MENNONITE LIFE

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In this Issue

Church institutions have always been in a state of change, including that of dissolution and creation. The nature of and reasons for such change—perceived as either favorable, too rapid or too slow—have often bewildered members of these institutions. In order to understand these situations, one needs to see that members of church institutions are shaped by their institutions as they shape their institutions. Another crucial angle one needs is provided by the historical perspective—by knowledge of the institutional and individual past.

The current discussion concerning possible merger between the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC) and the Mennonite Church (MC), the two largest North American Mennonite denominational bodies, reflects the multifaceted nature of members' attachments to the larger church institutions in which they live. One may read in the denominational papers a range of response: enthusiasm, opposition, and indifference.

Sensing an opportunity for historians to make a meaningful contribution to the current discussion concerning possible merger of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church, the Historical Committee of the General Conference Mennonite Church conceived of the plan of soliciting selected descriptions of merger experiences among Mennonite groups in the twentieth century.

These five accounts cover a time period from 1920 when the Western District Amish Mennonite Conference merged with the "old" Mennonite Church, to 1988 when the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada was formed by three groups: Western Ontario Mennonite Conference (MC), United Mennonite Conference of Ontario (GC), Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec (MC). It also includes the story of the Central Conference joining the General Conference Mennonite Church in the 1940s and 1950s, the temporary merger of Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Church from 1953 to 1962, and the dissolution of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba when in 1971 it formally urged its congregations to join the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Institutional mergers, especially of church groups, spawn metaphors drawn from the interpersonal dynamics of marriage. One cannot resist highlighting important aspects of each of these five accounts under such rubrics: the experience of the Western District Amish Mennonite Conference and "old" Mennonite Church as mutual submission; the Central Conference and General Conference Mennonite Church as formal courtship (1946-1957); the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and Evangelical Mennonite Church as annulment (1953-1962) of a parent-arranged marriage; the Bergthaler Conference and the General Conference Mennonite Church as prolonged informal courtship which ended in the adoption of the children; the three groups forming the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada as a marriage of friendly neighbors.

In addition to such marriage imagery, one may compare in these five accounts the relative weight of forces under the following categories: theological, ethnic, environmental, institutional structure. These questions arise: Did conscious theological agreement or disagreement of the groups shape the merger? Did aspects of language and various folkways encourage or discourage the merger? Did the groups share a common geography which fostered the interaction of bonding experiences? Did the polity structures of the groups require little or great adjustments in the merger? The comparative approach can yield insights if it does not overwhelm the richness of detail and the unique elements in each story.

The most crucial angle for understanding church institutions lies in the dimension of faith—an operative belief that members act in institutional settings because God has called them to do so. In the case of Mennonite Christians, the nature of the Church as the body of Jesus Christ is a paramount concern. The reader will hopefully sense such faith conviction in the authors of these five accounts, for that conviction certainly undergirds their efforts. They are published here with the hope that believers may more clearly understand the truth of these events and discern the will of God in Christ for the opportunities and dilemmas of today.

David J. Rempel Smucker
Guest editor

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Front Cover
The village of Bergthal in the Bergthal colony, Ukraine, ca. 1910 (see article by John Friesen)

Back Cover
Daniel Kauffman and Mary C. (Shank) Kauffman at their Scottdale, Pennsylvania, home in 1933 (see article by V. Gordon Oyer)

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V. Gordon Oyer

"Union in a Common Faith"

The 1920s Merger of the Western District Amish Mennonite Conference and the "Old" Mennonites

In the spring of 1930 a search for feature material led reporter Harold Hutchings to the home of J. A. Heiser near Fisher, Illinois. As bishop of the East Bend Mennonite congregation, Heiser consented to introduce his Mennonites to Hutchings' readers. Hutchings had anticipated finding a community of distinguishable sectarians; he instead found members of a denomination who outwardly differed little from their neighbors. As the reporter took notes, Heiser explained: "Many people think us very different, because of our name, I suppose. Or it may be they have us confused with the Amish who live down near Arthur and Arcola. . . . We are not like the Amish, as you can see." Heiser continued his interview, explaining various ways in which the Fisher Mennonites varied from the Arthur Amish, whose ancestors had "pulled away" from the Mennonites in "1690" as followers of Jacob Ammann. "Since then, the Amish have held to many of the old beliefs and customs of dress and abstinence that Mennonites do not nor have in the past paid attention to."[1]

Ironically, though Heiser labored to distinguish his Mennonites from the Amish, virtually his entire East Bend congregation descended from followers of Jacob Ammann. In fact, Heiser's own grandfather and great-grandfather had participated in the *Diener Versammlungen*, a series of Amish ministers' meetings (1862-1878).[2] These meetings originally intended to foster unity among America's scattered, diverse Amish, but they instead served as a point of departure for various schisms and resulted in Amish fragmentation. Following 1865, the most conservative withdrew from the meetings, developing their own discipline and becoming known as "Old Order" Amish. Also during this period, the "Egly Amish" (now Evangelical Mennonite) and "Stuckey Amish" (later part of the General Conference Mennonite Church) charted their own courses. The body which remained became commonly known simply as "Amish Mennonite." During the decade or so following the demise of the *Diener Versammlungen*, this remaining group re-gathered into three district conferences: the Eastern District Amish Mennonite [A. M.] Conference (1893-1927), which covered territory in Ohio and Pennsylvania; the Indiana-Michigan District A. M. Conference (1888-1916); the Western District A. M. Conference (1890-1920), which covered settlements in at least ten states west of Indiana. Each of these conferences dissolved after merging with the "old" Mennonites who inhabited the same territories.

Therefore, when J. A. Heiser was ordained to the ministry in 1917, he was ordained into the Western District A. M. Conference.[3] In 1920, when the conference disbanded, East Bend and Illinois' eight other Amish Mennonite congregations (representing about 1500 members) merged with the seven "old" Mennonite congregations of the Illinois Mennonite Conference (about 500 members). When the new group held their first session in 1921, they published their minutes under the heading of the "First United Mennonite Church Conference for the State of Illinois," dropping any allusion to the Amish heritage held by three-quarters of its membership. Also in 1920, the other Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites across the Great Plains and in Oregon acted similarly. Amish Mennonites and members of the area's "old" Mennonite conferences [Missouri-Iowa, Kansas-Nebraska, Pacific Coast] recon-

figured themselves, as had those in Illinois, into four new conferences: the Missouri-Kansas (later South Central) Mennonite Conference; the Iowa-Nebraska Mennonite Conference; the Dakota-Montana (later North Central) Mennonite Conference; the Pacific Coast Mennonite Conference. Collectively, these five newly integrated conferences included about 7500 members, 4500 of which were formerly Amish Mennonite.[4]

These series of Amish Mennonite mergers have been variously described as an "organic union" and "true merging";[5] "the greatest ecumenical achievement of any Mennonites and Amish in the early-twentieth century";[6] one in which "the two branches were united in thought, spirit, and practical concerns";[7] "a union in a common faith and not the union of compromise."[8] Indeed, if J. A. Heiser's perceptions are any indication, the mergers represented the bonding of two groups who had attained a truly unified identity. Despite the experiences of his grandfather and great-grandfather in the *Diener Versammlungen*, his ordination into the Western District A. M. Conference, and the local reputation of East Bend as an "Omish" church, Heiser confidently expressed his identity as "Mennonite" vis-à-vis "Amish." He explained the previous Amish labels as something of a historical fluke: "Because there were a few Amish in the first [Illinois] settlement, we were recognized in the Illinois conference as Amish Mennonites. . . . Ten years ago this mixed body united and have since been called Mennonite."[9] Whatever the individual rationales, Amish Mennonites across the former Western District seemed to join Heiser in identifying themselves as solidly "old" Mennonite.

How did a body of Amish ancestry which significantly outnumbered its "old" Mennonite counterparts come to so thoroughly view itself as a natural part of the "old" Mennonite church? Did this bonded identity truly reflect a "union in a common faith" rather than "a union of compromise"? As one might expect, the merger of 1920 developed over time through the interplay of various forces, some of which belonged to the broader development of American society and some of which remained particular to the peculiarities of Anabaptist faith.

J. A. Heiser and his two sons with their purebred Jersey cattle, 1930

Forces Which Encouraged Consensus

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contained enormous change. This era reflected the emergence of a truly industrial society. The focus of commerce shifted from stable, local businesses to a complex network of production and distribution. Americans began to derive their individual identities less from integration into small, self-sufficient communities than from membership in broader classes or occupations. Geographically dispersed people with common economic interests sought each other's support against such perceived common enemies as "monopolies" and "corporations," and formed alliances such as the Knights of Labor and the Grange movement. Economic concerns dominated as Americans "subordinated religion, education, and politics to the creation of wealth."[10]

These priorities produced a society increasingly characterized by organization of large-scale, common-interest groups; standardization of weights and measures; quantification of success and progress; and preoccupation with technological advancements that directly affected average people. The era brimmed with bustling activity, organization, and work. Communication and transportation advances connected vast distances as never before, significantly reducing the size of the world as individuals perceived it. This onslaught of change, mobility, and exposure to new information brought confusion, and the collective response to this confusion reflected, as one historian phrased it, a societal "search for order."[11]

According to the typology of historian Norman F. Cantor, the era represented the transition between two "cultural revolutions": "romanticism" and "modernism." Whereas romanticism was typified by a sense of broad interconnectedness and organic unity, modernism was typified by fragmentation, anti-historicism, and a focus on individual parts rather than a united whole.[12]

A key factor in allowing the 1920 merger to succeed so completely is the similar responses of Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites to this environment. They both sought to incorporate certain kinds of changes while resisting others. They tended to embrace the more practical, technological innovations and incorporate selected aspects of Protestant religious experience, while they simultaneously attempted to fend off the "worldliness" of American cultural and political expressions and remain organizationally separate from other religious traditions.

Their responses differed markedly from those of Old Order Amish and Mennonites. These more conservative groups attempted to rein in not only the pace of cultural change but the pace of technological and religious change as well. They perhaps intuitively sensed that accepting newly developed tech-

nology and broadening their religious experience necessitated, or at least seductively invited, interdependence with those who held alien values. Such exposure could not help but affect church members' priorities and world view. As Donald B. Kraybill has observed of twentieth-century Old Order Amish in Lancaster County, the conservatives rigorously attempted to negotiate with the advance of modernity on *their* terms rather than accept it on *its* terms.[13] They were thus better positioned to preserve an integrated, community-based identity and reject a more typically modern American identity which tended to separate one's religious expression from one's economic existence. The more open relationships to society chosen by Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites made this negotiation much more complex for them, but it generated common issues and dilemmas which drew Amish Mennonites closer to "old" Mennonites as it distanced them from Old Order Amish.

As J. A. Heiser explained, "You see, we are modern. . . . It was largely due to this disagreement on methods of living way back in 1690 that led to the separation of the Amish sect. . . . [In contrast,] we try to adjust ourselves to the present conditions without at the same time losing hold on the underlying principles on which our church is founded."[14]

Some of the modernizing changes which pre-merger Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites addressed similarly are revealed in their conference reports. For one thing, all groups sought to maintain their cultural "separation" from the world and to avoid becoming "unequally yoked" with it. They grappled with issues such as marriage to non-members, joining labor and farm organizations and secret societies, participating in cooperatives, grain elevators, and businesses in which other than "non-resistant" people participated. All attempted to prohibit these and similar activities which might foster inappropriate co-dependence and weaken their separation from the surrounding society's aggressive and frivolous values.[15]

Another common theme was increasing acceptance of the era's preoccupation with bustling activity, productivity, and organization as they applied these priorities to denominational activities. As the century turned, conference records reflected increased preoccupation with forming boards, committees, and institutions to carry out the work of the church. Similarly, these groups established their own Sunday schools and Sunday school conferences and measured their activity with statistics and tables.[16] In 1886, the Western District A. M. Conference delineated five subdistricts, each headed by a bishop, presumably to facilitate administration of its geographically vast organization. Many of their efforts involved joint cooperation and representation which increased over time. Regarding Illinois' "old" and Amish Mennonites, for example, Willard Smith lists eleven instances of joint organizational activity which predated merger.[17] Harry F. Weber stated that "by 1919, all the activities of the Mennonites and Amish-Mennonites in Illinois had been combined with the exception of the respective conference organizations."[18]

Besides common organizational activity, a common medium for membership dialogue also emerged. The twin publications *Herald of Truth/Herold der Wahrheit* (1964-1908), and their replacement, *Gospel Herald* (1908-present), were invaluable to the merger process. Since at least the mid-1860s, both groups contributed material and widely subscribed to them. This forged a mutual consensus that merger was possible and appropriate.

Both groups were influenced similarly by American Protestant revivalism of the era, as well. They showed interest in revival activity and their conferences increasingly addressed questions about missions and strengthening the spirituality of the churches. Concern over individual religious experience frequently surfaced as they sought to understand such issues as attaining assurance of salvation, the meaning of "consecration," and how to deal with individuals who personally feel a call to church work, but which have not been called by the congregation.[19]

The leadership of "old" Mennonite Daniel Kauffman played an especially pivotal role in framing these common religious priorities during the decades leading to merger. Much has been written about Kauffman and the Mennonite "doctrinal era" which he helped usher in. His articulation of "Bible doctrine" from Mennonite perspectives sought to place Mennonite thought and practice securely within conservative Protestant orthodoxy while retaining certain distinctives of traditional Mennonite belief. It represented in many ways a Mennonite version of Americans' "search for order" amid the emergence of modernity.[20]

Although Kauffman intended his efforts to keep Mennonites from drifting into religious modernism, his approach was in many ways itself quite modern. His writings tended to fragment and compartmentalize beliefs, reducing them to isolated components. Once isolated they could be codified and standardized into an organized system of practice to be implemented and monitored for greater uniformity. Such a framework helped set the ground rules for merger by identifying critical areas of belief and practice to which all parties must agree. Kauffman was strategically situated to disseminate these doctrinal priorities among all groups involved in the 1920 merger: he was ordained minister (1892) and bishop (1896) in Missouri, living there until 1909; he provided leadership in the Missouri-Iowa Conference; and he edited the *Gospel Herald* from 1908 until 1943.

Another factor, which exerted more influence among the western regions than among the eastern states, was geographic dispersion. Both groups expressed concern for how to minister to western and scattered members and called on eastern members for aid. They also addressed the problem of ministers moving from areas in need of leadership to areas which may not need them as badly. This common concern encouraged cooperation among Mennonite and Amish Mennonite settlers on the Great Plains and among their eastern counterparts concerned about building the church to the west. It ultimately provided significant impetus for organizational merger.

Area conferences also included representation from both Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites. Both participated in the formation of the Mennonite General Conference in 1898 as well. Resolutions were passed favoring such a conference by the Kansas-Nebraska (OM) conference in 1892 and by the Illinois (OM), Missouri-Iowa (OM) and Western District (AM) conferences in 1894. Both branches were represented on the 1896 General Conference committee and they provided reports at the First General Conference in 1898. Joint participation in this body provided yet another forum for contact and familiarity.[21]

Dissolution of Barriers

Despite their many similarities, however, some differences remained to be overcome. The Amish Mennonites, for example, retained the practice of shunning, or social avoidance, and clung to usage of German longer than most "old" Mennonites. Also, differences in polity existed, and the "old" Mennonite doctrinal emphasis established specific criteria, including greater rigidity in matters of dress, which had to be met before merger could be effected.

As early as the 1860s, even before interaction and common concerns had fostered a widespread sense of familiarity, voices could be heard for Amish Mennonite/"old" Mennonite merger, especially within Indiana. As tensions rose in this region during the 1870s and 1880s, these voices quieted, but during the 1890s, increasing cooperation led to new calls for merger.[22] In 1889, the Missouri-Iowa conference proposed that:

> a greater harmony should exist between the old Mennonite and Amish Mennonite churches, who are so nearly allied in faith to each other, and that the doctrine of non-resistance which we mutually hold so sacred and dear to our hearts may not suffer for the want of practice. We therefore extend an invitation to the old Amish church of Mo. and Kansas to meet with us in our next conference or any conference, that they may designate, to agree upon some plan for a union of the two churches.[23]

As one observer noted, this invitation was probably stifled by the formation of the Western District A. M. Conference in 1890.[24] It may also be, however, that the issue of shunning, one of the few which continued to separate "old" from Amish Mennonites, still presented a prohibitive obstacle. In 1891 the Missouri-Iowa conference addressed this issue, discussing it "at length from various stand points." They ultimately agreed on a statement which indicated it was "variously understood by some of our own people" and its application "be not made too rigid."[25] This conference undoubtedly included Amish Mennonite participants since another resolution favored including names of ministers for the "Mennonites and Amish Churches" in a Mennonite *Family Almanac*.[26]

Although the 1891 Missouri-Iowa Conference discouraged strict adherence to shunning, the Western District Amish Mennonites were still considering it seriously. In that same year the Western District reaffirmed that shunning should continue indefinitely until repentance was won. Writing in 1905, Daniel Kauffman and J. S. Hartzler indicated that this region's leaders had taken the deciding step toward eliminating shunning in 1884, when an ad hoc conference left the practice of shunning to the individual's conscience.[27] It apparently took considerable time, however, before the issue faded completely. By 1902, understandings of shunning seemed quite ambiguous. The question of whether shunning applied only to "spiritual" matters or to social "eating" as well generated discussion but no conclusion before that day's session closed. When discussion resumed the following day, the issue was closed by simply letting "the matter rest with the explanation made in Article 17 of the [1632 Dordrecht] Confession of Faith," which outlines proper application of shunning. The last Western District reference to shunning appears in 1904, when its purpose was defined as to convince the sinner of his or her sins. By then, actual practice of shunning seems to have virtually ceased among Amish Mennonites.[28]

Although the minutes of the "old" Mennonite conferences were almost exclusively printed in English by the turn of the century, the Western District Amish Mennonites printed their reports in both German and English through their final conference in 1920. Also, though absent from "old" Mennonite reports, the issue of language periodically arose in Western District A. M. deliberations during its thirty-year life. In 1890, ministers were encouraged not to preach exclusively in the German language, but to use English where it was more familiar. In 1893, reference to German helped relieve concern over why one could "affirm" something as true, but not swear an oath: "The difference is clear from the German version of the scriptures which has 'sagen,' 'aussagen[,]' 'bestaetigen' where in the English Bible the word 'affirm' is found." In 1900 it was asked, "What may be done in the interest of more unity and peace between members who would have the German language alone used in the services, and those who favor the use of both languages?" The answer: "They should forbear with each other; love and patience should be manifested on both sides." As late as 1914, the conference sermon was preached in both German and English. By 1920, however, language no longer seemed a significant issue. Undoubtedly the anti-German sentiment of World War I played a significant role in gaining full acceptance of English among Amish Mennonites. Because of the crucial role language plays in shaping identity, the eventual Amish Mennonite consensus on using English further smoothed the path toward merger.[29]

Both groups espoused congregational church polities via their common heritage, but the specifics of their polities differed. Whereas the "old" Mennonites tended to place greater authority in conference decisions, Amish Mennonites had remained more decentralized, retaining authority in congregations. Further, bishop decisions seemed to carry greater weight among "old" Mennonites. Trends toward centralized authority seemed to strengthen among both groups as the decades of the doctrinal era progressed. In 1910, the Missouri-Iowa Conference ruled that conference decisions were final, and that they not be submitted to congregations for acceptance. In 1891, the Kansas-Nebraska Conference ruled that members violating conference decisions would be placed under censure. Although this conference had determined in 1889 that "all brethren present" could vote on questions, in 1891 they determined that bishops and ministers would conduct conference, and that ultimately the judgement of the presiding bishop(s) would be final. In 1908, the conference indicated that their decisions could be either mandatory, if biblically based, or advisory. Even if advisory, however, members should still be submissive to the conference's counsel.[30]

The Western District A. M. Conference initially seemed more deferential to congregational authority, however. In 1900 it ruled that a bishop may not exclude anyone without the "counsel and majority" of the church. Shortly, however, the conference grew more assertive in encouraging a hierarchical deference to authority. In 1905 the congregation was declared subject to conference, just as the individual was subject to the congregation; in 1913 conference resolutions were declared binding, and in 1917 it again judged following conference resolutions to be "obligatory." Perhaps the most telling evidence of a shift in Amish Mennonite perceptions of authority comes from a

decision rendered at the 1904 conference. When asked whether bishops were satisfactorily "set[ting] in order things that are wanting," the conference responded that "inasmuch as a bishop cannot do anything without the consent of the congregation, we believe that the congregations should better support or stand by the bishops. . . ." When this statement was reprinted in a 1912 booklet of prior conference decisions, the wording was changed to read "inasmuch as Bishops and congregations should work together, we admonish the congregations to so assist the Bishops." As with other issues, by the time 1920 arrived, both groups had attained quite similar views of accountability and authority in church polity. One remaining sticking point, however, was that some of the "old" Mennonite conferences allowed lay delegates to vote at the conference session themselves. The Amish Mennonite conferences allowed lay attendance, but only the ordained could vote. This was resolved by the loss of lay voting for "old" Mennonites, a step which did not seem controversial. Although this may be interpreted as an "old" Mennonite concession, it also seems quite compatible with the eras's "old" Mennonite trend toward increasingly structured authority.[31]

As noted earlier, the "old" Mennonite doctrinal formulations helped establish criteria on which any merger with others must be based. In 1913, for example, both the Missouri-Iowa and Kansas-Nebraska "old" Mennonite conferences addressed "alliances" or "union work" with other Mennonite bodies. Although both expressed wishes for unity among Mennonites, both rejected any union other than on a "whole-gospel" or "complete Gospel" basis. Further research is needed to determine what circumstances raised the issue before both conferences in 1913 and whether their expressions of caution alluded to union with Amish Mennonites or other Mennonite groups. The language of these resolutions suggests, however, that both conferences had formed merger criteria which conformed to the era's growing doctrinal emphasis.[32]

As far as matters of dress, the Amish Mennonites seem to have acculturated further than the "old" Mennonites by the early years of the 1900s. This created problems for "old" Mennonite leaders such as Daniel Kauffman. In 1905, Hartzler and Kauffman observed of the Western District Amish Mennonites: "Having broken loose from forms, which in former years, impeded the progress of the church, their greatest fight in this line, is now to counteract the tendency to drift into the opposite extreme—worldliness. But they are fortunate in having a number of strong men, who are boldly preaching the doctrine of entire separation from the world."[33] By the time merger approached, however, most Amish Mennonites had aligned themselves with Kauffman's articulations of appropriate attire and other expressions of nonconformity.

As if to secure acceptance of Kauffman's doctrinal priorities in preparation for merger, Kauffman himself played a major role in the 1919 Western District A. M. conference. He preached the conference sermon, which focused on the need to retain boundaries expressed through biblical doctrines. Kauffman also served on the resolutions committee which set the conference agenda. Decisions resulting from this agenda affirmed the "plenary and verbal inspiration of the Word" and nonconformity of attire. It also appointed a "dress committee' to further investigate such matters. The 1920 conference accepted the resulting dress committee report, which recommended among other things that "there should be more uniform interpretation" of scripture relating to attire, and that the ministry "encourage the wearing of the regulation coat," a garment then required of "old" Mennonite ministers. For most involved, matters of dress consequently dissolved as one of the barriers to merger. In Oregon, however, consensus on dress had not yet fully jelled, which led Kauffman to reflect that perhaps the merger had occurred too soon.[34]

The final push toward union seems to have emerged from the Western District A. M. Conference's frustration with its difficulty in effectively administering its large territory. In 1918, the Calkins, Montana, congregation requested to join the Missouri-Iowa conference, which could "more conveniently" shepherd them. As reported:

> This request resulted in an interesting and lively discussion of the geographical situation of the Western A. M. Conference District and how that instead of releasing these congregations from time to time a closer union might be effected with sister conferences which are one with us in faith and practice and which cover the same territory. A unanimous sentiment was expressed in favor of a closer and more effective cooperation in the future.[35]

The following year (1919), each of the five conferences sent representatives to a "Merger Committee," chaired by Daniel Kauffman, which processed the question of merger in a meeting at East Fairview A. M. Church near Milford, Nebraska, in May 1920. Their report, which favored merger, was distributed among the congregations involved. The response overwhelmingly supported the proposed merger. In 1920, all five conferences accepted the merger committee's final report, which called for the

East Fairview Amish Mennonite Church near Milford, Nebraska, ca. 1947

proposed new conferences to meet and organize themselves in 1921. The new conferences would not alter the governance of existing bishops. Since the Western District A.M. and the Kansas-Nebraska conferences had divided their territory into subdistricts headed by bishops, this decision led to conference lines which did not neatly follow state lines. Thus the Thurman, Colorado, congregation belonged to the new Iowa-Nebraska Conference, whereas the southern Colorado congregations belonged to the Missouri-Kansas Conference. For the same reason, Creston, Montana, belonged to the Pacific Coast Conference rather than the Dakota-Montana Conference. This latter, sparsely populated conference was viewed mainly as a mission field and was to have one delegate from each of the other four new conferences to strengthen it.[36]

When 1921 arrived, the new conferences met and went about the business of structuring themselves. Where needed, joint committees were established to determine governance of overlapping mission projects and responsibilities. Little evidence exists of significant opposition to or fallout from the merger. The more conservative among the Amish Mennonites seem to have withdrawn in the decades prior to the merger so that few remained in the Western District Conference to impede the process.[37]

Conclusion

In many ways, then, this 1920 merger was a union of *both* "common faith" and "compromise." By then both bodies had held extremely compatible beliefs and practices. They had interacted and cooperated for decades, were comfortably familiar with each other, and perceived each other as holding the same faith. Their degree of similarity relied heavily on the choices of their nineteenth-century forebears to respond similarly to the changing American environment, which consequently set them on converging paths.

As merger approached, though, the Amish Mennonite path seemed to veer more toward that charted by the "old" Mennonites than vice versa. It was to some extent a matter of the larger body deferring to agenda established by the smaller. The Amish Mennonites seemed especially attracted to "old" Mennonite organizational skills, structures, and experiences in their journey toward merger. Although their cooperative efforts may have seemed fully egalitarian, they sometimes represented significant Amish Mennonite reliance on "old" Mennonite expertise. And, as their Amish identity faded, Amish Mennonites willingly incorporated the doctrinal agenda established by "old" Mennonite leaders.[38] Thus, by 1920, merger with the "old" Mennonites seemed natural, or at least inevitable. For example, Samuel Gerber, an Amish Mennonite bishop and Western District moderator for seven of the years between 1911 and 1920, "wasn't too interested in the merger in 1920 but when it got so far he went along cheerfully"[39] to the point of serving on the merger committee.

Yet although the mechanics of this merger seem to have involved disproportionate "old" Mennonite influence, the subsequent life of the new organization may reflect a different story. Some hold the opinion that following the 1943 death of Daniel Kauffman and the fading of the doctrinal era, Amish Mennonite polity bubbled to the surface and ultimately dominated the structure of the modern Mennonite Church (MC).[40] Even J. A. Heiser, during events preceeding East Bend's traumatic 1951 split, appealed somewhat to a congregationalism which denied the legitimacy of Illinois Mennonite Conference intervention in the dispute. Though he viewed his bishop's role over his congregation similarly to "old" Mennonite patterns of authority, some observers perceived that he seemed to feel the existing differences should have been resolved congregationally under his guidance and that the conference should not involve itself without his consent. Though subordinated and renamed during the 1920 merger, Amish Mennonite patterns of thought had apparently not been eliminated.

One could further speculate that the modern survival of this denomination has relied on contributions of both traditions: the "old" Mennonite doctrinal emphasis may have been crucial to guiding the united body through the onslaught of change manifested during the first half of the twentieth century;[41] alternatively, Amish Mennonite congregationalism may have facilitated adaptation to the century's latter half. Whatever the respective contributions to the merged conferences may have been, though, one thing seems certain—more than a mere organizational merger had occurred. As J. A. Heiser's voice attested in 1930, a highly successful merger of identities based on "common faith" had occurred as well.

ENDNOTES

[1]Hutchings, Harold E., "Mennonites Keep Aged Faith, Yet Live Modern Lives," Champaign [IL] *News-Gazette*, Sunday, April 29, 1930, p. 24.

[2]The minutes of the 1871 *Diener Versammlung*, held in Livingston County, Illinois, list Johannes Sutter and Johannes Bachman, both of Morton, Illinois, as participants. The former was the father of Heiser's maternal grandmother; the latter was his maternal grandfather. [*Bericht der Verhandlungen der zehnten jahrlichen Diener-Versammlung der Amischen Mennoniten-Brüderschaft, gehalten am 28., 29., 30., und 31. Mai 1871, in Livingston County, im Staate Illinois.* (Elkhart, Ind.: John F. Funk & Bruder, 1871), p. 29.]

[3]Smith, Willard, *Mennonites in Illinois*. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), p. 544.

[4]Population of Illinois Amish Mennonites and "old" Mennonites: "Illinois Mennonite Conference," *Mennonite Encyclopedia, III*, p. 10. Population of merged "old"/Amish Mennonites: Barr, Ray, "The Merger of the Mennonite and Amish Mennonite Conference from 1911 to 1928," *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*, Oct. 1952, p. 3.

[5]Weber, Harry F. *Centennial History of the Mennonites of Illinois, 1829-1929* (Goshen, Ind.: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1931), pp. 324, 329.

[6]Juhnke, James C., *Vision, Doctrine, War, Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), p. 122.

[7]Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*, p. 186.

[8]Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*, p. 187. Quote of Daniel Kauffman, *Gospel Herald* editor.

[9]Hutchings, "Mennonites."

[10]Hays, Samuel P., *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), p. 2.

[11]Useful treatments of this era include Hays' *Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* and Robert H. Wiebe's *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

[12]Cantor, Norman F., *Twentieth-Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

[13]Kraybill, Donald B., *The Riddle of Amish Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

[14]A concern for being "modern" yet faithful to tradition seemed tightly woven throughout J. A. Heiser's effort to distinguish his Mennonites from the Old Order Amish. He explained, "One outstanding difference between us and the Amish is that we do not compel our members to be farmers. . . . There are several Mennonite businessmen in Fisher. . . ." They prohibited dancing and most movies, "but as to other things in the modern world, . . . each family decides for itself how much time and money shall be spent on them. That is a matter of individual importance, not one of church domination. . . . I put a great question mark on any group that will not adapt itself to present conditions, and try to be an informed part of the generation as it goes along." Thus at least for this part of Illinois in 1930, a significant aspect of the merged Amish Mennonite/"old" Mennonite identity rested on

acceptance of certain traits of modernity.

[15]Reviews of conference minutes here and elsewhere focused primarily on the three largest conferences: Western District A. M. Conference [Mennonite Historical Library (MHL) and Archives of the Mennonite Church (AMC), both in Goshen, IN]; Missouri-Iowa Mennonite Conference [AMC]; Kansas-Nebraska Mennonite Conference [MHL/AMC].

[16]For thorough treatments of Mennonite organizational activity during this era and the period leading up to it, see Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, and Theron Schlabach's *Peace, Faith, Nation, Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988).

[17]Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*, pp. 185-186.

[18]Weber, *Centennial History*, p. 326.

[19]The Western District A. M. Conference did not discuss assurance of salvation as did the Missouri-Iowa Conference (1917) and the Kansas-Nebraska Conference (1896). However, they addressed other issues of individual spirituality, such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1895) and experiencing divine healing (1897), and discussed how to balance individual callings with the call of the congregation on various occasions (e.g. 1898, 1907, 1909).

[20]Discussions of the Mennonite doctrinal era and its impact on church thought and missions include: Leonard Gross, "The Doctrinal Era of the Mennonite Church," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LX (Jan. 1986), pp. 83-103; Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987); Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War;* Theron Schlabach, *Gospel Vs. Gospel: Mission and the Mennonite Church, 1863-1944* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980); J. Denny Weaver, "The Quickening of Soteriology: Atonement from Christian Burkholder to Daniel Kauffman," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (Jan. 1987), 5-45.

[21]*Proceedings of the Mennonite General Conference Including Discussions Leading to Its Origination* (Mennonite General Conference, 1921).

[22]Paton Yoder, *Tradition and Transition: Amish Mennonites and the Old Order Amish, 1800-1900* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), pp. 207-260.

[23]Minutes of Missouri-Iowa Conference, 1889 [AMC, II-9-1].

[24]Yoder, *Tradition and Transition*, p. 248.

[25]Some felt scriptural references supported avoiding all social contact of sinners, whereas others felt it referred to communion only. They concluded that "it would be more in keeping with the general tenor of the Gospel that the sin be avoided and not the one who has fallen victim to it."

[26]Minutes of Missouri-Iowa Conference, 1891.

[27]J. S. Hartzler and Daniel Kauffman, *Mennonite Church History* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1905), p. 308-9.

[28]Reports of the Western District A. M. Conference: 1891, 1902, 1904. Yoder, *Tradition*, p. 260.

[29]Reports of the Western District A. M. Conference: 1890, 1893, 1900, 1914.

[30]Missouri-Iowa Conference minutes: 1910; Kansas-Nebraska Conference minutes: 1889, 1891, 1908.

[31]Reports of the Western District A. M. Conferences: 1900, 1904, 1905, 1913, 1917. Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*, p. 187. The newly formed Missouri-Kansas Conference allowed lay members to vote "save such questions as the ministerial body may decide proper for decision by church officials" [Conference report for 1921].

[32]Report of Missouri-Iowa Conference: 1913. Report of Kansas-Nebraska Conference: 1913. This note of caution does not surface in Illinois Mennonite Conference reports of the period. Instead, in 1905 it asked, "How does this conference regard the growing tendency of Mennonites and Amish Mennonites working together," and responded that it "rejoices" over the tendency and "encourages stronger bonds." In June 1913, it approved official Amish Mennonite representation on its Sunday school conference executive committee.

[33]Hartzler and Kauffman, *Mennonite Church History*, p. 308.

[34]Report of Western District Amish Mennonite Conference: 1919, 1920. Kauffman's concerns about dress in Oregon were voiced to J. C. Wenger, who recounted them in an interview to Leonard Gross.

[35]Report of Western District A. M. Conference: 1918.

[36]Report of the Conference Merger Committee, included in the 1920 Western District A. M. Conference report. Daniel Kauffman, *Mennonite History* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1927), p. 80.

[37]The creation of the Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference in 1910 probably served this function. In 1930, J. A. Heiser viewed them as "half way between ours and the old order" [Hutchings, "Mennonites"].

[38]Paton Yoder has noted: "A great majority of . . . revival teams, made up of one Amish Mennonite and one Mennonite, held their meetings in communities which were predominately Amish Mennonite rather than Mennonite. This suggests that the former may have sought help of the somewhat more experienced Mennonites. Possibly the same explanation also accounts for the fact that, although many revivals in Amish Mennonite congregations were conducted by one or more Mennonite evangelists without the help of Amish Mennonite ministers, the converse rarely occurred." [*Tradition*, p. 246.] Also, when the Western District A. M. Conference began to grapple with meeting the needs of their scattered members, they quickly (1891) accepted help from the "old" Mennonite Evangelizing Committee [1891 Western District A. M. Report].

[39]Wayne Gerber, "Biography of Bishop Samuel Gerber" (term paper, Goshen College, 1959).

[40]Personal conversations of writer with Steven R. Estes and Leonard Gross. Gross cites the moderating influence of S. C. Yoder at a specially called 1944 General Conference and the 1971 reorganization of the Mennonite Church as evidence of the ultimate success of Amish Mennonite polity in the denomination. (Leonard Gross to Gordon Oyer, December 18, 1992.)

[41]For example, Robert Kreider has commented that Daniel Kauffman was one of the "pre-higher education" era's few leaders able to "contain and package church life and program in the face of real and threatened modernity," and that he "slowed down change until a new generation of college leaders" could make "another try at accumulating wider experience." [Leonard Gross, "The Doctrinal Era of the Mennonite Church," *MQR* LX, p. 100, note 36.] James C. Juhnke has also observed that Kauffman's synthesis provided "a coherent, English language denominational system of thought and organization well adapted to American conditions. [*Vision, Doctrine, War*, p. 271.]

Steven R. Estes

The Central Conference and Middle District Merger of 1957

In 1953 Raymond L. Hartzler (1893-1988) wrote an editorial in *The Christian Evangel*, the organ of the Central Conference Mennonite Church, discussing the possible merger of that body with the Middle District to form a new district conference in the General Conference Mennonite Church. Hartzler wrote: "We would not presume to say that we have developed a Central Conference culture, but we have come to some pattern of church and conference polity, a real sense of brotherhood and cooperation, undergirded by a fine unity of spirit and purpose."

What would happen as this group and the Middle District merged? Similar words might have been written about the Middle District, except that its entire history was as a part of the General Conference. Indeed, it was the cradle of the General Conference and the first conference sessions were hosted by its churches. Even within the General Conference, however, the Middle District was a unique blend of peoples located between the descendants of colonial Mennonite immigrants to Pennsylvania in the east and the largely (although not exclusively) Russian Mennonite population in the west.

As the Middle District and Central Conferences considered merger as early as 1948 when Central Conference president Harry Yoder declared that "ultimately there should come about a union of the Middle and Central District conferences," the two groups shared a parallel and sometimes overlapping history.

The Central Conference came largely from an Amish background while the Middle District came largely from Mennonite origins. Many of the families in each district came from an immigration following the War of 1812, although each district had an influential minority of persons from Pennsylvania colonial stock. However, even within the majority of more recent European migration there were a diversity of origins. Both groups were involved in missions and institutions and both groups were committed to inter-Mennonite relationships. The Middle District was largely involved with other Mennonite groups through the General Conference while the Central Conference cooperated extensively with the Defenseless Mennonites (the Evangelical Mennonite Church since 1954) in such endeavors as foreign missions, the Mennonite Hospital (Bloomington, Illinois), and Meadows Mennonite Home (Meadows, Illinois). Indeed, one could ask why the Central Conference and Defenseless Mennonites did not unite at some point?

The Middle District and the Central Conference largely overlapped. The Middle District included Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, while the Central Conference was comprised of churches in Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois. The two areas were settled at approximately the same time.

The Swiss Mennonites came first with the arrival of Benedict Schrag (b. 1767) in Ohio in 1817. Between 1817 and 1854 perhaps 1,200 Swiss came to the United States settling near Berne, Indiana; near Dalton, Pandora, Bluffton, and Marshallville in Ohio; and near Fortuna, Missouri. Mennonites from the Palatinate and Bavaria, called the South Germans, came to Ohio in 1832, Iowa in 1839, and Illinois in 1842. Pennsylvanians began to settle near Wadsworth, Ohio, in 1851.

The South Germans were the visionaries of the conference movement. Two churches in Iowa united in a conference on March 21, 1859, and called for a conference to be held at Pentecost, 1860, at West Point, Iowa. This meeting was held on May 28-29, 1860, as the first session of the General Conference of Mennonites of North America (now the General Conference Mennonite Church). As the conference grew, the churches in Iowa and Illinois organized a "Western District Conference of the Mennonites of North America" on November 6, 1868. Twenty years later the district had become so large that the Middle District Conference was organized for the churches of Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio (with struggling congregations in New York and Ontario) on October 24, 1888.

The Zion and West Point congregations in Iowa were charter members of the General Conference and the congregations at Summerfield and Wadsworth joined in 1861. The Swiss joined later: Berne, Indiana, in 1873; Fortuna, Missouri, in 1879; Elkton, Missouri, in 1884.

Somehow these diverse congregations and others that followed formed a cohesive district conference. Surely one of the great unifying factors was the Wadsworth Institute in Ohio from 1868-1878 which brought persons of diverse backgrounds together and molded them as leaders of the church. These persons were not only pastoring churches, but making extensive visits to congregations with an often far-ranging influence. Like the General Conference, the Middle District was structured in such a way that there was considerable freedom of interpretation concerning faith practices. Or, as the constitution said: "In essentials unity/In incidentals freedom/In all brotherly love."

The Amish were settling in the same region in the same time period. The pio-

neer was Christian Augspurger (1782-1848) who had come to the United States from Alsace in 1817, seen productive land, and returned to France to encourage others to join him. They returned in 1819 and settled in the valley of the Miami River in Butler County, Ohio. The European Amish immigration to the midwest included persons from Lorraine, Alsace, Hesse, Baden, Bavaria, the Palatinate, Lippe-Detmolt, Holland, and other areas. Each brought their own customs. Often they formed congenial congregations, but sometimes—as happened in Butler County, Ohio, in 1835 and in McLean County, Illinois, in 1859—two ethnic groups could not form one congregation. In each of these cases, liberal Hessian Amish, who wore buttons and played musical instruments and educated their children beyond the simple basics, formed separate congregations from their more conservative brothers and sisters.

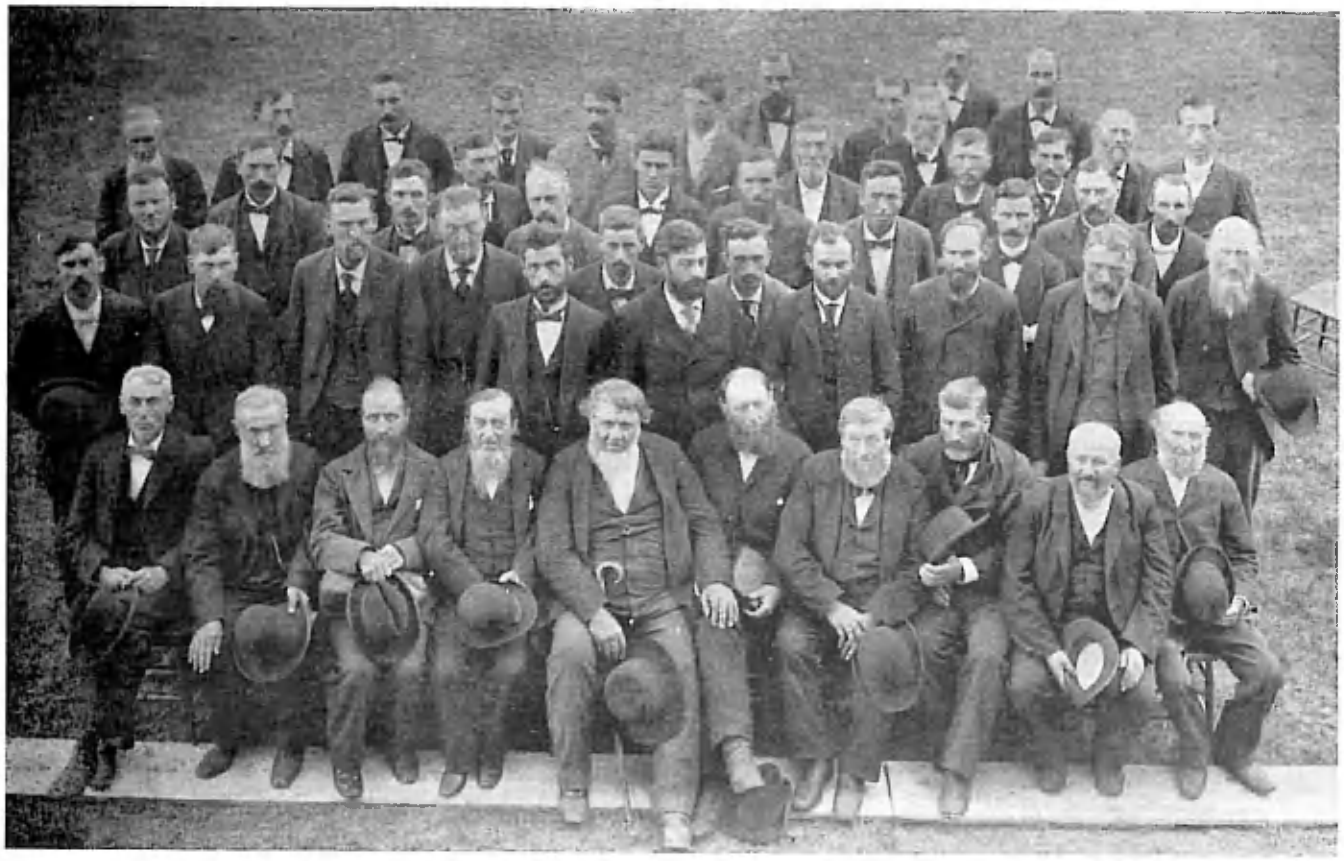
Pennsylvanians descended from the colonial immigration also came, mostly to central Illinois. One family came as early as 1835, but the real migration did not begin until 1848. Although often considered very traditional by later historians, it seems clear that most of them were coming from areas of Pennsylvania where the church was becoming more open to various influences from secular "English" society. Here the leader was Jonathan Yoder (1795-1869).

Jonathan Yoder was so highly respected that in 1862 he was chosen to chair the first meeting of Amish Mennonite ministers known as the *Dienerversammlungen* held in 1862-1876, 1878. There had been consideration among American Amish leaders for several years that ministers' meetings with representatives from the various congregations might address the various conflicts and congregational divisions which had been happening. In actuality, the meetings largely became a context for further conflict. In 1865 the most traditional ministers attended the meetings for the last time and during the next half century developed into the Old Order Amish. In 1865 Henry Egly (1824-1890) attended the conference for the only time and in that same year the Egly division occurred. The Egly Amish are now the Evangelical Mennonite Church. In 1866 the Hessian Amish—some of the most acculturated in North America—attended the conference for the last time.

One of the most dramatic of these departures was the so-called "Stuckey" Division in 1872. Joseph Stuckey (1826-1902) had followed Jonathan Yoder as the major leader of the Amish in McLean County. Stuckey attended the meetings in 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1871, and 1872. He was censured by some for being liberal, but he saw himself as providing pastoral leadership for persons who were not satisfied in their home churches and would probably be lost to the Amish Mennonites.

At the meeting in 1871 in Livingston County, Illinois, Joseph Stuckey was involved in a controversy concerning persons leaving the local Gridley Prairie Congregation (now the Waldo Mennonite Church) without letters of good standing because of their dress and joining the Weston Congregation (later developed into the Flanagan Mennonite Church) of which Stuckey was the nonresident elder. In October 1871 three ministers from the East came to investi-

Delegates to Middle District Conference, Danvers, Illinois, October 1, 1898. Joseph Stuckey in front row, center, with cane



gate the situation and decided that anyone desiring to transfer membership from one church to another needed to have a "satisfactory letter" and could not leave the church "until they have made peace."

At the meeting of May 19-22, 1872, the first business considered was the report of this committee. The question was asked as to whether the recommendations had been followed. Various accusations were made and another committee found that the trouble was between Joseph Stuckey and Christian Ropp (1812-1896), also an elder in McLean County who was also the nonresident elder for the Gridley Prairie Congregation. Peace was officially restored, but Stuckey refused to have his name listed as an attendant at the meeting because he had been "ill" and had not attended all of the sessions and had not heard all that was said.

But the difficulties were just beginning. On the last day of the conference the poem "Die Frohe Botschaft" (1869) by a member of Stuckey's congregation named Joseph Joder (1797-1887) was brought to the attention of the ministers. The conference felt that the theme of the poem was that "all men are saved and none shall suffer eternal hell or punishment." Many spoke against such ideas and a decision of the 1870 meeting was reiterated: persons holding such views should be instructed and if unrepentant put under the ban for repentance and correction.

On the Sunday after the conference it is said that Joseph Stuckey met Joseph Joder at the meeting house door with a copy of the poem and asked, "Is this your writing?" "Yes," was the reply. "Well," Stuckey said, "you can't be a member." The men had several heated discussions, but Stuckey could not bring himself to excommunicate Joder. Neighboring ministers must have been aware of this situation, because a call came from Illinois to three ministers from the East to come and deal with this situation. These three eastern ministers led by John K. Yoder (1824-1906) of Wayne County, Ohio, visited almost all of the Amish congregations in central Illinois, apparently seeking to gather support for what they would need to do. On October 10, 1872, a church service was held in the new North Danvers Meetinghouse and as they left they asked Joseph Stuckey if he considered the author of "Die Frohe Botschaft" to be his brother? Yes.

The three eastern ministers then withdrew from Joseph Stuckey "in regard to the Holy Kiss and spiritual fellowship." Stuckey had a small following of three congregations (at Danvers, Weston, and Washington, Illinois) which would grow into a "church fellowship" known as the Stuckey Amish.

Joseph Stuckey had a strong inter-Mennonite commitment. He worked closely with "old" Mennonites on occasion and even participated with certain Amish Mennonite congregations after the conferences ceased in 1878. He also worked with the General Conference. The link was provided initially by a family that settled in the midst of the Stuckey Amish settlement in McLean County. Christian Funk (1799-1881), a Mennonite preacher from the Palatinate settled in Dry Grove Township in 1853 following the arrival of his son Heinrich Funk and his bride Magdalena Hege the year before.

Christian Funk had been an early supporter of the unification movement which led to the first General Conference session in West Point, Iowa, on May 28, 1860. In 1858 he responded to a question in John H. Oberholtzer's (1809-1895) *Volksblatt* which headed an article asking "Are the Mennonites ever to constitute an ecclesiastical body?" Funk responded that fraternal fellowship was to be very much desired as all held the same fundamental doctrines. It was strict rules concerning external things which was the cause of separations. He recommended that love be given full sway in the hearts and the difficulties would be overcome.

How much influence did this thinking have on young Joseph Stuckey? It is unknown at this point how much intercourse Stuckey himself had with the Funks, but Christian Funk's statement certainly was compatible with Stuckey's reflections, whether or not they were the source of them. In 1937 Daniel Kauffman (1865-1944) asserted that the liberal Hessian Amish who were also in McLean County, Illinois, also influenced Joseph Stuckey and his church away from the more conservative portion of the Amish Mennonite fellowship. However, they certainly were not doing away with all the rules of church order.

Neither the Rock Creek Congregation (where Jonathan Yoder and Joseph Stuckey were the elders) nor the local Hessian Amish congregation would accept the Funks as members because they would not accept the Amish dress or the service of footwashing. Magdalena Funk's brother Daniel Hege (1826-1862) was a preacher for the Summerfield Church. After his death another minister from there, Christian Krehbiel (1832-1909), visited the Funks in 1864 and 1865 to preach for them, administer baptisms, and serve them communion. During this period Krehbiel met Joseph Stuckey and seeing that his congregation was progressive encouraged him to join the new General Conference. Stuckey did not consider this at that time. But, he enjoyed cordial relations with the General Conference Mennonites.

In June 1868 Joseph Stuckey was visiting various Amish congregations in Iowa. He stopped twice at West Point, Iowa, and participated in services at the Mennonite Meetinghouse there on June 5 and 12. He returned in 1873. Later he became acquainted with Samuel F. Sprunger (1848-1924), the young minister of the Swiss congregation near Berne, Indiana, who preached at the North Danvers Meetinghouse on September 19, 1875.

Other visits fostered these relationships. In 1888 and 1889 John B. Baer (1854-1939), a native of Summerfield who was the home missionary and field secretary for the General Conference, held service at North Danvers. Nathaniel B. Grubb (1850-1938), pastor of the First Mennonite Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, came to Stuckey's church in 1890. Ministers from Berne, Indiana, including John A. Sprunger (1852-1911) visited in 1891. In 1900 Henry J. Krehbiel (1865-1940) conducted revival services there. Joseph Stuckey also became friends with John Moser (1826-1908), bishop of the Swiss Mennonite Church near Bluffton, Ohio. And, perhaps most important, Joseph Stuckey sent regular correspondence to the Middle District's *Christlicher Bundesbote* beginning in 1888.

There were more "official" associations with the General Conference and the Middle District. In 1884 Peter E. Stuckey (1844-1929), Joseph's younger brother, was given a complimentary vote when he visited the General Conference sessions at Berne, Indiana. In 1889 the North Danvers Sunday school was represented at the Sunday school convention held by the churches of the Middle District. In 1891 "Stuckey" Amish Sunday schools from North Danvers, Washington, Gridley [actually Meadows], Flanagan, and Hopedale

were represented at the convention. On October 16-22, 1890, a report of the North Danvers Congregation was presented at the General Conference session in Childstown, South Dakota. On October 7, 1891, a declamation was given by the sewing society from Danvers at a meeting of such societies held at Berne, Indiana. Mission work also called forth the support of the Stuckey Amish—modest at first, but ever increasing. In December 1885 Magadalena Sommer Gerber (1815-1902) and Magdalena Roth Habecker Stuckey (1823-1904) donated bedding and clothing to the General Conference mission station in Oklahoma, while in the spring of 1886 Joseph Stuckey donated 50c to foreign missions.

Furthermore, some of Stuckey's good friends in other Amish communities were affiliating with the Middle District. In 1890 the congregation in Davis County, Iowa, under the leadership of Philip Roulet (1828-1904) joined the Middle District followed in 1892 by Benjamin Eicher (1832-1893) and his congregation near Wayland, Iowa. In 1894 the Apostolic Mennonite Church (which would unite with the Augspurger congregation in 1896) joined the Middle District. Butler County was the home area of many of the "Stuckey" Amish families in central Illinois.

Perhaps because of all of these associations, "Stuckey" Amish ministers began to attend Middle District sessions. In 1895 John C. Mehl, pastor of the Silver Street Congregation, which Joseph Stuckey had helped to organize in 1892, received a complimentary vote at the Middle District. Two years later, eight ministers and perhaps as many as 125 visitors from the "Stuckey" Amish attended the conference in Trenton, Ohio. The ministers signed a statement at the end of the conference thanking the Middle District for "the Christian love and brotherhood shown us." They also expressed "hope it may soon happen that our congregation may work hand in hand with this conference." And they invited the Middle District to meet at the Rock Creek Fairgrounds near Danvers the next year.

Fourteen "Stuckey" Amish ministers and three Hessian Amish ministers attended the sessions which they hosted on September 28 and 29, 1898. After the close of official business the meetings continued in more of the nature of an outdoor revival meeting through October 2, 1898. There were over three hundred delegates and 2,000 visitors to the conference and on October 1 pictures were taken of the crowd assembled there and of forty-nine Middle District and Stuckey Amish ministers. After the sessions, the conference committee donated the extra bread provided for the conference to the Benevolent Society of Bloomington. On a sadder note, four young persons attending this conference died that fall from typhoid fever, presumedly contracted at the Fairgrounds.

The hope for an early joining of the Stuckey Amish with the Middle District also died at that conference. Joseph Stuckey couldn't forget his treatment by the Amish ministers' meetings and could not sanction the joining of even so congenial a group as the Middle District. Indeed, when the younger ministers began to encourage the calling of a meeting of their own, he only reluctantly consented. They could see that some sort of closer cooperation was needed to foster the congregations. J. C. Mehl and his church were accepted into the Middle District in 1898.

Aaron Augspurger (1865-1953) finally prevailed upon his grandfather Stuckey to call for a ministers' meeting for which Augspurger wrote the letters of invitation. The *Predigerversammlung* was held on August 3, 1899, and they planned for a larger meeting at the North Danvers meetinghouse on September 26, 1899. There was unanimous agreement that there needed to be more thorough organization. As a result, annual meetings were held and in 1900 included a Sunday school convention which had begun separately already in 1896.

At the same time associations continued with the Middle District. In 1898 Peter Stuckey accepted the pastorate at Benjamin Eicher's old church and he was placed on the board of the Middle District's new Central Mennonite College (now Bluffton College) in Ohio. When the conference fully organized in 1908 as the Central Illinois Conference of Mennonites (the name was changed to the Central Conference Mennonite Church in 1914) the constitution was modeled on the constitution of the Middle District.

The new conference became very active after its organization. Not only were new churches started and home missions begun, but cooperative work with the Defenseless Mennonite Church (now the Evangelical Mennonite Church) resulted in foreign missions (1911), the Mennonite Sanitarium (1919), and the Meadows Old Peoples' Home (1923). But the happy relations with the Middle District were hardly forgotten. When the college in Bluffton, Ohio, reorganized in 1913 there was Central Conference representation on the board. The Central Conference also enthusiastically supported the Witmarsum Theological Seminary which opened in Bluffton in 1921. It was probably this joint work in education which fostered the exchange of personnel between the two conferences and allowed the possibilities for their eventual merger to develop.

The group also faced common challenges. Inter-Mennonite cooperation was especially strong in Chicago where both the Central Conference and General Conference had home missions. Both the Central Conference and the Middle District went through levening periods during the 1920s and 1930s when Fundamentalism and Modernism were the topics of the day. In 1932 both groups were involved in the organization of the Mennonite Peace Society and then the Mennonite Central Peace Committee in 1939. A common commitment to Civlian Public Service allowed for greater cooperation during World War II.

As early as 1930 Comity Committees from both the Central Conference and the General Conference met in Bluffton, Ohio, and discussed five possible areas of closer cooperation: publications, missions, evangelism, institutions, and attendance at church conferences. *The Christian Evangel* of the Central Conference and *The Mennonite* of the General Conference were jointly published in 1934 and 1935. In 1944 the General Conference joined the Congo Inland Mission (now the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission). Perhaps this association finally led to the acceptance of the idea of affiliation of the Central Conference with the General Conference which was being seriously discussed as early as 1941.

In 1945 the Central Conference applied to be admitted as a district conference of the General Conference. The application was accepted on February 19, 1946. There was some culture shock. The Central Conference had conducted its meetings with a large degree of informality. One minister said that he never heard someone declared "out of order" at a conference meeting

until he went to his first General Conference sessions.

It seemed clear that some adjustment needed to be made in the relationship between the Central Conference and the Middle District now that they were both geographically overlapping districts of the General Conference. The merger of the two bodies was rather threatening to the Central Conference, however, coming as it did after many years of close contact among the congregations. The Central Conference now faced the loss of their conference periodical and immediate control of their home and foreign missions, which they had retained in the affiliation with the General Conference. The Middle District was more spread apart and as the area in which the General Conference had been founded, the churches of that district were more used to less immediate relationship with many of their activities.

However, the two groups had many years of association and cooperative work in the college and the seminary. Now they were working together in the new seminary and at Camp Friedenswald as well as inter-conference work through women's organizations, men's organizations, and the Young People's Union. In 1951 the Middle District moved the process along by deciding from the conference floor to ask for admission into the Central District Conference. The Central Conference session, after a moment of prayer, gave a unanimous standing vote to further pursuing the coming together of the two groups. In 1953 they began to hold joint inspirational conferences (but continued separate business sessions) as a way of demonstrating the growing spirit of unity between the two districts and the way they could work together.

In 1955 both conferences passed resolutions "of organization for the new united conference." In 1956 each of the conferences agreed on a proposed constitution. Then on April 25-28, 1957, the two groups held their final separate conference sessions. On April 28, 1957, the two conferences officially merged and the new Central District Conference of the General Conference was constituted. It was ninety-three years after Christian Krehbiel had first approached Joseph Stuckey about joining the General Conference and fifty-nine years since the two groups had met jointly in Danvers in 1898. As the field secretary put it in 1957: "We find ourselves looking backward with appreciation to what has taken place among us and through us, and peering forward with something of wonder as to what the future will bring forth."

In 1953 Raymond L. Hartzler in his discussion of the Central Conference said that persons from other groups referred to the Central Mennonites as the "friendly conference." Perhaps this is the key to what made the Middle District-Central Conference merger work. The people took the time to become friends. At the time of the merger in 1957 there was some discussion that because of the far-flung geography of the new district, it should really be divided into two new districts with one comprised of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan and the other comprised of Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. That may have made some geographical sense, but, it seemed like it was too much to ask the conferences to give up their former identities and then divide them into two new identities. Friends travelled ten or twelve or more hours to attend conference sessions with friends. Maybe that is why thirty and more years later it is very hard for some in the district to contemplate integration when it means both a change of identity and (almost surely) a geographical division.

Hartzler's final comment on the friendly spirit of the Central Conference was a question "has at least that one thing become enough a part of us that in moving [into] a new and larger relationship we can both impart that and yet retain it at the same time?" If so, then "whether we can thus contribute and yet conserve will be the real test of what the years have begotten in us." Friendliness was met with friendliness in the merger forming the present Central District Conference. Relationships have been the key to cooperation and unity. "To the doing of that," Hartzler continued, "as we move forward, let us set ourselves with resolution and humility; but, above all, let us do it *together.*"

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Kevin Enns-Rempel

A Merger That Never Was

The Conference of Evangelical Mennonites 1953-1962

On June 14, 1953, some 350 people representing the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference (EMB)[1] and the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC) gathered at Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska, to celebrate the founding of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites (CEM). After almost six years of conversations together, they had entered an experimental affiliation with each other and came together on this day to consummate that relationship. Following an inaugural sermon by H. E. Bertsche, EMC minister from Archbold, Ohio, and secretary of the new conference, members of the CEM General Board and commissions joined hands on the platform while John R. Dick, a faculty member at Grace Bible Institute and vice president of the CEM, led in a dedicatory prayer. The meeting ended with the singing of "Blest be the Tie That Binds," and the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites was born.[2]

In the following years this affiliation would frequently be referred to as a "courtship," during which time the two conferences would explore the possibility of an actual "marriage" or merger. After a less-than-passionate nine-year courtship, however, they decided that no such marriage was possible. The two groups quietly parted company in 1962, their relationship the victim of geographic distance, differences in church polity, a lack of broad-based support among their members, and a nascent ambivalence toward their own Mennonite identities.

The EMB and EMC were seemingly well matched for each other, bringing to their relationship similar experiences and values. Both were small splinter movements that had broken away from larger Mennonite groups several decades earlier. The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference began in 1889 through the union of a congregation in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, led by Aaron Wall with two congregations under the leadership of Isaac Peters in Henderson and Jansen, Nebraska. All three congregations had split off from existing Mennonite congregations in the late 1870s and early 1880s, amidst accusations that their parent congregations accepted members without personal conversion experiences and did not practice adequate church discipline. The new groups also wished to begin Sunday schools and Bible studies, innovations that offended many in the existing congregations.[3] Originally known as the Conference of United Mennonite Brethren of North America, it soon added new congregations in several other western states and provinces. By about 1918 the conference had changed its name to the Defenseless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America, and in 1937 became the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference. At the time of the affiliation it had a membership of approximately 1,900.

The Evangelical Mennonite Church was founded in 1866 at Adams County, Indiana, under the leadership of Old Order Amish bishop Henry Egly. As with the EMB, issues of church discipline and church membership precipitated Egly's break with the Old Order Amish in 1865. Originally known as the "Egly Amish," the group later adopted the name Defenseless Mennonite Church, and became the Evangelical Mennonite Church in 1948.[4] Its membership at the time of affiliation stood at about 2,000.

Despite their similarities in origin and spiritual values, the EMB and EMC did also bring significant differences into their affiliation. The EMB was rooted in the Dutch-Prussian-Russian stream of the Mennonite church, while the EMC

traced its history back to the Amish Church and the Swiss-south German tradition of Mennonitism. While doctrinally similar, these two Mennonite traditions had developed markedly different attitudes and practices on a variety of issues.[5] The EMC and EMB also were widely separated geographically. Most EMC congregations were located east of the Mississippi River, particularly in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. The EMB, on the other hand, was thinly spread across the western United States and Canada with no large concentration of churches in any one area.

The first serious contact between the EMB and EMC occurred three decades before the actual founding of the CEM. In 1919 EMB evangelist George P. Schultz founded an English-language paper by the name of *Good Tidings* to supplement the official EMB German-language conference paper, *Evangelisationsbote*. Schultz, who was based in Chicago, also came into contact about this time with Christian R. Egle, minister of the Salem Defenseless Mennonite Church near Gridley, Illinois, and editor, until 1917, of the EMC paper *Heils-Bote*. Schultz and Egle were instrumental in arranging for a merger between *Good Tidings* and the English-language EMC paper *Zion's Call* in 1921. The new paper, known as *Zion's Tidings*, was published jointly until 1931, when Schultz resigned as editor. There was no further EMB involvement in the paper after that time, and it became a publication of the EMC alone.[6]

Evidently, Schultz and Egle also discussed the possibility of the EMB and EMC affiliating during this time and may have seen the merger of the two papers as a first step in that direction. It does not appear that these merger discussions progressed very far. The fact that the EMB still used German as its primary language in the 1920s, while the EMC had for the most part made the transition to English, undoubtedly stood in the way of such negotiations.[7] It is also unclear whether many other EMB leaders shared Schultz's interest in such a merger. His location in Chicago would have put him in closer contact with EMC congregations and leaders than was the case for most other EMB leaders farther to the west. The EMB and EMC did, however, maintain sufficient contact for *The Mennonite Cyclopedic Dictionary* to note in 1937 that the two groups worked "in close harmony" with each other.[8]

Discussions of an EMB/EMC affiliation resurfaced in the mid-1940s. On October 17, 1947, representatives from both groups met in Chicago for the first "Joint Unity Committee Meeting." Committee members spent most of this first meeting discussing the respective conference positions on various issues. They found themselves compatible on most of them, the only significant difference being mode of baptism. The EMC generally baptized by pouring, though it would also immerse or sprinkle at the request of the person being baptized. The EMB had for the most part made a transition from pouring to immersion by the 1930s, though they allowed latitude similar to the EMC. At the close of this meeting, the delegates passed a resolution recommending that "definite steps be taken" to better acquaint the ministry and laity of the two groups with each other, and expressed confidence that a unified plan for affiliation could be reached with regard to issues of doctrine, polity, institutions and missions.[9]

The Unity Committee met several more times over the next two years to work out the various details for the proposed affiliation. Early in this process, the committee raised the issue of a "liberal/evangelical" split within the Mennonite world, and the possibility that their affiliation would strengthen the Evangelical faction. In November 1948 it was noted that "we have no Conference for the evangelical group." At the January 11, 1949, meeting, "the expression was made that the two camps, modernistic and fundamental, are automatically separating themselves in these days."[10] It seems clear that the members of the Unity Committee saw themselves as creating a vehicle for "Evangelical Mennonites" who had become uncomfortable with the perceived liberalism of many other Mennonites. This agenda would be voiced many times over in the coming years.

At the January 11, 1949, Unity Committee meeting the members addressed the question of inviting the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (KMB) into their proposed affiliation. While this was the first time the KMB had contemplated unification with the EMC, there was already a precedent for such discussions between them and the EMB. Conversations regarding an EMB/KMB merger took place at the 1921 KMB conference and in 1922 it chose a committee to examine the issue more thoroughly. The discussion reached an impasse in 1926 when the KMB decided that it could not unite with the EMB unless the latter's members were willing to be rebaptized by immersion.[11] It does, however, appear that occasional conversations with regard to a KMB/EMB merger continued sporadically over the following decades.

John R. Dick reported at the January 1949 meeting that he had been approached by KMB leaders interested in again pursuing the question of merger. The fact that the EMB had for the most part switched to an immersion mode of baptism by the 1940s undoubtedly paved the way for the KMB to approach Dick at this time. The Unity Committee agreed to invite KMB representatives to attend future meetings to ascertain their interest in formally joining the affiliation discussions.[12]

The KMB response to this overture was ambivalent. On February 8, 1949, KMB Chairman John J. Kleinsasser wrote to the members of the KMB Executive Committee,

> Today I received a letter from Rev. J. R. Dick of Omaha Nebraska which almost made my hair turn a little grayer. In that letter Br. Dick invites our Conference to meet with the Committees of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference [sic] and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren. The purpose of this meeting is to find a possible ground or bases of unity. Personally I would much rather meet with the E.M.B. alone and leave out the E.M.C. But as it appears it is too late for that. . . . The possibility of union with these two Conferences seem [sic] rather an impossibility. I can see a positive union with the E.M.B. but a union with the two is hard to imagine. However I strongly believe that we dare not turn down this proposal.[13]

Several KMB representatives attended the Joint Unity Committee meeting in March, 1949. Kleinsasser noted there that only the issue of baptism stood between the KMB and a merger with the other two groups. H. E. Bertsche of the EMC responded by noting that many EMC congregations were moving in the direction of immersion baptism; E. G. Steiner went further by stating that the EMC would likely be willing to adopt any form of baptism as a matter of polity, but was not open to making it a dogmatic issue. Despite reservations, the KMB representatives declared themselves open to presenting the program of affiliation at its next annual conference.[14] The KMB, however, took no

active part in any future affiliation discussions with the other two groups.

On May 30 to June 1, 1950, the first Joint Conference of the EMB and EMC took place on the campus of Grace Bible Institute in Omaha, Nebraska. This event marked the first time that more than a handful of representatives from each conference had met face-to-face. Following a keynote address by EMB minister A. P. Toews on "The Unity of the Spirit," the conference addressed the general theme: "An Evaluation of our Purpose and Conviction." Two addresses helped to set the tone for this theme. The first, by EMC minister Gordon Zimmerman, was entitled "The Modern Attack on Evangelical Christianity"; John R. Dick followed with a sermon on "Why We Believe We Can More Vigorously Approach This Problem Together."[15] Once again, the concern of conference leaders to define themselves over against liberalism and modernism is evident.

The EMB and EMC met for a second Unity Conference on June 9-10, 1951. At that meeting the Unity Committee, now renamed the General Board, presented to the delegates ten proposals for affiliation. According to this document, both conferences would continue to function independently as before, "with due consideration of the confession of faith, policies and practise [sic] of the General Conference." The General Board would appoint a committee to study the merger of the two conference periodicals, *Gospel Tidings* (EMB) and *Zion's Tidings* (EMC). Mission programs would remain independent, "with a continual effort being made to unite these interests as time and opportunity permit." The two conferences would combine in electing joint representatives to national associations such as the National Association of Evangelicals and Mennonite Central Committee. The credentials of ministers would be recognized in each conference and an interchange of ministers encouraged. With regard to education, the committee agreed that "a list of approved schools be drawn up and recommended to the conferences until such time as we have such schools of our own." Neither the EMB nor EMC operated schools, and one of the often-repeated motivations for affiliation was the hope that a unified conference would have the necessary resources to run such a program.[16] Finally, the General Board suggested that the name of this new organization be the "Evangelical Mennonite Conference." This last proposal elicited thirteen other name suggestions from the floor, from which the name "Conference of Evangelical Mennonites" was chosen by ballot vote. The EMC approved the ten proposals at its annual meeting in August 1951; the EMB did so in June 1952.[17]

On April 1, 1952, an experimental combined issue of *Zion's Tidings* and *Gospel Tidings* was published. Beginning with the January 15, 1953, issue, this arrangement became a regular practice. Each appeared under its own title but with identical contents. Joint issues appeared until July 1953, when the two papers ceased publication and were replaced by the jointly-published *The Evangelical Mennonite*, edited by E. G. Steiner.

The lead article of this new periodical announced the creation of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites on June 14, 1953. Following the approval of the ten proposals for affiliation by the two conferences, they met in Omaha on June 11-14 for the inaugural meeting of the new conference. The General Board elected at these sessions consisted of President Reuben Short (EMC), Vice President John R. Dick (EMB), Secretary H. E. Bertsche (EMC), Treasurer H. H. Dick (EMB), J. R. Barkman (EMB), Milo Rediger (EMC), E. G. Steiner (EMC), and A. P. Toews (EMB). Three commissions were also created at these meetings: The Commission on Missions (A. P. Toews, Chairman), the Commission on Promotions (E. G. Steiner, Chairman) and the Commission on Education (Milo Rediger, Chairman).

In many ways, the inaugural conference of 1953 marks the high watermark of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites. The enthusiasm surrounding that event never seemed matched again in following years, and their ongoing relationship might best be characterized as one of indifference. For example, *The Evangelical Mennonite* during the years 1953-1962 contains almost no articles reflecting on the affiliation and its meaning for the two conferences. Given that *The Evangelical Mennonite* would have been the primary source of information about the affiliation for most members of the EMB and EMC, this absence of commentary is significant. Only a small percentage of each group's membership attended the joint conferences, and even fewer participated on the General Board or commissions. Add to this the fact that the two conferences were not in close geographic proximity to each other, and one has the ingredients for a less than successful affiliation.

The issue of affiliation was not totally ignored by the editors of *The Evangelical Mennonite*. In August of 1954, for example, Reuben Short wrote an article calling for the creation of a unified Evangelical Mennonite college. He noted that increasing numbers of Mennonite young people desired a college education and that "the survival of a church group will be largely determined by taking advantage of this opportunity of educating its youth." Short acknowledged that Grace Bible Institute already served "to bring evangelical Mennonites to a common understanding and a common ground," but suggested that an evangelical Mennonite school with a liberal arts curriculum was also needed.

Short recommended that the CEM consider establishing a junior college in the near future, which could eventually grow into a full liberal arts college.[18] While others in the conference echoed Short's concern at various points, no concrete progress toward the creation of such a school seems to have taken place. Even as a unified group, the CEM had a membership of about four thousand members—hardly a large enough constitutency to support a viable college program.

Other articles in *The Evangelical Mennonite* suggested that neither the EMB nor the EMC had fully embraced the idea of an affiliation. In June of 1955, on the eve of the first CEM General Conference since the inaugural meeting of 1953, Reuben Short raised the question, "Can We Erase the Dotted Line?" He acknowledged that some could not understand the need for spending time and money to gather as a joint conference. In response, Short suggested,

> We have gotten together for three preceding conferences. We needed to get acquainted. We still need more of the same. We formulated plans whereby we could start working together. . . . There is still a dotted line dividing our activity in the field of labor. . . . Are we ready to erase the dotted line?[19]

It is difficult to know whether the 1955 General Conference made any progress in erasing "dotted lines"; *The Evan-*

gelical Mennonite limited its reporting of the event to a one-and-a-half-column summary by editor E. G. Steiner that said nothing specifically regarding the affiliation.[20] Once again, those not in attendance at the conference would have had little opportunity to assess the value of the EMB/EMC affiliation.

Reuben Short's few articles on the topic of affiliation and merger in *The Evangelical Mennonite* were generally optimistic and encouraging. The same cannot be said of his EMB counterparts. In a 1957 article entitled "Too Old to Marry?" for example, John R. Dick compared the EMC and EMB to an elderly couple too set in their respective ways to marry each other:

> It is not so easy for two or more conferences to unite after many years of independent existence. It would mean compromises, adjustments and some heartaches. The question is repeatedly raised—"Can our two Conferences continue to progress in our present affiliated relationship indefinitely? Are we cooling off instead of becoming warmer? . . . We feel a sense of inadequacy to determine a clear-cut answer on the question. While we are most reluctant to think of disbanding, we must on the other hand prayerfully continue to study the whole plan—present and future.[21]

In December of 1958 the CEM General Board met to examine the questions raised by Dick's 1957 article. The Board recommended that the affiliation, "which has been of marked mutual blessing for almost ten years," continue, but in a modified fashion. The triennial General Conference sessions would be scrapped and replaced by "representative and regional conferences," which would "give opportunity for members at a distance to attend." This decision almost certainly spelled the end of regular lay contact between the EMB and EMC. The large distance between their respective congregations made it unlikely that any single regional conference would include significant representation from both groups. The General Board further recommended that CEM commissions be discontinued and that only the General Board continue to function.[22] The result of these decisions was to eliminate almost every point of contact between the two conferences, except for the jointly published *Evangelical Mennonite*.

In the spring of 1960 EMB President Henry Brandt wrote to EMC President Reuben Short stating his position on the future of their affiliation:

> I usually tell any prospective couple, that up to the point of the declaration in a wedding ceremony they can back out, but after that the deal is final. I think that we all realize that a merger would be final, and because of this fact, we seem to be either fearful or cautious towards such a move. I believe that our two constituencies are not too well acquainted with each other, in spite of our paper and our knowledge of our respective leaders and a few pastors. . . .
>
> Our joint effort with the paper seems to have worked very well up to a point. But after all these years I have the impression that we have two church papers bound under one cover and one name.
>
> From our side there are two questions which come to my mind when I think of a merger, namely: 1. Are we as the E.M.B. Conference willing to give up our *special interests* . . . and share them with others? 2. Are we as the E.M.B. Conference willing to assume responsibility in the work and interest of the E.M.C. Conference, as they are willing to share with us?[23]

Short's response to Brandt indicates that the EMC may not have been quite as ready to give up on affiliation or merger as was the EMB:

> The questions you proposed for yourself are equally adaptable to us. . . . I refer you to our business agenda for the conference held June 30 through July 3, 1955. In stating our policies which at that time we considered feasible, we said . . . "That the private interests of each group be respected, maintained, and encouraged. . . . That in such areas of life and service where united effort would be an advantage, the conference foster participation on a voluntary basis."
>
> If we observe this principle of cooperation, I can see no reason why a merger of our two groups would not be possible. . . . We could be working arm in arm within the framework of the total Mennonite household. This would give us considerable prestige in the eyes of the world and surely would be a credit to the cause of Christ at large. We must not be deterred by a spirit of bigotry. This is a time when we need to throw our shoulders to the wheel in a united effort for the cause of Christ while we still have time and opportunity.[24]

A few months later John R. Dick lent his voice to the discussion in another letter to Reuben Short:

> Our conference days are before us. We regret that the dates of our conference days coincide this year. It was thoughtless on our part to fail to remember that you have your dates set for the third week in August. . . . I wish to assure you, Bro. Short, that in establishing the date of our convention there was no intention of conflict—we just didn't think. And we are sorry it happened. Perhaps none of your people would have come this far west, and some of our people may yet attend your conference—we trust so. . . .
>
> This matter regarding our future plans concerning the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites will likely come into focus at our respective conferences. . . . We are not all satisfied with the present plan, and neither are we united on either merging or disannulling the affiliation.... In your letter to Bro. Brandt, you seem to feel inclined toward a merger. Had we merged at the beginning, these nagging feelings of indecision need not have troubled us. The question is still before us—where do we go from here?[25]

George P. Schultz, Evangelical Mennonite Brethren leader, ca. 1924

The decision by the EMB to schedule its annual conference at the same time that the EMC usually held its meetings, though inadvertent, reinforces the sense that the EMB in particular had no strong interest in continuing the affiliation and certainly not in moving toward a complete merger.

By 1960 it seemed obvious that there was little to stop the demise of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites. Triennial general conferences had come to an end in 1955 and joint commissions had been dissolved in 1958. *The Evangelical Mennonite*, though still published jointly, did little to serve as a forum for discussions of affiliation or

merger, or to strengthen a sense of unity between the two conferences. There is little surprise in the 1962 decisions by each group to dissolve the CEM after nine years of affiliation. The announcement of the decision, in September of that year, explained that

> the proposal to terminate made note of the geographic distribution of the churches which prohibits an adequate desirable fellowship and wise employment of administrative financial resources, the problem of synchronizing methods in the missions program, the need for more direct promotion of the Conferences through singular efforts, and that said affiliation did not appear to resolve the problem of higher education for the two bodies.[26]

John R. Dick, in the same issue of *The Evangelical Mennonite*, provided an epitaph for CEM, entitled "Still One at Heart":

> Time and experiences have taught us that sincere intentions in laying the groundwork of a building can not always envision the completion of that building. This does not mean that our labors and prayers have been in vain. Lasting gain has come as a result of our unified effort to promote the fields of administration, missions and evangelism. While we concede to the annulment of our organizational ties, we do not herewith terminate our mutual love, respect and spiritual helpfulness gained during the past decade.[27]

Still one at heart? Perhaps. The question is a moot one, since the EMC and EMB parted with scarcely a backward glance. *The Evangelical Mennonite* appeared for the last time as a joint publication with the September 1962 issue; in October 1962 the EMB revived *Gospel Tidings*, while the EMC continued publication of *The Evangelical Mennonite* as its own periodical. In subsequent years one is hard pressed to find any published references to the nine-year affiliation. How could two groups supposedly "one at heart" have so quickly forgotten about each other?

Two answers to this question stand out most prominently. First, the affiliation between the EMC and EMB never became a concrete reality for most members of either conference. The entire process—from the first conversations of the 1940s to the 1962 decision to end the relationship—took its cues from a small number of conference leaders rather than a broad-based cross-section of the two conferences. No grass-roots call for inter-Mennonite cooperation seems to have brought EMB and EMC leaders together in the late 1940s, nor did those leaders make any efforts to bring their constituencies into the process except in the most superficial ways. The two groups met as a General Conference only four times—in 1950, 1951, 1953 and 1955; for the last seven years of their affiliation, no large-scale joint meetings took place. It seems likely that many CEM members never actually met anyone from the other conference during the nine years of their affiliation. Nor did the jointly-published *Evangelical Mennonite* serve to create a bridge between the two groups. While it did publish local news and mission reports from both conferences, there was almost no thoughtful writing on the meaning of the affiliation or efforts to educate the two conferences about each other.

A second reason for the demise of the CEM has to do with each group's attitude toward inter-Mennonite cooperation generally. As splinter movements within the larger North American Mennonite world, both the EMB and EMC found reason to distrust certain parts of that faith tradition. This attitude has been particularly evident within the EMB in the years following the CEM affiliation. In 1969, for example, the EMB withdrew from Mennonite Central Committee, largely because of that agency's perceived emphasis on ministry to physical rather than spiritual needs.[28] Also at the 1969 EMB annual convention the EMB first publicly addressed the question of whether it even wished to remain identified with the Mennonite faith tradition. Conference president Frank C. Wiens, in his keynote address, unhesitatingly identified the conference with the Evangelical movement, but raised questions about its continued participation with other Mennonites:

> Who are we? . . . We say that we are MENNONITE. What does the light of truth reveal? . . . We don't like what we see and we are further confused by the apostasy of those who say they are also MENNONITE. . . . The defection of a segment of the MENNONITE Church to tradition, culture and the preaching of a mere social gospel has left us in a quandry as to who we are.[29]

The question of Mennonite identity became a recurring theme at EMB conventions during the next two decades. It was resolved in 1987 with the decision to change the conference name to "Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches" and in that way to remove itself from any explicit connection to the Mennonite faith tradition.

Ambivalence toward Mennonitism has been less pronounced on the part of the EMC. The number of "inter-Mennonite" articles and news items in *The Evangelical Mennonite* and its successor *Evangelical Mennonite Build* following 1962 was much higher than that in the *Gospel Tidings*, where they were virtually nonexistent. The EMC continues to participate in organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference, whereas the EMB/FEBC withdrew from both. Finally, the very fact that the EMC still uses the word "Mennonite" in its name indicates a higher level of comfort with its heritage than that exhibited by its former counterpart.

Nonetheless, ambivalence toward Mennonitism on the part of the EMC remains. The "Church Member Profile" studies of 1972 and 1989 indicate that the EMC scored lowest of all five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups studied on questions generally associated with "Anabaptist" beliefs.[30] Furthermore, a recent study of the EMC by Stan Nussbaum indicates that the EMC is less than certain of its Mennonite identity. He suggests that the

> EMC respects the commitment of the Mennonite household to the principles of Christian discipleship and service. EMC enjoys cooperating with Mennonite agencies as its resources permit. Yet EMC which 60 years ago was considerably involved in inter-Mennonite fellowship now refuses to emphasize Mennonite doctrinal distinctives, and so it puts a strain on the brotherly relationship. EMC is not sure it still belongs in this family, and the family must have reason to wonder if a child with so little respect for the fathers is really a credit to the Mennonite name.[31]

While most of these examples of ambivalence toward the Mennonite faith tradition by both the EMB and EMC date since 1962, it seems clear that these attitudes were already present during the years of affiliation. One can interpret their dichotomy between "liberal" and "evangelical" Mennonites as the first stage in a wholesale criticism of the Mennonite church. The CEM thus represented an attempt at inter-Mennonite merger on the part of two groups beginning to wonder if they were indeed "Mennonite" at all. Given that their shared Mennonite heritage was the primary point of commonality between

the EMB and EMC, and that neither group was entirely comfortable with that religious tradition, it seems hard to imagine that the two could have created a lasting merger. Had other differences such as geographic distance not complicated the relationship, their shared ambivalence might have served as an effective bond between them. Under the circumstances, however, it probably served only to send the two groups in different directions and ensure the demise of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites.

ENDNOTES

[1]Since 1987 known as the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches.

[2]*Report of Inaugural Conference of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites held at Grace Bible Institute, Omaha, Nebraska, June 11-14, 1953;* "Conference of Evangelical Mennonites a Reality: Impressive Inaugural Service Held at Omaha, Neb., June 14," *The Evangelical Mennonite*, July 1953, 1.

[3]Theodore Schmidt, "The Mennonites of Nebraska," (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1933), 29; Ferdinand P. Schultz, *A History of the Settlement of German Mennonites from Russia at Mountain Lake, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1938), 79-80.

[4]E. G. Steiner, "History of the Evangelical Mennonite Church" in *Report of Inaugural Conference of the Conference of Evangelical Mennonites held at Grace Bible Institute, Omaha, Nebraska, June 11-14, 1953* (n.p., 1953), 18-19; Stan Nussbaum, *You Must Be Born Again: a History of the Evangelical Mennonite Church*, revised ed. (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1991), 2-3.

[5]James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite History and Self-Understanding: North American Mennonitism as a Bipolar Mosaic," in *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Calvin Wall Redekop (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988), 83-99.

[6]Arnold C. Schultz, "George P. Schultz: Pioneer Chicago Mennonite Churchman," *Mennonite Heritage* 9 (1982): 42; H. F. Epp, "Glimpses of the History of Our Conference Paper," *Gospel Tidings*, August 1948, 9.

[7]E. G. Steiner, "History of the Evangelical Mennonite Church," 21.

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[12]Special Unity Committee meeting, 11 January 1949, Record Group T135, Center for MB Studies.

[13]J. J. Kleinsasser to members of the Executive Committee of the KMB Conference and the Foreign Mission Board, 8 February 1949, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church Records, Center for MB Studies.

[14]Minutes of the Joint Unity Committee Meeting, 15-16 March 1949, Record Group T135, Center for MB Studies.

[15]"Program: The Joint Conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Church to be held on May 30 to June 1, 1950 at the Grace Bible Institute, Omaha, Nebraska," *Gospel Tidings*, 1 April 1950, 6.

[16]Second Unity Conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference [sic] and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren held at Omaha, Nebraska, June 9, 10, 1951, Record Group T135, Center for MB Studies.

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[18]Reuben Short, "A Most Worthwhile Endowment," *The Evangelical Mennonite*, 15 August 1954, 3.

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[23]Henry Brandt to Reuben Short, 10 May 1960, Record Group T135, Center for MB Studies.

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[26]"EMB & EMC Dissolve Affiliation," *The Evangelical Mennonite* 15 September 1962, 3.

[27]John R. Dick, "Still One at Heart," *The Evangelical Mennonite*, 15 September 1962, 3.

[28]"Highlights of the '69 Convention," *Gospel Tidings* (August 1969), 13; William Regehr to Kevin Rempel, 29 January 1982 (letter in possession of author).

[29]Frank C. Wiens, "This We Believe," *Gospel Tidings* (August 1969), i-2.

[30]J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later: a Profile of Five Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Denominations* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1975), 114-116; J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 71.

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The Evangelical Mennonite

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Conference of Evangelical Mennonites a Reality

John Friesen

A Delayed Merger

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba and the General Conference

On 9 March 1971 the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba voted to dissolve. With that decision, the central organization, the *Gemeinde*, ceased to exist, and in its place local congregations assumed control over their own affairs.[1]

Five years earlier, on 27 June 1966 a central Bergthaler Church delegate meeting voted:

> to recommend that we join the General Conference Mennonite Church, but that the actual decision to join or not to join be left to the discretion of the local congregations that make up the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba.[2]

Since the Bergthaler Mennonites immigrated into Manitoba in the 1870s, why did almost a century elapse before this step could be taken?

There are several reasons for the delay. There were different historical developments in the two groups which created mistrust. There were some events which caused misunderstandings. There were insensitive actions taken by the General Conference Mennonite Church. There were Bergthaler leaders who felt their group's historical emphases would be weakened in a merger. All of these reasons combined to delay the day when the Bergthaler churches felt able to join the General Conference.

Part of the reason for the delay originated in Russia, the background to both the Bergthaler Church and the General Conference churches in the western states. General Conference churches in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota had their roots primarily in the Molotschna settlement in Russia. They had been shaped by educational and religious reforms which had swept through the Molotschna in the decades prior to emigration to North America.[3]

The Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Manitoba had its roots in the Bergthal settlement in Russia, a Chortitza settlement daughter colony founded in 1836.[4] The religious and educational renewals in the larger Mennonite settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna largely bypassed the Bergthal settlement. In addition, the reforms had raised suspicion and resistance within the Bergthal settlement.[5] This suspicion of the reforms, and especially of the Molotschna people who advocated the changes, continued to be at least one factor in the Bergthaler Church's hesitancy to relate closely to the General Conference.

This feeling of suspicion was particularly evident in the Bergthaler bishop Gerhard Wiebe. Wiebe was elected bishop in 1866 and lead the church during its emigration to Manitoba in the 1870s. In his discussions with other Mennonite leaders prior to emigration he often felt belittled, patronized and misunderstood.[6]

When the Bergthaler settlement decided to immigrate to North America, it chose Manitoba rather than the United States. Partly this decision was made because of the cheap land which was available in Manitoba. Getting sufficient, affordable land for its landless members was a major goal. Partly the Bergthal settlement chose Manitoba because of its isolation. Manitoba was perceived to afford a safe place to develop the Bergthaler vision of a true church. This vision, as articulated by Wiebe in his memoirs, was that the whole life of the settlement, especially the village and the schools, should be under the direction of the church.[7]

During the first several years after immigration into Manitoba, the question of relationship to the General Conference did not arise. To some extent this was because the pioneer years consumed most of the available energy. Organizing the church structures was a very difficult task since the Bergthaler church split into two parts, one half settling on the townships set aside for Mennonites on the east side of the Red River, and the other half settling on land west of the Red River.[8] Wiebe remained with the group on the east side.

Partly this lack of contact with the General Conference was due to Wiebe's suspicion of the Conference. In the 1870s about 17,000 Mennonites from southern Russia emigrated to North America. Many of the 10,000 who were settled in the western states came from the Molotschna. A large portion of these settlers joined the General Conference shortly after immigration.[9] Wiebe's negative experiences with them in Russia did not incline him to pursue relationships in North America.

During the Bergthaler Church's settlement and pioneer years, contact with the "old" Mennonites was stronger than with the General Conference Mennonite Church. One of the people to whom the Bergthalers related was John F. Funk, an "old" Mennonite publisher in Elkhart, Indiana.[10] The contacts with Funk had started when Bergthal delegates came to inspect land in the United States and Manitoba in 1873, and they continued through correspondence during the following years. Funk's paper, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, was read fairly widely in southern Manitoba. Contacts were also established with Swiss Mennonites in Ontario who assisted the Bergthaler and other Mennonites in Manitoba during their search

for land, in housing them during their trek to Manitoba, and in providing them with loans during the early years. Despite these contacts, the question of merging or formally relating to the "old" Mennonite Church does not seem to have been raised.[11]

During the 1880s the Bergthaler Church divided into two parts, the part on the East Reserve taking the name Chortitzer Mennonite Church, and the part on the West Reserve retaining the Bergthaler name. The Bergthaler Church was lead by Johann Funk who had been ordained by Wiebe in 1887. The contacts with the General Conference were all made by the Bergthaler Church on the West Reserve. The following history will thus follow only the story of the Bergthaler Church on the West Reserve, and drop the story of the Chortitzer Church.

The Bergthaler Church made an important contact with the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1891 in the hiring of Heinrich H. Ewert as principal of a new teacher training school in Gretna, Manitoba. Bishop Funk wanted to improve the quality of elementary schools among Mennonites, and to accomplish this he proposed the establishment of a teacher training school in Gretna. Since the provincial government wanted an inspector to help register Mennonite schools, the Bergthaler Church and the Manitoba government jointly hired Heinrich H. Ewert in 1891 as principal and as government school inspector.[12]

Ewert was an 1873 immigrant from the Thorn region, Prussia, and had gained an advanced education in the United States. In 1882 he had been asked to head the Kansas Conference School, which in 1883 moved to Halstead. He was an ordained General Conference minister, and he promoted the formation of Sunday Schools.[13] Thus when Ewert came to Manitoba in 1891, he could have been expected to draw the Bergthaler Church into the General Conference. This, however, did not happen. The majority of the Bergthaler Church members did not agree with Bishop Funk's vision of a teacher training school and disapproved of his new principal from Kansas. Most of the church left Funk in the early 1890s to form the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church. Funk was left with less than twenty percent of the membership.[14] Ewert attended General Conference sessions, reported regularly to the church about conference events, and yet his presence in Manitoba did not lead to a merger with the General Conference.

Another contact with the General Conference Mennonite Church was made through the Home Mission Board. In 1887 the Board sent its field secretary, J. B. Baer on a two month preaching tour of Manitoba.[15] His evaluation of his own efforts reflected the paternalistic attitude of the General Conference Home Mission Board toward Manitoba Mennonites, when he said he had been able, "to make the beginning for the revival of spiritual life in [Manitoba]."[16] Recognizing that Manitoba was becoming an evangelistic free-for-all, the Board in 1891 appointed N. F. Toews as their *reiseprediger* (itinerant minister) to the Manitoba region.[17] Toews, from Mountain Lake, Minnesota, had been raised in the Molotschna settlement in Russia, and in the United States had been influenced by Moody Bible Institute. Toews made his home base in Gretna and preached in the different Bergthaler Church meeting places from 1891-1894. Initially supportive of his efforts, Ewert, in 1893 said that due to Toews' preaching, "Spring had come to Manitoba."[18]

In 1894 problems developed for Toews. He advocated establishing a Bergthaler Church in the town of Gretna. Since the Gretna school, with Ewert as the principal, had become the religious center of the Bergthaler membership in Gretna, Toews was in effect challenging the authority of Ewert. With this proposal he gained Ewert's opposition.

Toews ran into additional problems. In his preaching, Toews called for conversions, and the people who were con-

Home of Jakob Friesen, colony secretary in Bergthal colony, Ukraine, ca. 1910

Heinrich H. Ewert, ca. 1916

verted under his preaching wanted to be baptized. The Mennonite Brethren missionaries who preached in southern Manitoba at the same time, baptized their converts immediately upon conversion. Toews' converts wanted to be baptized immediately as well. Bishop Funk, however, would not hear of this. He insisted that people who wanted to be baptized go through the regular catechism instruction conducted every spring and be baptized at Pentecost. Many of the young people, who were converted by Toews' preaching, simply joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. The result was that Toews lost the support of many Bergthaler people. The leaders felt he was secretly working for the Mennonite Brethren missionaries, and the young people felt he had let them down.[19]

In 1894, the General Conference Mission Board, realizing that Toews was in trouble, sent their secretary, J. J. Balzer, also from Mountain Lake, to settle the baptism issue. The attitude with which Balzer came caused resistance almost immediately. In one of his discussions he gave the impression that the Mission Board was interested in baptizing the new converts and in establishing a General Conference church in southern Manitoba.[20] Balzer was told if this was his intention, he was "meddling in affairs that were not his concern."[21] Balzer left shortly thereafter.

Within the same year, a third minister from Mountain Lake, H. H. Regier, was invited by someone in the Bergthaler Church to come to Manitoba.[22] Without requiring catechism instruction of the new converts, he baptized them. Even though this action broke with the Bergthaler pattern of spring baptisms after catechism instruction, it was tolerated because it solved the immediate problem. The baptism issue created by Toews had thus been resolved, however, in the process Toews had been discredited. Balzer had further aggravated the situation by suggesting that the General Conference was willing to form churches in Manitoba.[23]

Despite these unfortunate events of 1894, contacts were not totally broken off between the Bergthaler Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. For example, in 1908 the Bergthaler church invited the General Conference Home Mission Board to send H. R. Voth, of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, to Manitoba to conduct evangelistic services. In a letter to the Mission Board, J. J. Balzer expressed his opposition to complying with this request. He described the influence of H. H. Ewert and his brother Benjamin as dictatorial. He argued it was useless to send *reiseprediger* to Manitoba since they could not preach where they wished, but were forced to preach in the regular church services. His advice was, "We are willing to help only if we are able to work completely independently."[24] His letter continued with a personal attack on Ewert. His negative view of the church leadership in Manitoba, and his interest in establishing a General Conference church in Manitoba, kept the relationship with the General Conference cool.

Jacob Hoeppner was ordained as bishop of the Bergthaler Church in 1910 and lead the church until 1926. Those were turbulent years. Canada followed Britain's lead in entering the Great War against Germany and Austria in 1914. The Bergthaler Church, together with the other Mennonite *Gemeinden* in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, gained assurance from the Canadian government that the *Privilegium* of 1873 would be honored, and that all Mennonite men would be exempted from military service.[25]

In the midst of the war, the question of whether to join the General Conference Mennonite Church was raised in the Bergthaler Church. In 1917 H. H. Ewert argued for joining the General Conference. He said, "The fellowship and work of the Conference is very good. Why don't the churches accept the brotherly hand extended by the Conference?"[26] The minutes do not indicate what he meant by "extending a brotherly hand." They do record that at the next Bergthaler Church delegate meeting the decision was made not to join.

The war occasioned a serious controversy between Canadian Mennonites of Russian descent and their respective provincial governments. At issue was control of the schools, since the governments felt they had to gain control of the Mennonite schools in order to instill in Mennonite men the sense of nationalistic pride which was missing in World War I.[27] This controversy resulted in Mennonite loss of their elementary schools and in the eventual immigration of about 7,000 Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay. Since Bergthaler schools were already registered, this controversy did not affect them directly. This controversy, however, had an indirect effect upon Bergthaler relationships with the General Conference. H. H. Ewert became a spokesperson for the conservative faction of the Mennonite community whose schools were being shut down.[28] Earlier an advocate of acculturation, he became increasingly suspicious of the intentions of the Canadian host society and of the various governments. This experience later inclined him to be critical of United States General Conference Mennonites when they began to acculturate rapidly in the 1920s, and made him hesitant to relate too closely to them.

After World War I and the Revolution in Russia, one of the issues that faced the Bergthaler Church, as well as all Russian Mennonites in Canada, was the emigration from the USSR. The Bergthaler Church minister, H. H. Ewert, hosted the organizational meeting of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, the umbrella organization for Canadian Mennonites which brought more than 20,000 Mennonite immigrants from the USSR to Canada in the years 1923 to 1930.[29]

The immigration movement created new tensions between the Bergthaler Church and the General Conference. The immigration movement to Canada was a cooperative effort between Mennonites and the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, on behalf of Russian Mennonites in Canada, had to come up with large sums of money in order to finance the immigration project. In each of the years of heavy immigration, 1923

to 1926, the Board was short of money, and could accept only a portion of the people in Russia awaiting emigration. In each of those years, the General Conference and Mennonite Central Committee had large sums of money available, but refused to release them for the Canadian immigration project. The General Conference and MCC insisted that Russian immigrants should be settled in Mexico, and refused to help the Canadian Board, despite urgent personal pleas by the chair, David Toews. Finally, toward the end of the immigration process, when the Soviet government was already closing the doors, the General Conference released the money it had available.[30]

The migration from the USSR created other problems between the Bergthaler Church and the General Conference. After the immigrants arrived in Canada, the General Conference was fairly generous in providing relief help, such as clothing. In addition, the General Conference also appointed and salaried *reiseprediger* from among the immigrants to minister to the newly arrived groups. The result was that the immigrants gained a positive image of the General Conference, and within a few years most of the non-Mennonite Brethren immigrant churches joined the General Conference. To the Bergthaler leaders the General Conference seemed to be trying to gain undue credit for what was a belated contribution to the immigration process. Also, by salarying immigrant ministers, the General Conference seemed to inject a form of salaried ministry which was foreign to Canadian Mennonite churches.

Hoeppner resigned as bishop in 1926. He ordained David Schulz as his successor, who served until 1964.[31] For almost forty years Schulz lead the Bergthaler Church. His warm pietism, his interest in Christian education, and his good organizational ability attracted new members. He saw church membership almost triple from about 1,160 members to a high of over 3,000 members. During this time the church expanded its meeting places from three to 20.[32] He was the driving force behind the establishment of Elim Bible School in Altona in 1928. During World War II he worked hard for the exemption of Bergthaler Mennonite men from military service. During the early 1940s he led the Bergthaler Church to form a mission program in Mexico jointly with the General Conference.[33] Schulz was thus an inspiring, progressive leader, respected by the Bergthaler Church and involved in the formation of new organizations.

During Schulz's leadership, the relationship to the General Conference went in two directions. On the one hand, there were the factors which were pulling the Bergthaler Church toward the General Conference. These were factors which had developed despite the numerous tensions and misunderstandings which have been noted above. One of the areas of relationship was missions. Since the early 1890s the Bergthaler Church had annual mission festivals. In addition to having its own ministers speak at these festivals, the Bergthaler Church frequently invited General Conference Mission Board members or missionaries on furlough to be speakers. The Bergthaler Church for many years had forwarded its mission money to General Conference mission programs in the United States and overseas. *Der Mitarbeiter*, the Canadian Conference paper edited by H. H. Ewert, carried frequent reports from the General Conference foreign mission stations.[34]

A strong tie to the General Conference was built in 1946, when a Bergthaler member, Anne Penner from Rosenfeld, Manitoba, went to serve in India under the General Conference Mission Board.[35] It was a point of pride for the Bergthaler Church that Anne Penner was the first General Conference missionary from Canada. The relationship to General Conference mission efforts was further strengthened, as noted above, when a joint mission effort was begun in Mexico in the early 1940s.

Another relationship to the General Conference developed in the area of literature. By the 1950s, the Bergthaler Church was using the General Conference hymn book, General Conference Sunday School material, and some of its members were subscribing to General Conference papers, namely *The Mennonite* and *Der Bote*.

A third area of contact with the General Conference was maintained through attendance at the delegate conferences. From the early 1890s onward, Bergthalers attended conference sessions. At first H. H. Ewert attended, later his brother Benjamin, and eventually delegates were elected who were officially visitors at the General Conference sessions. They gave reports to the Bergthaler Church upon their return. The Bergthaler Church was thus kept informed about developments in the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Despite these positive contacts, and Bishop Schulz's more expansionist leadership style, the Bergthaler Church did not join the General Conference Mennonite Church. One of the principal reasons was that the Bergthaler leadership became convinced that the General Conference was being influenced by the spirit of modernism and was promoting practices that could be a danger to the Bergthaler Church. Since World War I there had been troubling signals from the General Conference. During the war, General Conference men had served in the military. In the early 1920s there were indications that the General Conference was being influenced by a new form of Biblical interpretation known as higher criticism. The General Conference was increasingly using the English instead of the German language, introducing various new practices, and its men were joining lodges. In place of discipleship, it was emphasizing reason. These misgivings were confirmed by H. H. Ewert when he attended the General Conference sessions in 1929. He reported his findings to the church and published them in an article in *Der Mitarbeiter*.[36]

The views expressed in this article by Ewert seem to have shaped the Bergthaler Church leaders' views of the General Conference throughout the time that Schulz was bishop. Despite these concerns about the General Conference Mennonite Church, its mission program continued to be supported, and its new hymn books and Sunday school literature was accepted in the churches.

In the 1950s the voices advocating joining the General Conference were raised with increasing frequency and insistence. In the February issue of *Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, one of the ministers, D. D. Klassen, wrote a lengthy article stating the case for joining the General Conference Mennonite Church. His reasons were that a) the Bergthaler Church had sent its mission money to the General Conference for the past 64 years; b) General Conference missionaries were serving under the General Conference Mission Board; c) the Bergthaler Church needed the connection with other churches, and others needed the Bergthaler Church; d) the Canadian Conference was a

district of the General Conference, and the Bergthaler Church was the only church not a member; e) and the General Conference had for many years been inviting the Bergthaler Church to join.[37]

At the Bergthaler Church's *Lehrdienst* meeting in April 1956, a proposal was made to join the General Conference at its triennial sessions in Winnipeg that year.[38] The response by the leadership was cautious. In the March issue of the same paper, Schulz in an editorial warned against moving too hastily and advocated weighing the consequences very carefully.[39] The leadership of the Bergthaler Church was not ready to join and decided to study the issue further.[40]

During Schulz's leadership the decision to join the General Conference could not be made. His suspicions were too great. Also, he resented the fact that the Bergthaler Church should be the one to give up its identity to become part of another organization. In one of the discussions of this issue, he is to have asked, "Why should we join them? Why do they not join us?"[41]

After Schulz's resignation in 1964, the new leaders of the Bergthaler Church, Jake F. Pauls until 1967, and after him Ernest Wiebe, were able to lead the discussions to the point where the church recommended joining the General Conference. But by the time the decision was made, the Bergthaler *Gemeinde* structure was being dismantled, and it thus seemed more appropriate to have the individual congregations join. At the General Conference triennial sessions in Estes Park in 1968, ten Bergthaler congregations joined, and most of the rest joined shortly thereafter.[42] The merger with the General Conference Mennonite Church which had been an issue of discussion and contention for almost a century, had finally happened.

Mennonite Collegiate Institute, Gretna, Manitoba, ca. 1916

ENDNOTES

[1]Minutes of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church Brotherhood Meeting, 9 March 1971, *Gemeindeblatt*, 36 (March-April 1971), 3. The term *Gemeinde* is used to refer to the ecclesiastical pattern which developed among Mennonites in Poland/Prussia and Russia in which an Aeltester (bishop) presided over a church which might meet in more than one meeting place, and be served by numerous lay ministers, depending on the size of the membership. In Manitoba all Mennonite Churches were initially organized into *Gemeinden*.

[2]Minutes of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church Brotherhood, 27 June 1966, MHC vol. 727.

[3]Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Churches and Religious Developments in Russia 1850-1914," in John Friesen, ed. *Mennonites in Russia* (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1989), 149-150.

[4]William Schroeder. *The Bergthaler Colony*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1986).

[5]James Urry, "The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889)" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1978). See especially the chapters on school reforms (p. 342-399) and educational reforms (p. 527-586). Both reforms had little influence in Bergthal.

[6]Schroeder, *Bergthal*, 128-129; Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, tr. by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg, Man.: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981), 26-32; Harry Loewen, "Emigration in the 1870s" in Friesen, *Mennonites in Russia*, 127-143.

[7]Wiebe, *Causes*, 33-34.

[8]For discussions of the settlement patterns, see E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesens, 1955), 61-70; and Adolf Ens, "Relations with Governments Western Canada 1870-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ottawa, 1978), 27-102.

[9]Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, *Open Doors: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975); Edmund G. Kaufman, *General Conference Mennonite Pioneers* (North Newton, Kan.: Bethel College, 1973); James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: the Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press, 1975).

[10]*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Funk, John Fretz."

[11]Frank H. Epp. *Mennonites in Canada 1789-1920* (Toronto, Ont.: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 289.

[12]Ens, "Mennonite Relations," 172-173; Paul Schaefer, *Heinrich H. Ewert: Teacher, Educator and Minister of the Mennonites*, tr. by Ida Toews (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC Publications, 1990), 19-30.

[13]Schaefer, *Ewert*, 14-19.

[14]Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 295-298.

[15]H. P. Krehbiel, *The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church of the Mennonites of North America* (Canton, Ohio: H. P. Krehbiel, 1898), vol. I, 21.

[16]Krehbiel, *History*, 21.

[17]Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 297; Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), 103.

[18]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 103.

[19]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 107.

[20]In a letter to the General Conference Home Mission Board in 30 August 1894, Balzer argued the case that starting a General Conference church in Manitoba would be beneficial and would not decrease the support for the school in Gretna. It would reduce Ewert's authority, and this Balzer saw as positive. MHC vol. 727.

[21]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 108.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid.

[24]J. J. Balzer to the General Conference Mission Board, 28 April 1908, MHC vol. 727.

[25]For a discussion of the *Privilegium* which Mennonites negotiated in 1873 with the Canadian government, see Ens, "Mennonite Relations," 28-44.

[26]Protokol der Lehrdienst Beratung, 1 March 1917, MHC vol. 727.

[27]Ens, "Mennonite Relations," 173-174.

[28]Ens, "Mennonite Relations," 204.

[29]Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1962), 72-73.

[30]Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 158-159.

[31]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 79.

[32]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 118.

[33]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 331-338.

[34]For example, *Der Mitarbeiter*, the monthly Canadian Conference paper, carried a sixteen page quarterly insert, "Beilage fuer den Mitarbeiter. Berichte aus der Mission der Allgemeinen Konferenz der Mennoniten von Nord Amerika." *Das Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, which began publication in 1936, carried mission-related articles from 1942 onward.

[35]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 338.

[36]*Der Mitarbeiter*, September 1929, 6-7.

[37]*Das Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, February 1956, 4.

[38]Protokol der Lehrdienst Beratung, April 1956. MHC vol. 727.

[39]*Das Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*, March 1956, 2.

[40]See the minutes of the Church's *Lehrdienst* meetings in 1956 and 1957. MHC vol. 727.

[41]Based on an interview with Henry J. Gerbrandt, November 19, 1992.

[42]Gerbrandt, *Adventure*, 359.

Marlene Epp

Cooperation to Amalgamation to Merger

The Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada

When Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union stepped off the train in Waterloo County, Ontario, in 1924 and stepped into the buggies of their Swiss Mennonite hosts, it may have seemed hard to believe that these were their co-religionists, and even harder to imagine that some 60 years later they would be signing an agreement to integrate. Their clothes were different, their language was strange, and their customs unfamiliar. Yet the friendships which were formed in these Ontario Mennonite homes—in some cases the newcomers were hosted for as long as a year—were the beginnings of cooperation between these two groups which continued for many years. The situation may have been much the same when Amish immigrants from Europe settled just west of the Ontario Swiss Mennonites 100 years earlier.

On October 31, 1987, three Mennonite conferences in Ontario—the descendants of the immigrants described above—signed an agreement to integrate as one conference and thus cease to exist as separate organizations. The new entity, the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada (MCEC), which was officially born in March 1988, was formed out of a recognition of the cooperation which had existed amongst the three groups for decades.

The steps down the road to integration really began when two Mennonite groups and one Amish with different historical experiences found themselves sharing geography. The first Mennonites in Ontario began migrating from Pennsylvania in the late 18th century, settling in the Niagara Peninsula, in the Markham district north of Toronto and in the area surrounding modern-day Kitchener-Waterloo. This group of Ontario Mennonites (OM)—excepting the numerous splinter groups which had formed over the course of two centuries—were organized at the time of integration as the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec (MCOQ). They represented 5,000 members in 45 congregations.

Not long after the Mennonites from Pennsylvania had built their first log homes and planted their first crops, they welcomed Amish migrating directly from Europe. These Amish received land just west of Waterloo and thus became close neighbors to their Mennonite cousins. In 1963 the Amish chose to call their conference the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference (WOM). In 1988 they had 3,000 members in 18 congregations.

Approximately one hundred years after the first Mennonites and Amish had established themselves in southern Ontario, they played host to about 1,000 Mennonite immigrants from the Soviet Union. These "Russian" Mennonites were refugees from civil war, famine, and Soviet policies of forced russification. In many cases, the Russian Mennonites lived with and worked for their Swiss co-religionists for up to a year before establishing their own homes in Waterloo, Leamington and Niagara. Their numbers increased in subsequent decades as prairie Mennonites moved to Ontario during the depression and as additional Mennonites left the Soviet Union following World War II. Although the Russian and Swiss Mennonites shared homes and a common faith, their differing languages and cultural traditions meant that worshipping together on a permanent basis wasn't

realistic at the time. Russian Mennonites organized themselves as the United Mennonite Conference of Ontario (UM), the "united" refering to the diverse areas of Russia from which they had originated. At the time of integration the UMs represented 5,000 members in 26 congregations.

Sharing the same geography, it wasn't long before Mennonites from these three conferences embarked on a tradition of cooperation in projects and institutions. At the organizational level, concrete steps towards some form of union began with the formation of the Inter-Mennonite Conference of Ontario (IMCO) in 1974. But tangible cooperative endeavors were already many. Wartime crisis brought Ontario Mennonites together in the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, formed in 1917. Women's sewing circles of the Swiss Mennonites and Amish pooled their material relief energies that same year. The need for a united front in time of war also prompted the creation, together with other peace churches, of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches in 1940. Both these organizations presented the voice of nonresistance to the outside world as well as a collective relief effort. This tradition was continued with the formation of Mennonite Central Committee Ontario in the mid-1960s.

During the sixties inter-Mennonite cooperation flourished. Already in the late fifties mission boards of the various Mennonite groups began sharing visions for Christian outreach in Ontario. Resources were united in the creation of Rockhaven, an alcohol recovery home in Sudbury in 1966 and soon thereafter a joint committee, the Mennonite Mission and Service Board, came into being.[1] One of the most notable joint projects was Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo. Established in 1961, the college was unique not only because of its tri-conference support,[2] but also because it was the first post-secondary Mennonite institution on the campus of a secular university. This venture was followed shortly thereafter by the creation of the Waterloo County Mennonite Credit Union, a financial institution based on mutual aid principles which served Mennonites, Amish and Brethren in Christ.[3] In 1971 a Canada-wide inter-Mennonite newspaper, *Mennonite Reporter*, began publishing from Waterloo. Although neither the Credit Union nor the *Mennonite Reporter* were formally connected to any conference, both reflected and reinforced the inter-Mennonite activity underway in Ontario.

At the conference level, the initiative taken by the mission boards was repeated as moderators, staff, education committees, and youth services of the three conferences began to meet together and plan joint projects through the late 1960s and into the 1970s. The assortment of inter-Mennonite conference committees were brought under the coordinating umbrella of the Inter-Mennonite Conference of Ontario in 1974.

The process of integration which followed over the next decade and a half could be characterized as several steps forward, one step back along the way. For those who wanted to see the process quickly to completion, the steps back were frustrating. Those who were more hesitant about the merits of integration, however, sometimes felt the steps ahead were much too large and much too quick. In its early years the IMCO faced its own crisis of authority. After experiencing "constant frustration" as to the authority of decisions made by the inter-Mennonite body, it was decided that IMCO be a forum for discussion and recommendation but that formal decisions be made separately by the three conferences. For those who were eager to see greater unity occur, this represented a "step backward."[4]

The tension over the role of IMCO in fact reflected a certain irony in its very existence. It would seem that the creation of IMCO was a declaration, even if nothing was stated explicitly, that some form of merger of the three conferences was inevitable. On the one hand, IMCO as a symbol reinforced the philosophical rationale for working together. At the same time, by creating a new administrative dimension to the Mennonite conference scene in Ontario, IMCO was in fact adding to the problem which an integrated conference ultimately sought to solve. Once the IMCO began undertaking its own projects, what else but an integrated conference could take operational responsibility for those projects, given IMCO's mandate to be a forum for discussion, more than a decision-making body. The IMCO in fact exacerbated the problem of administrative overload in Ontario and by doing so helped accelerate the integration process along. Because the IMCO had added a layer of joint committees onto the already existing separate committees of each conference, the idea of amalgamation soon began to be raised as a solution to the "burdensome and costly duplication" of "structures."[5] Rationalization was thus a key impetus to union. As one person said: "Surely we do not need four executive committees, three personnel committees, three missions committees, three nurture committees, plus a host of other ad hoc and sub committees."[6] Boosters of integration argued that integration was a "wise stewardship of resources and energies."[7]

In January 1978 delegates to IMCO voted to ask the three constituent conferences and their congregations to consider amalgamating within five years. The amalgamation study process which followed in each conference produced mixed results. The Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec seemed most favorably disposed towards amalgamation; in fall 1980 29 out of 37 churches voted 67 percent in favor of amalgamation. At their annual meeting in April of that same year, UM churches were more cautious about amalgamation, though heartily affirmative of continued cooperation. WOM churches were similarly reluctant to move ahead. The lack of a conclusive "yes" closed the door to amalgamation in 1981. Amalgamation would be replaced by the nebulous concept of "organic growth" towards unity.[8] At the same time, IMCO was advised to pay more attention to coordination and consultation and less to its own program initiatives. For unity advocates, the developments in 1981 represented "backpedalling."[9]

The hesitations toward amalgamation were many and varied. Those who questioned the merger process wondered what was wrong with the status quo of cooperative effort. Others observed that spiritual unity was of greatest importance and that already existed.[10] On the other hand, along the way the fear was also expressed that in order to promote theological commonality between the three groups, leaders would settle for a lack of clarity on theological issues.[11] One individual warned the IMCO committee studying amalgamation that it should avoid the example of an earlier church union in Canada in which what ensued "could be read not as the sum of the three but actually a weakening of the whole."[12]

Some feared the loss of historic identities which might result from a union and the difficulty in reconciling dif-

ferent worship practices and cultural traditions. For instance, footwashing was a common practice in the OM and WOM churches but was relatively foreign to UMs. Even the style and some might say personality differences between the groups was viewed as a hindrance. It was observed that UM conference sessions were characterized by vigorous and even confrontational debate while the other two were more reserved and conciliatory.[13] One conference felt threatened by their perception that persons in another conference were more educated and professional and would conduct business accordingly.[14]

The question of church polity also pointed out differences between the three conferences. While the Western Ontario and United Mennonite Conferences historically had a congregational orientation, the OMs looked more to conference for leadership and authority. In practical terms, this meant for instance that in UM churches the congregation authorized the ordination of pastors, while in OM churches the congregation requested and the conference authorized ordination. Some felt that congregational authority would be undermined with the creation of a larger and possibly more distant conference structure. There were also many small differences to work out, for instance, would congregational per member contributions to conference be called "levies" or "askings"?

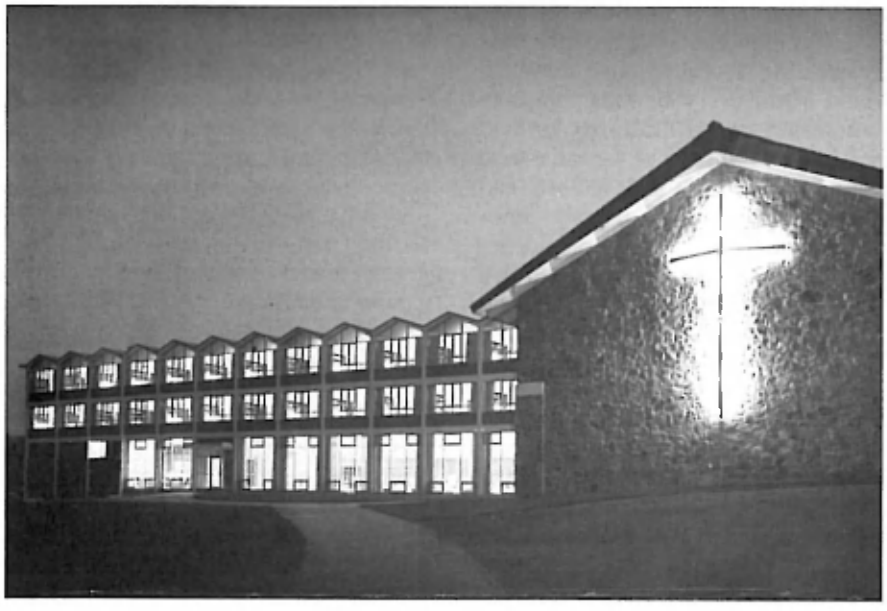
Related to the polity question was the issue of larger denominational relationships. Structural reorganization within Ontario would obviously have implications on wider conference affiliations. First of all, UM congregations were already members of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, part of the North American General Conference. Would that membership be jeopardized should the UM conference become part of a new Ontario body? or would the OMs and WOMs join CMC? The OMs and WOMs faced similar questions as members of the Mennonite Church. If nothing else, an alphabetic nightmare threatened. Some people who said no to amalgamation simply believed that merger would eventually come about on its own if allowed to proceed naturally and without undue organizational pressure.[15]

The voices of misgiving, despite the official rejection of amalgamation in 1979, tended to be muted in published discussions of merger. Publicists of the integration process tended to be favorable, if not outright eager, towards structural unity and thus reservations were sometimes unfortunately characterized, not as valid questioning, but as "deep seated fear" of the "unknown and unfamiliar" while pro-integrationists were contributing to the "work and leading of the Holy Spirit."[16] Working for structural unity was frequently described as following the will of Christ. The coming together of Mennonites in Ontario was interpreted, not as coincidence or circumstance, but as divine intervention.[17] Those who questioned the practical steps involved in the movement of history were viewed as "camping in the wilderness."[18] One critic of the 1979 amalgamation study document pointed out that it was "obvious" that the author favored total amalgamation and "wrote the document accordingly" and thus left out other viable polity alternatives such as "federation" with divided responsibilities and powers.[19]

The "no" vote of 1980 did not long deter those who were convinced that merger was a desired goal. Instead of abandoning the process, early in 1982 IMCO announced a shift in emphasis. Perhaps sensing that they had missed some steps by jumping ahead to discuss structural unity, IMCO decided to focus on the theological unity which existed between the three conferences. One observer compared the distinction to a courtship versus a marriage and asked whether Mennonites in Ontario were not ready to move into the more permanent and visible stage of love for one another.[20] Despite the stated shift in emphasis, IMCO moved ahead in programming: a church planter and mission consultant were hired.

This move in fact created a further impetus towards merger which was the need for congregations emerging in the 1980s to identify with an inter-Mennonite body as a reflection of their own membership which spanned and went beyond the three conferences. Most of these congregations tended to be in urban areas—Guelph, Kingston, Windsor, Mississauga—which had little or no historic Mennonite presence. Some churches chose to become a member in more than one conference. At least one congregation expressed the desire to affiliate with IMCO alone while the possibility of congregations affiliating with Mennonite Central Committee was also raised. Work among Hispanic, Laotian and Hmong immigrants also highlighted the rather absurd expectation that new Mennonites identify with historical differences. It was also pointed out more than once that the distinctions would have little meaning for coming generations. More and more, young people growing up in Ontario were exposed to the programs and traditions of more than one stream of Mennonitism. One report noted that "youth and young adults cross conference lines

First building of Conrad Grebel College, an early cooperative project of the Mennonite conferences in Ontario



with ease."[21] It was pressure from new churches and mission workers, however, that brought a sense of urgency to discussions of inter-Mennonite structures.

A study paper on the issue of conference membership proposed that IMCO obtain a separate charter and that emerging congregations be encouraged to join the inter-Mennonite body. Heavily laden with agricultural metaphors (ironic in light of the fact that most new churches were urban), the paper argued that the three conferences, having created a farm together, could not then expect the fields which had been tilled and planted jointly, to revert back to one of the three separate farms.[22] The inter-Mennonite effort in planting churches fell short when the fledgling congregations thereby created could not exist as inter-Mennonite entities. Failing to achieve support from all three conferences, however, the proposals were shelved. The IMCO mission consultant asked: "Does the Inter-Mennonite Conference really want a staff person to help start inter-Mennonite churches if they can't really happen?"[23] It would seem another "step back" had been taken.

But as was becoming the pattern, the step back was followed by a fairly large leap forward. Early in 1985 the language of "integration" first appeared in official discussions of structural change. In February of that year, delegates to the annual meeting of IMCO unanimously approved a proposal to move toward "an integrated conference with geographically-based districts."[24] The proposal was endorsed by the three conferences in separate session and an Integration Study Committee was created. Movement towards that goal would begin in 1986 when the three conferences and IMCO would hold their annual meetings at the same time and place. (MCOQ and WOMC had been meeting jointly already since 1979.) It was probably no coincidence that 1986 was also the year in which Mennonites would celebrate the bicentennial of their first arrival in Canada. The secretary of IMCO wrote to the executive of MCOQ: "It would be a powerful symbol if Mennonites from three migrations to Canada would come together in one fellowship during [1986]."[25] Thus an emotional catalyst was added to the plan.

The apparent enthusiasm to move ahead on integration is somewhat surprising given the rejection of amalgamation only five years earlier. The issue was re-opened partly on the urging of the three conference mission boards who were "irritated and frustrated" by the perpetuation of historic divisions.[26] The chair of the inter-Mennonite mission board in fact threatened to resign if changes were not made. Additionally, certain polity difficulties had altered somewhat: the "Mennonite Church Region I" conference body which had tied together MCOQ with the North-West Mennonite Conference (based in Alberta and Saskatchewan) had ceased to be part of the Mennonite Church structure. Furthermore, the UMs had begun a personnel committee and taken on a conference minister, thus moving closer to the OM model. The change in language—from amalgamation to integration—may have made a difference for some; the latter implied less of a fusion of identities while amalgamation had become a "bad word."[27] One person involved observed that nothing more dramatic than the passage of time had made the constituency more amenable to union.[28]

As the pace towards integration quickened, the number of meetings held and study papers written also increased. As one person observed: "The road to three-conference integration in Ontario is paved with paper."[29] Some of the paper produced was destined for the files only. For instance, a new confession of faith was shelved after several drafts, suggesting that differences in theology were not a major concern after all. By the end of the year, the Integration Study Committee produced a proposed model for integration. In March of 1986 the three conferences in joint session voted over 90 percent in favor of uniting by 1988. A year later, after much more paper was produced in fine-tuning the integration model, the three conferences held individual meetings for the final time. At the same time they all approved the first draft of the integration model. In fall of 1987 the final agreement and legal by-laws of the new conference were approved with only one dissenting vote.

The new entity, called Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada was officially born on March 1, 1988, composed of about 85 congregations with a total membership of just over 13,000.[30] While most observers would agree that a relatively smooth transition from three conferences to one has occurred, the early years were not without difficulty. Within a year of its inception, MCEC boldly embarked on a $6.3 million dollar capital fund drive to support building projects at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, at Conrad Grebel College, and for new churches. Coinciding with an economic recession in Ontario, the fund drive fell far short of expectations and was a morale blow to the new conference. Though according to one individual, the fund-raising would have occurred regardless of integration, the perceived extravagance of the drive raised criticism from those who believed that a streamlined and more efficient conference structure would also save money.[31] The size and unfamiliarity of the new conference was perhaps the greatest loss for some people. Having been accustomed to attending annual conferences at a neighboring church, some congregations lamented the long drive to a strange setting for meetings. The "family feeling" wasn't there anymore. The loss of an historic identity was definitely hastened by the integration process, even while the conference is mindful of maintaining equal representation from the three groups on committees and amongst personnel. The use of OM, WOM, and UM labels will probably persist for some time to come.

Resolving questions of polity was and continues to be one of MCEC's greatest tasks. The extent to which conference is involved in the testing, calling, and ordination of ministers is being worked out. Faced with several options of relating to their "in-laws," the three conferences together agreed that congregations would become "associate" members of national or North American conferences of which they had not previously been members. Thus, OM and WOM congregations became "associate" members in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, while UM churches became associates within the Mennonite Church. Further developments regarding denominational affiliation depend in large part on the pace of GC/MC integration discussions. The manner in which monies are forwarded to the larger denominational bodies remains a sensitive issue.[32]

Working out its relationship to conference-linked but autonomous Mennonite organizations was also a challenge faced by the integrated conference. For instance, in some quarters it was assumed that the women's organi-

zations of the three former conferences would be part of the integration process. However, as independent bodies accountable to their local groups and not to the conference, the women's organizations felt more time was needed for them to "get to know each other better" and, although unity was favored as an eventual goal, they opted to proceed at their own pace and "not be bound by the conference integration timetable."[33] At the same time, all three organizations insisted that they should together have a representative on the executive committee of the new conference, pointing out that such a direct information flow was necessary given the fact that "a significant amount of funds for conference-related interests are generated by [women's] groups."[34] When such representation was withdrawn given the fact that other women would be on the executive committee, women's organizations protested that they were representing an organization, not women's point of view generally, and as a result, their place on the executive committee was reinstated.[35] Women's organizations in Ontario continue to work together on an executive committee and sponsor joint enrichment events.

One of the most potent signs of the success of integration lies perhaps in the congregations themselves. The calling of ministers to churches reveals an increasing level of comfort with leaders from a different background than that of the congregation. Thus an OM pastor can find a home in a former UM church and vice versa, and individuals can more comfortably associate with a congregation which fits their worship style regardless of background. On the other hand, the fact that by and large the congregation has remained central means that many persons in the pew have been relatively unaffected by integration.

For the next generation the labels OM, WOM and UM may be meaningless outside of the lesson of history. For those individuals coming to the Mennonite church from other traditions such labels have never held much meaning at all. Knowing that organizations must reflect the constituency which they represent and serve, the forces for integration recognized that Mennonites in Ontario are static neither as individuals nor as a people. The path from cooperation to amalgamation to integration in Ontario represented change in institutions but also the evolution of a people of faith and deed. Integration was at once a response to changing realities amongst Mennonites in Ontario and at the same time was a leading force in working out a vision of unity.

ENDNOTES

[1]Cooperation in missions initially involved the mission boards of five different groups—the Ontario Mennonites, United Mennonites, Western Ontario Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, and Brethren in Christ. See two separate documents entitled "Ontario Inter-Mennonite Development" in Conrad Grebel College Archives (hereafter CGCA), XXVIII-8.1.1, Inter-Mennonite Conference of Ontario (IMCO), Amalgamation Committee.

[2]The college was also supported by the independent Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church.

[3]Today the credit union is called Mennonite Savings and Credit Union (Ontario) Limited and has branches in Waterloo, Kitchener, Elmira, New Hamburg, Milverton, and Leamington.

[4]Dave Kroeker, "Theological training program to be launched in Ontario," *Mennonite Reporter*, January 24, 1977, p. 1.

[5]Henry Paetkau, "Cautious optimism marks amalgamation study discussions," *Mennonite Reporter*, Apr. 28, 1980, p. 1.

[6]Vernon Zehr, "To unify our work and witness," *Interface: Update on Integration*, insert in *Mennonite Reporter*, Nov. 25, 1985, p. 14.

[7]"Shaping our future together," *Interface: Update on integration*, insert in *Mennonite Reporter*, Mar. 3, 1986, p. 10.

[8]Ron Rempel, "Conferences will cooperate but not amalgamate," *Mennonite Reporter*, Feb. 16, 1981, p. 3.

[9]Editorial, "Backpedalling on unity," *Mennonite Reporter*, Sept. 28, 1981, p. 6.

[10]Henry Paetkau, "Cautious optimism marks amalgamation study discussions," *Mennonite Reporter*, April 28, 1980, p. 1.

[11]Margaret Loewen Reimer, "Need to define beliefs," *Mennonite Reporter*, Sept. 30, 1985, p. 4.

[12]Rod J. Sawatsky to Amalgamation Committee, April 30, 1980. XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee. Sawatsky was referring to the 1925 union of three denominations to form the United Church of Canada.

[13]Inter-Mennonite Amalgamation Study Committee, "A Study Paper on Amalgamation," June 1979, p. 6. CGCA XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee. Also "MCEC Integration Report to GCMC/MC Integration Committee" (copy given to the author by Sam Steiner).

[14]"Report of Inter-Mennonite Amalgamation Study Committee," Jan. 5, 1981, p. 2. CGCA, XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee.

[15]"Report of Inter-Mennonite Amalgamation Study Committee," Jan. 5, 1981, p. 2. CGCA, XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee.

[16]Henry Paetkau, "Cautious optimism marks amalgamation study discussions," *Mennonite Reporter*, April 28, 1980, p. 2.

[17]"The union of three conferences: A work of God," *Mennonite Reporter*, Nov. 9, 1987, p. 5.

[18]Ferne Burkhardt, "Leaders draft new plan to unite three Ontario groups," *Mennonite Reporter*, Jan. 21, 1985, p. 1, 3.

[19]Rod J. Sawatsky to Amalgamation Committee, April 30, 1980. CGCA, XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee.

[20]Editorial, "Which unity vision—courtship or marriage?" *Mennonite Reporter*, March 8, 1982, p. 6.

[21]"Report of Inter-Mennonite Amalgamation Study Committee," Jan. 5, 1981, p. 3. CGCA, XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee.

[22]"When we plant together, to whom does the field belong?" *Mennonite Reporter*, Jan. 23, 1984, p. 5.

[23]Ron Rempel, "Leaders say no to membership in Inter-Mennonite group," *Mennonite Reporter*, Oct. 1, 1984, p. 1.

[24]Margaret Loewen Reimer, "Three Ontario conferences will meet together in 1986," *Mennonite Reporter*, March 4, 1985, p. 4.

[25]Sam Steiner to Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec Executive Committee, 25 Oct. 1984. CGCA, XXVIII-8.1.1, IMCO, Amalgamation Committee.

[26]Margaret Loewen Reimer, "Three Ontario conferences will meet together in 1986," *Mennonite Reporter*, March 4, 1985, p. 4.

[27]Amalgamation may have had negative connotations partly because it was the operative term in controversial municipal restructuring underway in Waterloo region in the late 1970s. Conversation with Sam Steiner, November 23, 1992.

[28]Conversation with Nelson Scheifele, November 23, 1992.

[29]Sam Steiner, "Integrating conferences in Ontario: A progress report," *Mennonite Reporter*, July 29, 1985, p. 4.

[30]The total number of congregations in MCEC was less than the sum of the three separate conferences because a number of churches had affiliated with more than one conference while several of the new congregations were inter-Mennonite projects from the beginning.

[31]Conversation with Sam Steiner, November 23, 1992.

[32]"MCEC Integration Report to GCMC/MC Integration Committee." A copy of this report was given to the author by Sam Steiner.

[33]Minutes, Meeting #1 of Integration Working Group - Women's Organizations, April 29, 1986. CGCA, XXVIII-8.3.2, IMCO, Integration Study Committee. The three women's organizations in Ontario did not correspond to the three conferences involved in integration. WOM and OM women worked together in the Women's Mission and Service Commission (WMSC) while UM women had two separate organizations—Ontario Women in Mission (based in Niagara and Kitchener-Waterloo) and South-West Ontario Women in Mission (based in Leamington).

[34]Minutes, Integration Study Committee, Meeting #18, May 1, 1986. CGCA, XXVIII-8.3.1, IMCO, Integration Study Committee.

[35]Minutes, Inter-Mennonite Executive Council, April 9, 1987. CGCA, XXVIII-2.1.3.1/1, IMCO, Executive Committee. Also, conversation with Gloria Musselman, November 24, 1992.

Book Reviews

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen and John M. Janzen. *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910).* Intercourse: Good Books, 1991. Pp. 231. ($35.00)

In the eyes of an historian of material culture, an object's interaction with its history is not unlike that of an onion and its center. Just as there is little left of an onion once it has been peeled of its layers, without the layers of history associated with them, most artifacts are of little value. Every museum has at least one object which is virtually unidentifiable. Outside of being a curiosity, such an object has almost no value. One can "read" most objects to discover such basic information as its name, construction, shape, and size. This provides one layer of an object's history. But there are many other potential layers: an object's maker, its owner or owners, its use or uses over time, how it was used, where it was used and why it was used, anecdotes associated with the object or its owner(s), and the list goes on. Each of these layers of information creates that "onion" we know as an artifact.

Mennonite Furniture presents its readers with some very large onions. The objects in both the book and the museum exhibit it accompanies are rich in layers of historical information. Unlike many books on decorative arts, *Mennonite Furniture* weaves a rich web of information, including both basic data and anecdotes, around its subject matter.

The book opens with an introduction of the themes which it will explore and the first in a series of very helpful maps. *Mennonite Furniture* rests on a foundation of information gathered during an extensive survey of Mennonite immigrant furniture on the Great Plains. Among other things, the survey enabled the compilation of an inventory of Mennonite furniture artisans (Appendix A) and an inventory of Mennonite furniture in public collections (Appendix B). The latter is just the tip of the iceberg; privately owned items discovered during the survey are not listed in the book in order to protect the owners.

The first chapter presents what the Janzens refer to as a "Canon of Immigrant Mennonite Furniture." This includes thirteen main furniture types. These items of furniture, such as the *ruebenkj* or resting bench, are placed within the context of Mennonite usage of and attitudes toward domestic spaces in the home.

The remainder of the book follows a largely chronological approach. Chapter two deals with the Vistula Delta and the synthesis of a variety of cultural forms and styles into what the Janzens refer to as the Vistula Delta cultural tradition. The next two chapters deal with the Mennonites' adoption of that tradition, with one chapter emphasizing architecture and the other linking several specific Mennonite items of furniture with the tradition. The writers' thesis that the Vistula Delta was the area of origin for the Mennonite immigrant furniture discussed in the "canon" hinges on these two chapters.

Chapter five deals with the migration of the Mennonites, and their furniture traditions, from the Vistula Delta to Poland and South Russia. Of particular interest in this chapter are an inventory from a Polish Mennonite's estate of 1830 and a list of craftsmen in the Molotschna colony in 1854. Here also are numerous diary excerpts which personalize the furniture. Diaries, journals, and oral histories provide much of the

information for the next chapter's profiles of three craftsmen (Franz Adrian, Heinrich Schroeder, and Heinrich Rempel) who emigrated from Russia to the Great Plains. The paint and stain recipes of Jacob Adrian, Franz's father, form the content of Appendix C.

The chronology is briefly interrupted by chapter seven, which goes into detail about the construction, decoration, and style of the Mennonite furniture examined during the survey. Chapter eight, one of the shortest chapters, deals with the waning and demise of the Mennonite furniture tradition in the face of American mass production and popular tastes. This process of acculturation has been central to the Mennonite experience in America from colonial times to the present and hopefully some day a good deal more space will be devoted to exploring how it has figured in Mennonite material culture.

The last chapter of *Mennonite Furniture* speaks somewhat to the above concern as it takes on the issue of Mennonite aesthetic identity. It approaches the question of whether there is indeed a distinctive Mennonite aesthetic and what forms it takes.

The weakest chapters in the book are those which deal with proving the Vistula Delta as the area of origin for Great Plains Mennonite furniture traditions. This is also the weakest area of the exhibit at the Kauffman Museum (nearly half of its space deals with this subject but it is also the area with the fewest objects). For all of the emphasis on the Vistula Delta, the evidence is not strong and relies heavily on a discussion of architecture. The Vistula Delta explanations seem to be a rather simplistic approach to a complex interplay of influences, adoption, and adaptation which may have varied with each type of furniture. The authors' "Comments on Style" (pp. 187-190), with their emphasis on pluralistic influences make much more sense.

A more careful definition of the various dialect terms would have been helpful. For example, *grootestow* and *grosse stube* are used interchangeably without explanation whether they refer to the same type of room or if the dialects define the room differently. Both did function quite differently from the American parlor (despite the parallel drawn on p. 42) in filling multiple uses. For a person having only limited knowledge of the various dialect words, the lack of clear definitions or consistent use could be confusing.

The book's organization is sometimes unclear. For example, the term *Biedermeier* is used many times before it is finally defined on p. 188. Some of the stronger evidence for the furniture's stylistic roots in the Vistula Delta is included in the chapter on construction, decoration, and style, when it might be more useful earlier in the chapters dealing directly with the Vistula Delta.

One of *Mennonite Furniture*'s greatest strengths is the breadth of primary resource materials, ranging from European sources to oral histories to woodcuts and works of art. The appendices, endnotes, and bibliography should prove invaluable for researchers ranging from folklorists to genealogists. In addition to the historical data about the furniture pieces, the many excerpts from and references to various archival manuscripts and diaries make an important connection between family histories and the existing material evidence about the families (i.e. the furniture). Together they present a more complete picture of Mennonite immigrant life than each would separately.

It is impossible to talk about material culture without illustrations and this book is filled with excellent color photos, maps, and other graphics. The interplay of graphic mediums, such as the combination of a woodcut, an old family photograph, and a contemporary photo of the artifact on pp. 78-79, provide so much more depth than a simple photo and description.

As a ground-breaking work this publication is excellent. *Mennonite Furniture* should last as an invaluable reference tool long after many other books have been rendered obsolete by newer publications.

As any book of this genre should, *Mennonite Furniture* suggests a variety of topics for further exploration, such as a study of the resting bench/sleeping bench/pullout bed variations on a bench. They are interesting adaptations of the Germanic tradition of using benches for sleeping, something which goes back to medieval times. Hopefully *Mennonite Furniture* will also become the stimulus for further exploration of other aspects of Great Plains Mennonite material culture, such as architecture.

A few personal thoughts by way of conclusion. I was delighted to see my own family's connection to Mennonite furniture traditions (my great grandfather H. B. Friesen's diary is one of the book's sources) and appreciated the maps, which helped me identify the placenames mentioned in my copy of the diary. I suspect I am only one of many Mennonites who will find some form of personal identification with the book. Having seen some Mennonite furniture go on the auction block and end up in the hands of antique dealers (who are usually more interested in the furniture's monetary rather than historical value) and heard stories of other furniture being drastically altered or destroyed, I hope the book will encourage Mennonites to place greater value on their material heritage.

The Janzens close *Mennonite Furniture* by opening another subject of at least potential book length: Mennonite aesthetic identity as revealed by Mennonite material culture. Looking at the 1790 Vistula Delta wardrobe on p. 89, the 1882 Adrian wardrobe on p. 139, and the 1903 jigsawed bookcase on p. 195, although each is different in style, one is struck by a common aesthetic exuberance. Here is a tradition of taste that clearly transcends the "aesthetic of the plain" referred to in the book. Similarly, anyone who has viewed Emil Kym's murals, painted for members of the Hoffnungsau community, must acknowledge that they do not reflect control of the sensory in life. I would suggest Mennonite aesthetics include an ongoing tension between the plain and the sensual which goes beyond the simple offering of charity to an itinerant painter in defiance of one congregation's aesthetics (the experience of one family as described on p. 202). Mennonite stylistic traditions in the decorative arts may have been lost after arrival on the Great Plains but this aesthetic tension remained. Perhaps it is this aesthetic tradition, as much as the sway of American popular culture, that draws some of us to Hawaiian shirts and overstuffed Victorian loveseats.

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Cynthia Eller, *Conscientious Objectors and the Second World War: Moral and Religious Arguments in Support of Pacifism.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991. Pp. 232. ($39.95)

Born and raised in a Church of the Brethren family, Cynthia Eller sensed that being a pacifist in the Vietnam generation was quite unlike being a pacifist in either of the two world wars. In graduate school at the University of Southern California, Eller began to explore the roots of moral decision-making by male conscientious objectors. World War II, she thought, seemed a worst case scenario for pacifists, since neighbors, co-workers, and sometimes even church and family members posed the thorny question, "What about Hitler?"

Eller wondered how conscientious objectors justified their decision not to participate in a popular war, and how they rationalized their stance in later years, when revelations about the Holocaust evoked public memory of the Second World War as a "good war." Eller's questions became grist for her doctoral dissertation in the field of religion. The resulting book is a well-written and carefully nuanced defense of pacifist moral reasoning.

Conscientious Objectors and the Second World War is not, however, a history of American conscientious objection. The book does not offer a narrative account of COs' experiences over the course of the war. Eller organized her chapters topically. One chapter describes CO demographics; another analyzes the COs' religious, philosophical, and political foundations for pacifism. Eller regarded chronological time as irrelevant to her study, noting that "I am not seeking to discover what really happened with World War II COs, but rather how they perceive their experiences and reflect on them some fifty years later" (p. 7).

For the most part, this topical scheme suits Eller's purposes well. But it also leaves some important questions unasked, such as how changes in Selective Service policy during the war affected the decision-making of conscientious objectors. When the United States entered the war, fathers were exempt from the draft, but by 1943, Selective Service began drafting married men with children, and COs with dependents had to consider carefully how their decisions might affect family members. Similarly, Eller does not explore how the process of demobilization, which took place in 1945 and 1946, diffused or intensified CO introspection.

One of the book's intriguing aspects is its use of oral history. Eller avoided methods of statistical sampling. Instead, she tried to obtain "the full range of pacifist arguments present in the World War II CO population" by interviewing sixty men, including Mennonite, Brethren, and Quaker CPS alumni, as well as men with non-peace church affiliations (p. 190). She also made an effort to interview men who had spent time in prison or in the military, or who held atypical views. In addition, she drew upon taped interviews in the Schowalter Oral History Collection at the Mennonite Library and Archives.

Eller's highly selective use of sources makes for an interesting, quotable book. In one instance, a CPS man recalled that his fellow campers, frustrated with a mundane work assignment, labeled it "work of national impotence" (p. 69). A limitation of her methodology, however, is that Eller cannot say *which* of the pacifist arguments and perspectives discussed in her book were most widely held by World War II conscientious objectors. Language repeated throughout the book—"many COs," "some COs," "other COs"—suggests a studied vagueness.

Eller argues that critics of pacifism have successfully but mistakenly portrayed its proponents as pie-in-the-sky idealists, although she acknowledges that "most pacifists are not at all clear about how the needs of states can be met without war, and they frequently seem to throw up their hands . . . and retreat to a private witness about war" (p. 166). She asserts that pacifists reason differently about moral issues than do non-pacifists. Most of the COs in her study, she points out, were not indifferent to the threat of evil in the world. But rather than using fascism or evidence of Nazi atrocities as justification for war, COs tended to focus on their own behavior as the locus of morality. Furthermore, Eller argues, they expected that taking responsibility for their behavior would ultimately lead to desirable ends.

Eller attributes the pacifists' moral reasoning to an assumption of benevolence; for the pacifist thinker, "God, the universe, or human nature is believed to be responsive to morality . . . and to reward it with good consequences" (p. 147). Most Americans in the 1940s did not share this assumption.

Although Eller is a pacifist-scholar, and she concludes that conscientious objectors' decision-making in wartime was understandable, her work in no way apologizes for all varieties of pacifism. Some of her interviewees, for example, gave anti-Semitic responses as a way of explaining their pro-German stance during the war. But readers ought not be too surprised that the moral reasonings of conscientious objectors in wartime are prone to such idiosyncrasies. Indeed, a significant contribution of Eller's work is her emphasis on the multiple sources and manifestations of pacifist thought. Eller describes the World War II COs as individuals who staked out positions along broad political and religious spectrums. She offers glimpses of the wartime certitude *and* anguish of conscientious objectors who were fundamentalists, conservatives, liberals, and even atheists.

Peace-minded scholars are engaged in a quest to construct an alternative interpretation of American history. In *Conscientious Objection and the Second World War,* Cynthia Eller dares to suggest that the collective voice of World War II CO dissenters may "dethrone 'the good war' " (p. 187). Her evidence relies more on the memories of individualists, loners, and intellectual elites than it does on the legacies of the communally-oriented Mennonite Civilian Public Service program. But despite that bias, or perhaps because of it, Eller's scholarship deserves serious attention from Mennonite readers.

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Harvey L. Dyck, ed. and trans., *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp 1851-1886.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. Pp. 456. ($60.00 Canadian)

This is one of very few surviving diaries which allows the late twentieth century reader to be immersed in the everyday world of nineteenth century Russian Mennonitism. Only a portion of Jacob Epp's diaries (Book I, 1851-1853; Book IV, 1859-1871; Book V, 1871-1880) which were brought to Canada in the 1890s survived the vicissitudes of time and family relocations. A scion of a prominent Chortitza family, Jacob's links with the prominent Mennonite leaders of the day fill the diaries with significant data. Even the author's twenty-two year sojourn as a farmer and teacher/minister in the *Judenplan,* some 130 kilometers west of Chortitza, did not diminish the flow of information since he continued to participate regularly in the life of the larger community. This government-sponsored settlement plan of six villages, in which Mennonites were to act as models for Jewish farmers, became the setting for Epp's mature years until his move to Baratov-Shlakhtin in 1874.

The uniqueness of the diaries relates to the character of Epp himself. Here is an open, forthright man who does not hesitate to express his views on contentious community issues or to disclose his intimate feelings and thoughts. While many entries reflect the daily routine associated with the cycle of agricultural life, others focus on the agonies of local church life or assaults upon deeply held convictions such as the threat of compulsory state service in the 1870s. The diary reader enters into the very heart and soul of Jacob Epp. He struggles for the material survival of his family amid drought, livestock disease, and insect infestation. There is the on-going concern and pain for an ailing wife who will not recover and a rather hasty remarriage to provide a mother for the orphaned children. Periodic deaths of infants or young children only add to life's burdens. Epp is preoccupied with teaching the faith to a maturing generation in catechism classes and equally desirous of ensuring sound learning in the local elementary school.

If there is one overriding theme in the diaries, it relates to community. The words *Lehrdienst* (ministerial council) and *Bruderschaft* (brotherhood meeting) appear month after month, year after year. Epp's view of the church is very much in the Anabaptist tradition. He sees the church as an identifiable group of living persons contending with good and evil. The true test of Christianity was the common life together. Epp's struggle to attain this ideal of the church was an ongoing one. Throughout the diary, the ministerial council and the church members (males only) meet regularly to consider cases of immorality, theft, drunkenness, public misconduct as well as quarrels between parishioners or even husbands and wives. Epp repeatedly records his concern over the prevailing and for him intensifying impiety. His advocacy and practice of the ideal of the visible church is intuitive. Nowhere in the diaries is there any indication that he was historically aware of the ideals of his sixteenth century forebears.

Dyck adopts a very readable and rather free translation to compensate for the somewhat antiquated German of the text. He had carefully researched the local vocabulary of the nineteenth century Russian Mennonite world and provided contemporary equivalents. The voluminous nature of the diaries naturally demanded editorial discretion and Dyck selected those diary entries which constituted significant portraits of the larger Mennonite community or of Epp's personal world. Unfortunately the publisher failed to include an editorial mechanism to clearly indicate the exclusion or inclusion of the original text. For example, a cursory check of the original diaries revealed that for 1866 Dyck selected four out of fourteen entries in January, six out of twelve in March, and seven out of sixteen in October. Similarly, the publisher failed to indicate the portions left out of a given diary entry.

This book is for everyone. It offers the reader a vibrant, intensely human experience of the past without having to endure the convoluted intellectualism at times associated with the narrative of the professional historian. Thanks to the editor/translator for a job well done. His extensive introduction and detailed notes provide the reader with all the information needed to understand and appreciate the diaries.

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