been so actively involved in their lives. The reasons for this are clear. The majority of Mennonites only experienced government policies at the local level, in their colonies, more specifically at the village level. Here the people introducing the policies were not Russian officials but local Mennonites. While many of these changes also caused conflict within the community, the disagreements were seen mainly as Mennonite affairs and the involvement of the Russian state was only hazily understood.

For instance during Cornies' "reign" many naive Mennonites believed that if only they could reach government officials they could stop Cornies and have him removed, even banished to Siberia. This shows how little they understood the real situation: Cornies was a loyal servitor of the state and received the full backing of local and central officials. The difference in the situation in the 1860s and 70s was that the policies being promulgated by the Russians were not administrative changes but major policy reforms which were widely pub-

licized and openly debated. Precisely because they were not directed at Mennonites but at all people there were no local Mennonites to mediate the changes. And by the 1870s ordinary Mennonites were much better informed than in earlier times about the wider world, mainly through reading newspapers and journals.

The conflict caused by the earlier changes in the Mennonite world, and more importantly the social and economic consequences of these changes, were to play a much larger role in the decision of Mennonites to migrate during the 1870s than generally has been acknowledged. To put it bluntly, the Mennonite migration was in part a series of separations, schisms might be more accurate, of Mennonites from Mennonites. It was not just the Russian state that Mennonites were turning their back on, but also other Mennonites and a Mennonite way of life which was being consciously rejected.[12]

For some groups the reasons behind this separation were religious; for others they concerned education, the structure of society and economic conditions. To understand these "reasons," one has only to examine the turbulent years of the 1860s in the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia. There was massive religious conflict, involving not just the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren, but also the Templars and schisms in other groups, such as the Kleine Gemeinde which in turn spawned its own revivalist movements such as the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Perhaps even more significant than the religious discord, was the social conflict centered on ownership and access to land. The full scale bitterness these disputes engendered have never really been examined by Mennonite historians, but they divided communities far more deeply than has been previously realized.[13] At the same time the land shortages, combined with a growing population and the opening of new possibilities of renting or purchasing private farms outside the colonies after the Crimean War, threatened the Mennonite vision of cohesive, congregational-communities *(Gemeinden)*. The village way of life and strict control of congregational members seemed at risk.

All these problems were in fact the culmination of earlier government policies and Mennonite responses. The shift from sheep farming to intensive grain cultivation for commercial returns, the building of industries and increased trade with outsiders, the educational reforms to promote progress and to develop an administrative elite—all these, in different ways, made some Mennonites highly suspicious of the future direction of Mennonite life in Russia. So during the 1870s, as plans for emigration were drawn up, factors other than just the threat of military conscription were cited by Mennonites as reasons for emigration. These include objections to educational reforms being initiated by Mennonites, religious conflicts and such things as the singing of hymns using the newfangled *ziffern* system (numerical notation) introduced by that most Prussian of Mennonite school teachers, Heinrich Franz.[14]

It is important to understand that there was no sense of a united Mennonite community in Russia in the 1870s. Instead there were separate groups: various congregational-communities loosely federated into doctrinal and regional groupings; village communities; colony communities and a host of other competing interest groups. The disorganized and confused Mennonite response to the Russian reforms reveals just how lacking in a clear sense of direction and unity the Mennonite world was in the 1870s. Elders, merchants, teachers, civic leaders held meetings, sometimes together, sometimes apart, and these individuals and groups petitioned government in different ways. Some, with little or no understanding of how government operated, wandered about the country looking for influential officials to impress or to convince of the righteousness of their cause. Eventually, out of this confusion, a realization emerged that Mennonites needed to cooperate at a higher level than the village or the congregation. Various new conferences were established in the late 1870s forming the basis of what has become known as the Mennonite Commonwealth. But this only occurred after many Mennonites had emigrated to North America.[15]

Among some of these emigrants there are clear indications that a desire for economic success on the American frontier, rather than just freedom of faith, separation, isolation and control of their own affairs, prompted individuals to migrate. The merchant elite of the port city of Berdiansk, Cornelius Jansen, Leonhard Sudermann and others were businessmen, who in their life time had moved from Prussia to Russia for business reasons and, much less committed to Russia than many settlers, were now more willing to move again. It also should be remembered that in the 1870s the continued commercial prosperity of Berdiansk was not good as trade had fallen off.

But the majority of the 1870s emigrants left not as individuals but as members of larger kin groups and, more importantly, as members of congregational-communities. These were group settlement migrants with a strong sense of self-identity and a high degree of social cohesion. As such the social structure of the old homeland was brought to the New World, with all its inequalities and many of the social tensions which had existed in the Old World. Villages may have been re-established on the model of the colony street villages, a structure it should be recalled imposed on Mennonites by the Russians, but also with the wealthy located physically and socially at the center of the village community and the poor householders at the margins.

It is not surprising that the immigrants to the USA came mainly from the Molochnaia as this was the colony most influenced by the pressures of reform before 1850. Of those who went to Canada only the intellectually conservative Kleine Gemeinde came from Molochnaia, and many Kleine Gemeinde settled in the USA.[16] The other conservative Mennonites who migrated as communities to Canada all came from Khortitsa or Khortitsa daughter colonies: the Bergthalers and the Alt Kolonie from Fürstenland and Khortitsa. But the Molochnaia colony was more socially and culturally diverse than Khortitsa and this too influenced the reasons for emigration and the choice of destination in North America. One of the reasons for the Alexanderwohler's decision to emigrate could have been their relations with the other Groningen Old Flemish congregations in Molochnaia, Waldheim and Gnadenfeld. These were much later immigrants to the Molochnaia (in the 1830s instead of the 1820s) and this time difference, combined with the fact that they came from very different homelands in Prussia and Poland, must have emphasized their separation from the earlier Alexanderwohl immigrants to Russia. It is perhaps significant that in Russia each group maintained separate congregational structures with their own elders and ministers.

Conclusion

Explanations of the 1870s migrations must be multifocal. There is no simple, single reason for the emigration although the reforms of the Russian state, especially its military reforms, must be seen as the major catalyst which unleashed the pent-up tensions and differences between Mennonites and the Russian state, and between Mennonites and Mennonites, which led to the great parting of the ways of the Russian Mennonites.

But we also have to look at historical events such as the great emigration through the pattern of contemporary events and not ascribe to those involved meanings, ideas and intentions which were not present at the time. All history is written in the present and thus reflects present-day concerns. But we must be careful not to read events with the benefit of hindsight and imbue them with later fantasies. Understanding that the Russian state was not the evil empire it has been made out to be, and that the Mennonite world was not the world of innocent farmers living out some Anabaptist fantasy in isolation on the southern steppes, enriches our understanding of the emigration of the 1870s. It also challenges us to rethink old issues in a broader historical context.

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Baptist in All But Name: Molotschna Mennonite Brethren in India

by Peter Penner

Between 1890 and 1914 the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren sent seven couples and four single women as missionaries to the Telegus of India. They established three stations east of Hyderabad city in the dusty Deccan: Nalgonda, Suriapet, and Jangaon. Beginning in 1899, the American Mennonite Brethren sent five couples and five single women to the same general area. After the Great War (1914-1918), the Americans sent more.

The Russian and the American Mennonite Brethren missionaries in India differed only as to the originating country and their sponsorship. The Russian MBs were supported jointly by Mennonites in the Molotschna and by the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU), with its headquarters in Boston. In terms of cultural background, religious conviction, and commitment to the missionary vocation each identified strongly with the other.

Despite these similarities the two groups never completely joined hands. When the Great War and the Russian Revolution ended the flow of funds from the Molotschna, the Baptist mission organization in Boston took over the three stations mentioned above. The Mennonite missionaries from the Ukraine continued under the Baptist administration.

This circumstance has led a number of researchers in recent times to seek causes, an explanation hidden until now, for this separate development. Why were these three stations retained by the ABMU in 1914? Conversely, why were they not picked by the American Mennonite Brethren Mission (AMBM), which also had been working among the Telegus since 1899?

Though not all the evidence is in; it seems clear from the papers of the American Baptist Archives Center (ABAC) in Valley Forge, that the ABMU's reasons for the retention of these fields with their personnel were determined more by factors internal to that Mission than by any sinister cause.

This paper therefore argues that the explanation for the failure of Russian Mennonites and American Mennonites to join hands in 1914 is to be found by looking closely at the Molotschna-Boston tandem. The 1904-05 agreement between the missionaries and Boston secretaries, negotiated after a long period of differences, was never completely satisfactory.

First we need a brief look at the principal missionaries, both Russian and American. Abram J. Friesen, son of a factory owner from Einlage, Chortitza, started it all. He led the way for others by attending the Baptist Seminary of Hamburg-Horn, Germany (1885-89). There in 1888 he offered himself for missionary service among the Telegu-speaking peoples of India. When he suggested the affiliation with "an Anabaptist-minded missionary society" in Boston, the Molotschna Brethren, meeting at Rueckenau, gave their undivided support for this venture in conjunction with the ABMU.[1]

Abram and Maria Friesen arrived at Nalgonda late in December 1889 and began to build their station. Acknowledged as the leader of the mission from Molotschna until 1914, he also had a profound influence on American MBs towards activating their missionary zeal in the direction of the Telegu people.[2]

The couple always associated with the second station, Suriapet, were Abram J. and Katharina Huebert. Having also prepared themselves in Germany, they arrived in India in 1898. They built up a magnificent station over a long period. They stayed "down in the plains" most years and had only two furloughs in a thirty-eight year period, one in the 1920s to acquire Canadian citizenship. In 1936 they retired in the Nilgiri Hills at Ootacumund.[3]

The Hueberts were followed to India by Heinrich and Cornelius Unruh from Spat-Schoental congregation. Their better-known brothers, Abram H. of Winkler and Winnipeg, and Benjamin H. of Karlsruhe, Germany, became famous in Mennonite circles as teachers, Bible scholars, and eminent preachers. Heinrich and Anna Unruh arrived at Nalgonda in 1899 and eventually built at Jangaon. Eminently the practical man, he too built what was called a "showcase" station. He seems to have left correspondence to his younger brother, Cornelius, whom the Boston officials thought of as "the general" of the Molotschna MBs in succession to Friesen.[4] They arrived at Nalgonda in 1904.

As indicated in the appendix, Mennonite Brethren in the Molotschna sent missionaries to India until 1913.

As numerous pictures and references from the period show, there were fraternal relations between the Molotschna and American MBs from 1899 to the 1920s and later. Nalgonda served as a hospitable starting place for the earliest Americans. A warm welcome in a strange land awaited them. Friesen provided a language teacher, as well as the first indigenous preachers as they began to branch into other areas: N. N. and Susie Hiebert to Hughestown and John and Maria Pankratz to Malakpet (both in Hyderabad), Daniel and Tina Bergthold in Nagarkurnool, and John and

Standing behind: Abram Friesen and Abram Huebert; middle row: Aaron Friesen, adopted son of the Friesens, Maria Friesen, Katharina Reimer, and Katharina Huebert; children in front: Abram Huebert, Mary Friesen, Katie Huebert; about 1905-6.

Maria Voth to Deverakonda, a field given to them by the Baptists.[5]

In a thesis written at Fuller Seminary in 1986, Ben Doerksen strongly suggested that something went wrong between 1899 and 1904. If the Molotschna work in Nalgonda district was virtually Mennonite Brethren, then why, Doerksen speculated, would the Americans boast of organizing the first M. B. Church among the Telegus in 1904? He and others have hinted at differentiation brought about by a quarter century of acculturation to America, or Russlaender-Amerikaner tensions, or perhaps even doctrinal differences between the Northern Baptist Convention which supported the ABMU and the American MBs. Doerksen went so far as to trace (or fabricate) tensions between Russlaender and Amerikaner to the scurrilous remarks (sort of "good riddance to bad rubbish") made by P. M. Friesen in 1911. These referred to those Mennonites who had gone (not uncriticized in Russia) to Kansas in the 1870s.[6]

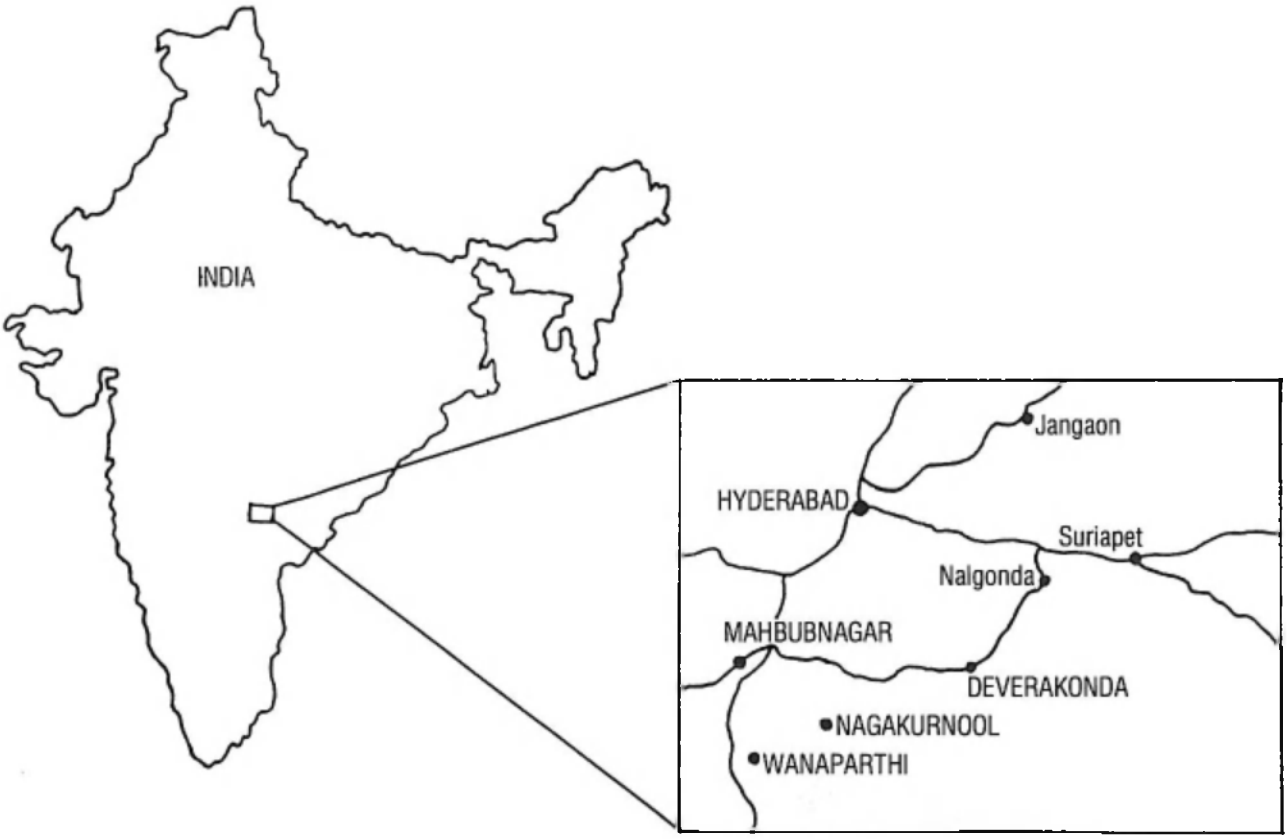
But were the Hiebert and Pankratz families really that different from the Friesen and Unruh families simply because the former had migrated from the Ukraine in 1874-79? Only two decades later, while on furlough, Friesen was invited to visit the American MB conference to advise them on their choice of a mission field in India. He had an encouraging response. In fact, the N. N. Hieberts and Elizabeth Neufeld, the first American MB missionaries, travelled to Nalgonda with him in 1899.[7]

Doerksen stretched the point even further by taking the Russlaender-Kanadier tensions of the 1930s and relating them back to assumed tensions between Friesen at Nalgonda and the first long-term American missionary: John H. Pankratz.[8] But this conflict, brought on in the 1930s by the formation of the Canadian-based Africa Mission Society in competition with the Hillsboro-based Board of Foreign Missions, could hardly be reflected in the decade before the War of 1914-18. What brought about that tension was the apparent attempt of some Americans to prevent Russlaender (Mennonites who migrated to Canada in the 1920s) from having an equal opportunity to enter missionary service. Some American Mennonites wanted to keep Tabor College and Hillsboro in control of the growing missionary movement among North American MBs.[9]

The tensions that arose in India among American MBs (and there were serious ones) are not at issue in this paper. Nor can we look into the very intriguing question as to why A. E. Janzen, the secretary and historian of the AMBM in India (from about 1948 to 1963), virtually ignored the Russian dimension of M. B. work in India. What this paper questions is the assertion, based on insufficient evidence, that tensions which had developed between Russians and Americans prevented the union of their respective fields in India in 1914. What is, however, argued here is that the tensions that developed between Friesen at Nalgonda (or while in Rueckenau on furlough or retirement) and ABMU secretaries were much more profound and determining than any other conflicts, minor or otherwise.[10]

The key figure in all this was the first "general" of the Molotschna MBs, Abram Friesen. Already in 1895 he was negotiating with the ABMU in Boston about accepting more missionary candidates on the same basis as he had been accepted. There were additional prospective candidates, he explained. They had been examined by the Molotschna M. B. Conference before they left for Hamburg studies, and were keen to enter the Telegu field. (These were the Hueberts and the Unruhs.) He was actually trying to head off the tendency in that year for these candidates to go off independently to West Africa. Friesen was convinced that the small number of Mennonite Brethren in Russia were not ready for an independent mission. Hence he was overjoyed when the ABMU encouraged further applications for service in India. In that connection he used the intriguing metaphor: "Our churches would . . . 'rather be the tail of a rat than the head of a mouse' in mission work."[11]

The years from 1900 to 1905 were indeed crucial, but not for the reasons suggested by Doerksen. During this period Friesen tried to clarify the mutual responsibilities of the Molotschna association and the ABMU, almost threatening that if these could not be worked out satisfactorily, it was clear that the Russians would prefer to work under the



LIST OF M. B. MISSIONARIES SENT BEFORE 1914

FROM RUSSIA

Name	Dates in Service	Principal Station
Anna Epp (Bergthold)	1904-14	Nagarkurnool
Abram and Maria Friesen	1890-1914	Nalgonda
Abram and Katharina Huebert	1898-1936	Suriapet
Aganetha Neufeld	1913-23	Suriapet
John and Anna Penner	1913-50	Mahbubnagar
Anna Peters	1909-12	Suriapet
Katharina Reimer	1905-8	Nalgonda
Cornelius and Martha Unruh	1904-38	Nalgonda
Heinrich and Anna Unruh	1899-1912	Jangaon
Franz and Maria Wiens	1909-14	Jangaon
Johann and Helena Wiens	1904-10	Suriapet

FROM AMERICA

Name	Dates in Service	Principal Station
Daniel Bergthold	1904-46	Nagarkurnool
Tina Mandtler (first wife)	1904	
Ann Epp (second wife)	1904-14	
Anna Sudermann (third wife)	1898-1946	
N. N. and Susie Hiebert (Language Study only)	1899-1901	Nalgonda
Frank and Elizabeth Janzen	1910-27	Wanaparthi
Elizabeth Janzen (widow)	1910-46	
Katharina Lohrenz	1908-13	Malakpet
Elizabeth Neufeld (Wichert, Wall)	1899-1906	
John and Maria Pankratz	1902-41	Malakpet
Katharina Schellenberg, M.D.	1907-45	Nagarkurnool
John and Maria Voth	1908-42	Deverakonda

newly-formed "American M. B. Mission Union" (here abbreviated to AMBM). To awaken interest and keep a growing readership informed of the great prospects for the expansion of the Nalgonda work, Friesen launched *Das Erntefeld* (The Harvest Field) in 1900, a paper for Mennonite Brethren, which ran from 1900 to 1914.[12]

At the same time he entertained the strong hope until well into 1902 that N. N. Hiebert's perceived favorable impression of the ABMU might lead the Americans to join with the Baptists. Hiebert had to retire from India because of illness before even completing language study. Friesen asked "The Rooms" (a nickname for ABMU secretaries housed in Tremont Temple Baptist Church, Boston) on 28 June 1901: "Will the constitution of the ABMU permit a union with the AMBM?" The answer to this was affirmative, though such a union did not materialize.[13]

Following the arrival of John and Maria Pankratz at Nalgonda in October 1902, supported by the new AMBM, there was no detectable rancour. While disappointed that the American brethren had decided to go it alone, Friesen had an appreciation for their position, helping where he could, and visiting their stations when he could.[14]

Friesen then continued to press the ABMU in a matter which had engaged him from the time of the Huebert application: **the guarantee of Russian M. B. salaries in India.** He argued that while the Molotschna churches had already demonstrated that they were giving a disproportionate amount towards the building of stations and churches in the Nalgonda district, it was essential to have this guarantee from the ABMU because of the nature of the Russian giving: it was entirely voluntary and not the result of levy. If a satisfactory compromise could be worked out with the ABMU, Friesen was certain that the Molotschna conference would never let the Boston office down. The Russian families would continue to give as long as they saw their work placed on a solid footing in relationship with Boston. If the present negotiations failed, Friesen knew there would be a growing feeling of independence and alienation.[15]

These negotiations, quite protracted, led to a working agreement between the ABMU secretary Barbour and Friesen in 1904. Their meeting finally took place in Stockholm, Sweden, during Friesen's furlough. At a time when many donations were coming from Russia in the form of "specifics" (designated gifts), they agreed to share the costs as follows: an India-based committee would recommend the **total** sum to be applied to any station. The Russians were to provide not less than half of salary costs, including furlough salaries and special needs, as well as the outfitting and travel costs to the field. The ABMU would cover the remainder as well as transportation costs for furlough or other necessities. Meanwhile, Friesen would try to persuade the Russian treasurer to send all monies through the office in Boston.[16]

In line with this, the Molotschna churches actually prepared a constitution for their relationship with the ABMU. The brother responsible for this association, certainly in the first decades of this century was Heinrich J. Braun. His wife was the one who received the Huebert children as her wards, as shown in a picture.[17]

The year 1905 had not ended before Friesen came back with a firm, and successful, request for amendments to the agreement. Evangelism generally would be a Russian responsibility, salaries would be shared, but all educational and medical work would have to be guaranteed by the Union. After all, there were only about 4,000 [his figure] Mennonite Brethren in Russia compared with the many more Baptists in America. At the same time, Friesen was concerned to protect his preference for concentration of his forces. He had made it clear from the beginning that he did not want any recruits from Russia sent to a Union station outside Nalgonda district, even though he knew that some Baptist colleagues in India already feared that MBs wanted to concentrate their efforts so that when they were strong enough they would break away or offer themselves to the AMBM.[18]

In 1909 relations became quite strained when a Boston secretary named Huntingdon seemed ignorant of the discussions of 1904-07 and of the way in which the joint venture had unfolded over the previous eighteen years. Friesen, who could become most forthright, protested from his furlough in Rueckenau. He proved to his satisfaction that it was Boston that was in arrears to Rueckenau, and not the other way around. Two years later he warned that some disillusionment was setting in among Molotschna supporters. This, in 1911, coincided with secretary Barbour's visit to Nalgonda where, according to Cornelius Unruh, he praised Friesen for his magnificent accomplishments before his retirement.[19]

On 26 November 1912, only a few days after receiving the cable about Heinrich Unruh's death at Jangaon,

Standing: Johann G. Wiens, Anna Epp, Martha and Cornelius Unruh; Seated: Helena Wiens, Heinrich and Anna Unruh; children: John Wiens, Marie, Henry and Martha; about 1905.

Friesen reminded The Rooms of what the twenty-three year relationship meant: as long as Russians supplied missionaries and money in the proportion they had been doing, the three stations concerned "shall be considered as belonging to our churches." It was this principle of concentration on Nalgonda and offshoot stations that had served to keep Russian interest high and monies flowing as required.[20]

It was this ever increasing desire for concentration on the part of the Russian missionaries which went far toward persuading the Baptists to retain control of the Nalgonda district. It seems that during Friesen's last visit to the field, he and Franz Wiens, the successor to Heinrich Unruh, carried that wish too far. It is clear that Friesen hoped to place one village church entirely under the name of the Mennonite Brethren. About the same time Wiens allowed the following to be published in *Das Erntefeld:* If only we in India would not have to divert funds into "strange quarters," if only we could administer such funds ourselves. Going even farther: if we worked **"against the rules"** of the Union "to which we are subservient, we could show the world to what extent the Molotschna could carry this magnificent work."[21]

While admittedly there are some letters missing in the Franz Wiens collection, one must conclude that this was perceived by The Rooms as having gone far beyond the agreement of 1904-05. The following scenario seems reasonable: Wiens must have regretted these statements soon after, realizing how they would be interpreted by The Rooms. He then wrote a letter of regret, sending it first to J. Heinrichs at the Baptist Seminary, Ramapatnam. Alerted by the latter, The Rooms chose to accept that letter as a form of resignation. It is clear from their letter to Wiens, dated 26 December 1913, that he could not be permitted to return as a missionary under the ABMU once his coming furlough was over.[22]

As is evident, the years 1912 to 1914 were crucial to the MB/Baptist relationship which had been built up so painstakingly, and not without some misunderstandings. Just as this tandem was endangered by the zeal to consolidate, the Great War intervened. What happened in 1914 was that the Rueckenau treasurer Braun had gathered $1,500, but could not send it out of the country. Could the AMBU send that amount to Nalgonda immediately and, if necessary, underwrite them until the crisis has passed over? Friesen, Huebert, and C. Unruh combined to petition the Society to help Rueckenau out for the duration of the terrible times into which they had been thrown by the War with Germany. In response, secretary Baldwin in late 1914 made a special appeal to his board, saying that these Molotschna Mennonites, " 'Baptist in all but name,' have had the most cordial [!] relations with our board, and, if this Board should refuse the request, it could not help having a most unfortunate effect on the Mennonites [of South

Top: *Standing: Daniel Bergthold, Abram Huebert; seated: Anna (Epp) Bergthold, Katharina Huebert; children: Viola Bergthold (later Mrs. John Wiebe), Abram and Katie Huebert; about 1905.*

Bottom: *Elizabeth Neufeld, seated center, with friends: English regimental officers, Baptist and MB missionaries: Anna Sudermann, second from left, standing; J. H. Pankratz and Heinrich Unruh on the right side; seated: Abram Friesen, Anna Unruh, Maria Friesen and Maria Pankratz; sometime between 1902 and 1906.*

Nalgonda Compound, about 1930.

Russia]. They would feel that they were not trusted, that their fidelity through these years has amounted to nothing and the influence which American Baptists through the Board have been able to have upon them would be lost."[23] It was this feeling of trust which Wiens was thought to have violated.

Quite apart from this pleading and the need to clarify the matter of concentration, it was clear that the ABMU wanted to retain these three stations. What had been built up over the years by Friesen, Huebert, and the Unruhs had come to command respect in The Rooms. The exemplary appearance of their stations in a very arid part of the Deccan, as well as their success in winning a large church among the Telegus in a mere quarter of a century were well known. Moreover, Baldwin and others had the highest respect for these missionaries. Not only had each learned Telegu in order to preach the Gospel; they had also learned English to a passable extent for communication with Boston.[24]

When this working relationship came to an end, as seen in Braun's inability to send his funds for the year 1914, Friesen acknowledged to "Brother Baldwin" that, yes, "legally," these stations "belonged to the [Baptist] Society." There were immediate assurances of such support and that nothing would be done on the American side to destroy the fraternal relations built up over so long a time.[25] The ABMU was not prepared to take advantage of the impossible situation into which the Molotschna was thrown by war, revolution, and then famine.

Besides, there were at least two practical considerations: The American stations were all far distant from the AMBM stations, in Hyderabad and to the south and southeast. Also, in 1914 even the AMBM had only a small supporting constituency. Hence it is unlikely that they could have afforded these three well-developed stations at that time. They had received other less developed stations, such as Deverakonda in 1910. But in 1914 Deverakonda by comparison with Nalgonda was an unfinished station. Even two decades later at the time of the sale of Mahbubnagar, fifty miles south of Hyderabad city, by the ABMU to the Hillsboro Board, the latter asked for a price much below the market on the basis of the tremendous contributions made by the Russian MBs towards the buildup of the work among the Telegus.[26]

Therefore it seems fair to conclude that the missionaries from Molotschna found themselves inextricably linked to the American Baptists in 1914. There are simply no grounds for presupposing any serious breakdown of fraternal relations between the two groups of Mennonite Brethren working in India.

ENDNOTES

[1]P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia, 1789-1910* (Fresno: General Conference of MB Churches, 1978 ed.), 675.

[2]Obituary of A. J. Friesen, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 11 October 1922; Mrs. H. T. Esau, "Mission Study Lesson," *Christian Leader* 3 (April 1939): 11.

[3]C. Unruh, 3 October 1923; A. J. Huebert, 30 December 1931 and 17 November 1936. **Note:** all references are to the various missionary letters held in the America Baptist Archives Center at Valley Forge unless otherwise indicated.

[4]J. A. Toews, *History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno: General Conference of MB Churches, 1975), 89-90; P. M. Friesen, 681-687; C. Unruh, 19 February 1932.

[5]John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro: MB Publishing House, 1950), 53-56 230-238; Joh. H. Voth, *Ein Jahr unter den Telugas: Jarhes-Bericht 1928-1929* (Mangalore: Basel Mission Press, 1929), 6.

[6]Ben Doerksen, "Mennonite Brethren Missions: Historical Development, Philosophy and Policies" (D. Missiology diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1986), 391f, 72ff; cf. P. M. Friesen, 490ff.

[7]Abram Friesen to secretary Duncan, 28 December 1897; Esau, 11.

[8]Doerksen, 391f, 72ff.

[9]See G. W. Peters, *The Growth of Foreign Mis-*

sions in the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, Conference of the MB Church of North America, 1952), 97-103; cf. J. B. Toews, *The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of MB Churches, 1978), 58-62.

[10]Lohrenz, 230ff; A. E. Janzen, *The American Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1898-1948* (Hillsboro: Board of Missions of the Conference of the MB Church, 1949), 17; cf. Mrs. H. T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M. B. Missions* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 138ff, where she gives much deserved credit to Friesen.

There were two brief tiffs between Russian and American MBs, one at the turn of the century between Friesen and John F. Harms, editor of the *Zionsbote* ("Die schoene Missionsgabe," 30 November 1898, 4); and the other in 1925 between Cornelius Unruh and John Pankratz when the former wrote something in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* which offended the latter (Pankratz correspondence, 13 July 1925, in A250/0/3, Box 12, Center for M. B. Studies, Fresno, Calif.). Both of these problems were settled most amicably, the first when Harms acknowledged his mistaken interpretation, and the second when Pankratz discovered that some field preachers were more to blame than C. Unruh. Neither of these had anything to do with the question at issue in this paper.

[11]Abram Friesen collection, 28 February, 18 June, and 23 July 1895.

[12]A. Friesen to Barbour, 20 October 1900.

[13]A. Friesen, 20 February 1901; 28 June 1901; 22 October 1902.

[14]For an account of A. Friesen's visit to Malakpet, see *Das Ernte feld* (January 1908), 20-21.

[15]A. Friesen, from Ootacumund, 15 April 1903.

[16]"Plan of Cooperation Between the M. B. of Russia and the Executive Committee of the Missionary Union" [1904], ABAC.

[17]Abraham H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde, 1860-1954* (Hillsboro: Fürsorgekomitees der Generalkonferenz von Nord-Amerika, 1954), 328-330; for reference to Braun, see J. A. Toews, 103-104, 113, 381.

[18]A. Friesen, 16 August 1905; 28 August 1907.

[19]A. Friesen, 7 July 1909; 11 September 1911; C. Unruh, *Das Ernte feld* 12, #4 (1911).

[20]A. Friesen, 26 November 1912.

[21]Cf. A. Friesen, *Das Ernte feld* 15, #9 (1914); and Franz Wiens, *Das Ernte feld* 14, #11 (1913), 147.

[22]Huntingdon to Wiens, 26 December 1913, Franz Wiens collection.

[23]Baldwin to the ABMU, Boston (late 1914), in A. J. Huebert collection.

[24]Cornelius Unruh, *Das Ernte feld* 12, #4 (1911), 45.

[25]A. Friesen, 26 November 1912; 1 January 1915; Baldwin, 2 February and 2 March 1915.

[26]John Voth, "Obituary for Heinrich Unruh," *Zionsbote*, 25 December 1912, 2; idem, *Ein Jahr unter den Telegus*, 6; Esau, *First Sixty Years*, 140-141; H. W. Lohrenz and J. C. Robbins, 18 and 22 December 1936, J. A. Penner collection.

Book Reviews

Peter J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers: An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia*. Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989. Pp. 95.

From an imaginary vantage point on a satellite high above the earth, an observer looking down on Europe would immediately spot a vast plain. About half of the plain the observer would see, precisely in the middle of Europe, is Poland.

In the Middle Ages, from the 10th century to the close of the 15th century, the open frontiers within this enormous plain allowed for Poland's expansion. But since then, the land of the Polish people has been the changing center of a great tug-of-war. Few natural barriers shelter Poland from invasion, and the centuries have seen wave after wave of foreign armies advance and retreat across the open plain. Poland has had a stormy, unstable history: it has literally disappeared as an entity for whole centuries. It has ranged from being a great power to being swallowed up by other powers. It has given birth to democratic institutions; it also has been ruled by autocratic governments. Historic Polish lands have been lost; new territories have been gained. Its borders have shifted eastward, then westward.

This land also hosted Mennonite settlement and a significant episode in Mennonite history. This seems incongruous with more recent images of Poland: Communist rule, Solidarity's struggle for a better society, and the founding of the first parliamentary democracy in Eastern Europe. With television coverage of Lech Walesa shaking hands with the Polish-born Pope, and a Catholic nation kneeling at Mass, we have come to think of Poland as an ethnically unified, Catholic nation that has retained its sense of Polishness through all those physical changes and against incredible odds. Indeed, the population is 92 percent Catholic and some 20 million people attend mass each week. Evidence of religious activity is everywhere—from the crosses and cathedrals in the countryside to the ever-present church bells, and the numerous clerics seen in towns and cities.

But postwar Poland—its borders moved westward by Stalin—is much more homogenous in ethnicity, culture and religion than at any other time in its history. Mennonites, who survived in Poland for four centuries—from Reformation times until the end of the Second World War—helped to make the nation diverse. Peter J. Klassen's *A Homeland for Strangers* makes an extremely valuable contribution by telling the story of Mennonites in Poland and providing them with a glimpse of the culture of the nation in which many of their forefathers lived for some 400 years.

A Homeland for Strangers is an unusual book. It is both a serious work of excellent historical command and a professional tourist guide based on competent field research. Klassen looks at points of mutual history of Mennonites and Poles, drawing on numerous historical works, as well as his own research carried out in the Gdańsk archives.

A remarkable feature of pre-Partition Poland (before the nation was swallowed up by Russia, Austria, and Prussia in the latter part of the 18th century) was its multicultured, multiethnic character. Under the Polish kings during the 16th and 17th centuries, Poland permitted religious differences and became a haven for Protestant movements such as Lutherans, Calvinists, and Orthodox Christians. Anabaptists were welcomed to the area during the first half of the 16th century, and despite sporadic restrictions and repressions against Mennonite communities, Polish kings steadfastly championed toleration toward Mennonites until the extinction of the Polish monarchy.

Happily, Klassen's tone is that of an impartial researcher. This deserves special praise since Mennonites writing about their group's history do not always live up to this standard. The book contributes to Mennonite history by placing Mennonite settlements in Poland within a wider cultural, social, and political context. The book could also remind Poles of their nation's background of ethnic and religious diversity, since, from the Polish point of view, the Mennonites are a small, obscure, ethnic group that disappeared from Polish territory.

Klassen's work is nicely supplemented with illustrations and reference materials. Photographs of Mennonite historical sites from the territories of Gdańsk and Zulawy, as well as photographs of sites symbolically important to Poles such as a monument commemorating the martyred shipyard workers, help the reader to imagine times and places described in the book.

A list of towns in Polish and German provides a useful guide to Mennonites familiar only with the German place names. This list, as well as several maps, are helpful to Mennonite tourists to Poland and will assist them in locating sites of Mennonite interest.

A flaw in Klassen's short book is his marginal treatment of some areas where the Mennonites lived, including north of and around Torun, Plock, and Warsaw. He describes the Zulawy Wislane (Vistula Zulawy) and Gdańsk areas, and the area around Kwidzyn and Chelm, as the homeland for the majority of Mennonites. Most illustrations are from the territories of Gdańsk and the Vistula Zulawy.

Yet Mennonite settlements in the Mazovia region, often overlooked, are particularly important. We agree with the author that the first Partition of Poland opened a completely new page in Mennonite history because the Prussian state that took over the territories where Mennonites lived withdrew most privileges that had been granted to Mennonites by Polish kings. The decrees of Frederick II and Frederick William II prohibited Mennonites from purchasing and owning land in Prussia, and inspired the Mennonite exodus from the Vistula Zulawy and Gdańsk territories. As the author noted, the majority of Mennonites moved to the regions of southern Russia attracted by the favorable conditions offered to these newcomers by the decrees of Catherine II.

But the first Mennonites who left their homes moved to the regions of the Kingdom of Poland where the privileges granted to them previously were still in force. From 1783 to 1790, many settlers from the territories that were taken over with the first Partition of Poland migrated to the regions around the Vistula. They worked hard to clear the forests growing on flood-land territories, and founded such villages as Sady, Holedry Czerminskie, and later Wymysle, Sady-Markowszczyzne, and Kazun Nowy.

Following the second and third Partitions of Poland, such settlers also came to Mazovia, despite the fact that the lands on which they lived were administered by the Prussian state. As part of a systematic colonization policy by the Prussian crown, which wanted to settle German peoples on the occupied territories of the Kingdom of Poland expeditiously, such opportunities were granted Mennonites by the subsequent decrees of Frederick William II, which guaranteed the Mennonites of Prussian Poland freedom of faith, exemption from military duty, and the opportunity to purchase and own land. Mennonites continued to settle in Mazovia until the mid-19th century.

Villages in Mazovia played an important role in Mennonite life throughout Europe. The lines of communication linking Mennonites from the Vistula Zulawy with those living in Russia or the Ukraine passed through these villages, as later did the subsequent waves of refugees from Russia to America.

Despite any omissions, both Mennonites and Poles have much to learn from Klassen's book: Mennonites about an important part of their experience; and Poles about their history of religious tolerance. With the Catholic religion now taught in the public school in Poland (no longer in the churches) and with the Roman Catholic Church penetrating almost every sphere of life, Poles might benefit from the Anabaptist teachings embracing separation of church and state of former Mennonite settlers in their nation.

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Lavonne Platt, ed., *Hope for the Family Farm: Trust God and Care for the Land.* Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987. Pp. 231.

Hope for the Family Farm is a collection of essays dealing with a wide variety of topics concerning farming in the modern age. The book is divided into four basic sections. The first section is biblical in nature. This section sets up and supports the premise that it is our biblically based task to "guard and preserve" the earth rather than subdue it. Stewardship is biblically based.

The second section, containing four chapters, looks at farms and communities. A variety of community models are presented along with individual family profiles.

The third section deals with the link between farmers and the rest of society. The links explored include the relationship between farmers and urban dwellers and farmers and international development.

The fourth section details how a variety of groups have confronted the farm crisis of the 1980s.

Among the many contributing authors are Ron Guengerich, Mark Epp, Lois Janzen Preheim, Roger Claassen, Gordon Hunsberger, and Robert Hull.

The book was not designed to be definitive in nature but to "stimulate discussion of these basic questions. Readers are invited to deal with this book as they would a growing plant—to prune it, to cultivate it and to give it further shape. It is my hope that as the roots grow deep the fruit will ripen and form new seeds for a future of hope and promise." (p. 5)

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Mennonite Life Index 1986-1990

Compiled by J. Richard Blosser and Barbara Thiesen

This is a cumulative index which includes all authors of articles and major subjects treated in *Mennonite Life* during the last five years (1986-1990). Such topics as places, leaders, cultural and religious aspects, etc., are listed.

Authors are listed by last name. Articles are given by month, year, and page. The following abbreviations are used: Ma—March, Je—June, Se—September, De—December.

The following issues contain indexes for previous years: January 1956 (1946-1955); January 1961 (1956-1960); January 1966 (1961-1965); January 1971 (1966-1970); March 1976 (1971-1975); June 1981 (1976-1980); and March 1986 (1981-1985). Back issues are available for $2.50 each.