

# Mennonite Life



DECEMBER 1998  
VOL. 53 / NO. 4

## In *this* issue



In this issue we celebrate the life of Warren Kliewer, writer and dramatist of Mennonite background, who died July 29, 1998. Kliewer was known in Mennonite circles for his poetry, short stories, dramas, and novels on Mennonite themes, but was also well-known in theater

circles for his work in reviving eighteenth and nineteenth century American plays with

his East Lynne company in Cape May, New Jersey. His work along these lines was noted in an article by Alvin Klein, "A Director with a Reverence for Things Past," in the Sunday, August 9, 1998, *New York Times*.

Here we publish three tributes to Warren Kliewer, one by Raylene Hinz-Penner of Bethel College, read at a memorial service in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, September 19, 1998. Another is by Kliewer's friend and contemporary Elmer F. Suderman. A third is a poem by Dallas Wiebe, another of Kliewer's friends in Mennonite literature. The poem was also read by Elmer Suderman at the Kliewer memorial service in Mountain Lake.

Then follows Warren Kliewer's last submission for *Mennonite Life*, a short story called "Fathers and Sons," which he implied contains "some ugly stories that must also be told." (See Raylene Hinz-Penner tribute.) Also included here is one of Kliewer's poems, "A Story about Beginning," first published in *Cincinnati Poetry Review*, fall 1989, which was edited by Dallas Wiebe. Wiebe read this poem at the memorial service for Warren Kliewer in the Lambs Theatre on West 44th

Street, just off Times Square in New York City on October 24.

We also include a bibliography of Warren Kliewer's numerous contributions to *Mennonite Life*, going back to 1953.

A short story by Dallas Wiebe and poems by Rhoda Janzen, California poet laureate; G. C. Waldrep, an Amish poet of North Carolina; and Cheryl Denise, a Mennonite poet in West Virginia who has previously been published in *Mennonite Life* fill out our Arts section.

Our History sections consists of an article that reflects on one incident in the long history of interaction between leaders of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the (Old) Mennonite Church, timely in the light of ongoing merger discussions and the recently published biography of Harold S. Bender:

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## *Mennonite Life* to Cease Publication

**W**e regret to announce that *Mennonite Life* will cease publication with the December 1999 issue. For several years now, revenue has been unable to meet printing costs, let alone other expenses associated with producing the magazine. With subscriber numbers now below 500, it no longer seems practical to continue. In this, *Mennonite Life* is succumbing to a trend that seems to be more widespread in church-related and even secular publishing: general audience magazines which address issues of a more intellectual nature than popular culture and current news have trouble surviving.

*Mennonite Life* began in 1946 at Bethel College with a number of purposes and goals in mind: to replace the *Bethel College Monthly* (which ended in 1935) as a forum for writing by Bethel students and faculty; to speak to issues of Mennonite identity in a situation of considerable social change after the end of World War II; to provide a forum for General Conference interests, meaning also Russian-background Mennonites and those living in the plains states (this was in direct competition with *Mennonite Quarterly Review* which was seen at that time as not offering room for those interests). The intention was to position the new periodical in tone and audience somewhere between a newspaper such as *Mennonite Weekly Review* and a periodical aimed more at the scholarly specialist audience such as *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.

The phrase "semi-popular" was used at least a couple of times.

*Mennonite Life* seems to have run a deficit almost all the years it was in existence up to 1970. Thus there was repeated consideration given to discontinuing it. It was evaluated at least every five years, on average, if not more often. In 1970, the Herald Publishing Co. (publishers of *Mennonite Weekly Review*) offered to take it over on a trial basis.

*Mennonite Life* was published and edited by the *Mennonite Weekly Review* staff from 1971-1974. This coincided with the preparations for the 1974 Russian Mennonite immigration centennial and thus they were able to build up subscriber numbers considerably.

In late 1974 Herald Publishing decided the publication was too expensive and asked the college to take it back. Apparently the plan was to operate on a break-even basis and not provide a subsidy from the college budget. With the centennial past, the number of subscribers seems to have started declining almost immediately. Occasional attempts were made to bring in outside support, such as several issues published with the help of Canadian General Conference groups.

*Mennonite Life* was edited from its beginning through July 1971 by Cornelius Krahn. Other editors included: Robert M. Schrag, Dec. 1971-Dec. 1974; Robert Kreider and Jim Juhnke, 1975-June 1980; Robert Kreider, Sept. 1980-Sept 1984; David

Haury, Dec. 1984-Sept. 1989; Jim Juhnke, Dec. 1989-June 1995; John D. Thiesen as managing editor, Sept. 1995-present. In addition, Raylene Hinz-Penner served as editor of the annual December arts issue Dec. 1991-Dec. 1995.

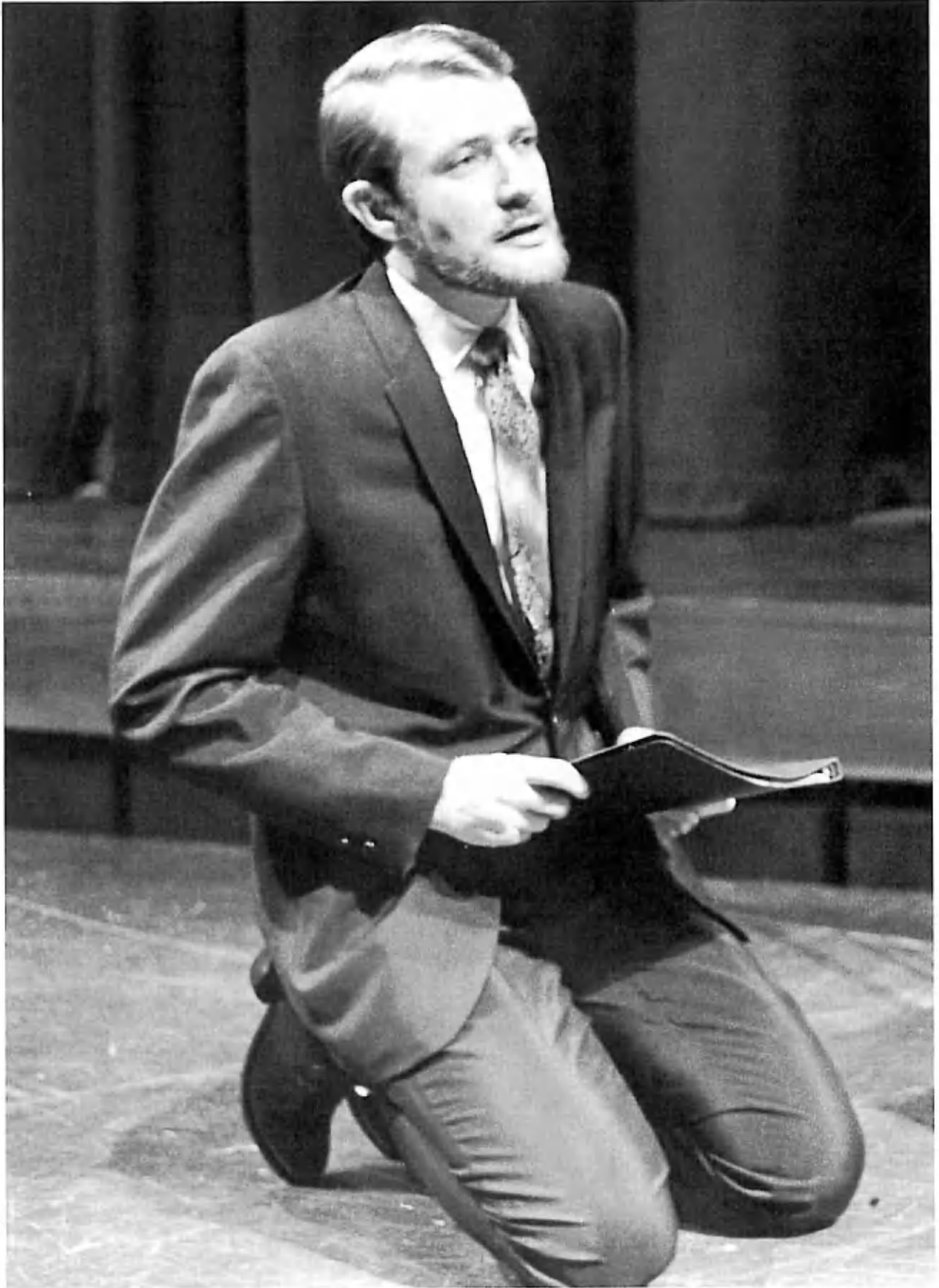
After a 50th anniversary issue dated March/June 1996, a new editorial team was in place whose duties would be to select and edit articles in the four areas of history, theology and religion, current issues, and arts. John D. Thiesen continued as managing editor, with responsibility for compiling selected articles and working with Mennonite Press to produce each issue, as well as continuing as book review editor. The editorial team consists of: Jim Juhnke

and Mary Sprunger (history), Duane Friesen and Lois Barrett (theology), Brad Born and Rich Preheim (current issues), and Raylene Hinz-Penner and Carla Reimer (arts). Barbara Thiesen has acted as copy editor since at least 1985.

Since this reorganization and redesign of 1996, we have received more praise for *Mennonite Life* than at any other time in the recent past. This is ironic, since at the same time subscriber numbers continue to drop.

We hope to devote much of the space in the 1999 issues to celebrating the 54 years of *Mennonite Life* and to looking forward into the new century and millennium with a Mennonite perspective.

# Mennonite Life



**R**ead at the memorial service in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, September 19, 1998.

In the 1969 *Thresher* yearbook, the last year that I was at Bethel College as a student, there is a wonderful picture of Warren Kliever kneeling on stage, a manuscript in hand, earnest look on his youthful, bearded face, alongside the caption which reads: "Warren Kliever, Wichita State writer and oral interpreter, engaged in interpretation of his own work."

I did not know Warren Kliever in those years, but it seems I have always known of him and of his work. In his last submission to *Memnonite Life* ["Fathers and Sons," in this issue], Warren began his letter: "Enough with the bittersweet nostalgia. There are some ugly stories that must also be told," and then, in a later paragraph, "It's easy to apply stringent standards to other writers. Let's see what you can do Kliever."

He then tells me what he is sending, why, how he has revised it, and finishes, "I strongly suspect this is the last mixed-genre story I'll send you.... I never intended the series to focus on myself. I am and want to remain a minor character in the stories. So... on to other things."

I did not realize what "on to other things" could mean in Warren's case this time.

We shall miss so much his interest in *Memnonite Life* and Mennonite writing, his careful

reading of other writers, his interest in story for the sake of story, his interest in telling the truth, his bold willingness to tell the other side of the story.

The warm human being that Warren was became obvious to all of us at the Goshen conference last October, "Mennonite/s Writing in the U. S.," where he was much honored both formally, in a tribute, and informally, by old friends and new ones like me, who after so many years of writing back and forth over submissions to *Memnonite Life*, was able, finally, to sit around the table and talk with Warren about writing and more.

The last story Warren submitted for *Memnonite Life* is about what is good and true and essential, and as always, it is seeking how to live, in this case, differently from his father, and it involves the work of the imagination. From Warren's youthful perspective at the story's end he says,

I began to realize I was going to have to become a different kind of person, a person for whom I had no model and whom I was unable even to imagine.

Warren spent a lifetime in such uses of the imagination, often in untraced territory; we are glad for the signposts he has left us along the way on his journey. We were not ready to accept his last submission.

## For Warren Kliever

Raylene Hinz -  
Penner

## Warren Kliewer, Writer and Mennonite

Elmer F.

Suderman

From his Mennonite background and from the predominantly Mennonite community where he grew up—Mountain Lake, Minnesota—Warren Kliewer found much of the material and themes for some of his short stories, poems, and dramas. Never a committed Mennonite, he was, nevertheless, haunted by its influence on his life. He came to recognize the good as well as the evil of that background, with its tenacious hold on tradition, its close-knit family and community closely tied by culture, language (Low German), and blood.

Pacifism, particularly, was important to him all his life. He was given his conscientious objector classification after an investigation by the FBI and served as an orderly at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. Through the years he maintained close relationships with the Society of Friends (Quakers), teaching for some years at Earlham College, sharing in worship in several Friends Meetings, and maintaining personal and artistic relationships with a number of Quaker writers.

The tension between his background and his writing is evident in all his works, particularly in his poems, published usually in *Mennonite Life*, and especially in his collection of short stories, *The Violators*, set in Waldheim, a small German town in Manitoba. Though neither the church nor the community is identified as

Mennonite, Mennonite readers soon recognized that they were based on Kliewer's knowledge of and experience within the Mennonite world.

But Kliewer's use of Mennonite materials always transcends the local. All readers recognize themselves as the often-flawed, tradition-bound, ignorant, and sometimes evil people in Kliewer's works.

At the first conference in the United States commemorating "Mennonite/s Writing in the United States," held at Goshen College, October 23-26, 1997, Kliewer was one of three people recognized for outstanding contributions to Mennonite literature.



**H**ello, Mountain Lake, Minnesota.  
Come in. Is anyone there?  
Have you heard  
    your son is dead?  
Did you know he passed away  
    from a prominent house  
    in Secaucus, N. J.?  
I tell you this,  
    all who will listen,  
You lost a dandy  
    when your wandering boy's big heart  
    stopped beating in his cancer.  
Filled with joy and generosity,  
Filled with intelligence and art,  
He held the world  
    inside his lungs  
As it taught what all must know;  
    you pay for your brains  
    with cancer's pains.  
To love this world and all that's in it  
    lets you beg for surcease  
    in the final minute.  
To care for the word  
    that cures the inward  
    emptiness of little towns  
    invites the certain writing  
    of those last heartfelt sounds.  
He laid his life into the theatre  
    and filled his scripts  
    with human matter.  
The heavens might declare the glory of God;  
Dramatists and actors speak in earthbound words.  
Now he awaits the rising  
    of the curtain  
    upon his final dialogue  
Where time and man stand mute  
    before eternity's dark plot.

## An Elegy for Warren Kiewer

Dallas Wiebe

## Fathers and Sons

Warren Kliever

**M**y father's stories about his father, Gerhard, always fascinated me, for by the time I was born my grandfather had died. The detail that first caught me was Gerhard's youthful accident one fall during threshing season. He broke both bones in his right forearm, so that the hand and wrist dangled down loosely. Evidently the doctor knew his business, because after a few days' layoff Gerhard discovered the arm with splint was strong enough to bear weight like a whole arm. He climbed back into his hayrack and trotted his now well-rested team back into the field. If he expected cheers for his bravery, he certainly got none. This was, after all, the threshing season, the busiest time of the year. Corn husking came after that, a race against the snow. When the storms came and there was enough leisure to get back to the doctor, the broken bones had healed enough to leave a gap between them. Gerhard now had an extra joint, two right "wrists." My father and I tried to guess about some details. Surely, we thought, the doctor must have advised an operation. Anesthetics must have reached Minnesota by the 1880s. But we guessed Gerhard would have had to go to Saint Paul for the surgery, and to stay there for the duration of treatment. That would have cost money. Big cities cost money. And they do other kinds of harm to young men. Most likely the family decided just to postpone the operation. Gerhard probably spent the winter building an arm

brace and outfitting his tools with specially designed braces and handles. The family postponed again in the spring. Gerhard had two right wrists for the rest of his life.

Telling stories was not my father's style, most especially if the story hinted at any personal confession. Sometimes it would take me ten or fifteen years to piece together one coherent story out of my father's memory fragments, stitching together odd-shaped scraps into a coherent quilt. His purpose in telling me as much as he did, I realized, was not to entertain. He spoke in parables, each of which taught an elusive moral lesson.

My father had grown up on the farm his grandparents had carved out of virgin prairie a mile and a half from town. Born in 1895, some twenty years after the land had first been marked out with wooden stakes, my father was his parents' second surviving child. Gerhard had decided earlier that the first child, a boy, Peter, would belong to his father and be taught to work with animals and in the fields. My strong-willed grandmother, Margareta, who needed some help herself, decreed that their second would be a daughter, and then my decidedly masculine father was born. "Well, we'll see about that," said Margareta, and brought him up in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Even as a child he sewed so well that he amused himself one rainy Sunday afternoon by cutting, tailoring, and sewing himself a suit out of old newspapers.

But this made him necessary. After he'd finished the fifth grade in the one-room school, she told him his schooling was finished. "We can't spare you," she said. He was an adult, after all, who could add and subtract and read, write, and speak English and German. What more did he need? By then she'd had four more babies, only one girl who was still too young to do anything, and none of the neighbors had extra daughters. So John, just turning twelve, reported for full-time kitchen duty.

He'd tell me these stories in his office when there was a lull in business, or we'd be driving along a bleak country road with nothing to look at. He'd jump in with no more introduction than, "Did I ever tell you about such-and-such?" And in the earlier years of his revelations, all the stories were innocuous.

I had to wait until I was in the university to hear the hard stories about his own father, the little dramas of two men facing each other down. He was courting his first wife, he once told me when I was deemed old enough to hear such things, and he wanted to use the Sunday buggy and the elegant, gray driving team of horses. Twenty-three years old and about to be married, he still asked for permission. Gerhard said no, gave no reason, just said no. My father marched out, pulled the buggy out into the middle of the yard, and brought out the team of grays and their harnesses—in full view of the house so that no one would think he was sneaking around. So he harnessed the horses with a lot of fuss and flourish to let the family, peeking through the parlor windows, see how much he was enjoying himself.

Gerhard watched too until his cocky son was attaching the last trace to the last whiffletree, then came out into the yard, methodically disengaged the traces, and led the driving team back into the barn. Neither one spoke as my father watched the dismantling of his plans. As he walked the mile and a half to the house of his bride-to-be in town, he promised himself he would never again live on a farm, and he made good on it. After his marriage he never went to bed in a farmhouse.

My father told me this parable and left it unexplained, and it took me years to learn enough about farm economics to understand. In those days children of a farm family, I came to understand, were not expected to have aspirations of their own. A child was a non-salaried employee, or more precisely, an economic unit. A child who could do a job would save a measurable amount of money not paid to a hired man. No one considered this unfeeling or irreligious. Farmers were landowners who were teaching their children to take more and more control of the property they would eventually inherit.

What was wrong with this system? Hadn't it worked just fine in the old country? I'm sure my grandfather was puzzled. The system had always worked well back there, effecting a smooth transition from apprentice to partner to sole owner. My willful father was sure to cause economic damage to his family by leaving the farm, by declaring that there are choices. And he probably set a bad example for the four younger children. One by one they decided to leave the farm.

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In his late middle age Gerhard was stranded on his farm with no helpers.

Something, I was sure, had preceded that clash. That can't have been the first confrontation. But there was no way I could ask questions on that subject. I had to wait until my father decided to talk. "What I really wanted to be was an architect." That was a shocker. I'd never heard him use that word before, and clearly he meant exactly what he was saying: *architect*, not builder or contractor. At about the age of fourteen he knew he wanted to design. Knowing he'd have to prepare himself, he enrolled in the high school in town and arranged with some friends willing to trade him room and board for taking care of the cow and the driving horse. Only when it was all arranged did he ask Gerhard for permission.

"Yah, John, you can go," Gerhard told him. "But you still have to do all your chores here." My father tried to protest. Gerhard cut him off. "We can't spare you."

The first morning of school began at five when he got up, walked to the farm, did his chores, walked back to town, three miles round-trip. After the day of classes, he milked his friends' cow and groomed the driving horse, walked to the farm, did his chores, walked back to town in the dark, three miles round-trip, and did the next day's homework. Every day for a week he grew wearier, and dimly grasped that Gerhard's demands had undermined the reason for moving to a house near the school. John moved back to the farm. He did not become an architect. Nine years later

he remembered this failure when he walked to town to court his bride-to-be and promised himself never again to sleep in a farmhouse.

There was no order in which my father chose to tell me his stories, his parables, and so I had to mull each one over to search for a pattern. The last one he told me was probably the hardest to tell. A farmer in the community needed an extra hand, so Gerhard "rented out" his sixteen-year-old son: a not uncommon arrangement those days. John was to live with the other family and be provided meals and whatever he needed. The wages, four dollars a month, were to be paid to Gerhard. No one asked John's opinion. He reported back, after a few weeks, that the meals were skimpy and the house was cold. "Somebody here's trying to save money," he told his father.

"Life is hard," Gerhard replied.

Then John's gloves wore out. He asked the farmer to buy him a new pair.

"Can't afford it," the farmer replied and sent him out to shell corn, a hard task even during balmy weather, because the sharp corners of dried kernels chew up gloves and human flesh. But there was a blizzard that day. John's hands grew numb and started bleeding. He threw down a half-finished corn cob and walked into town. There he found a house with a telephone, called Gerhard, and explained the situation.

"Buying gloves," Gerhard said, "they're supposed to do that."

"But they refuse."

They argued, and forced each other into positions from which neither could retreat. But John's

desperation was great by now. "When I hang up this phone," he said, "I'm either coming back home or ... I'm going somewhere else. I'm not going back to that cheapskate farm."

"Where are you going?"

"You'll never know."

"Ach, how can you go anywhere in this weather?"

"I'm going. You can be sure of that. What do you say?"

After a long silence Gerhard said, "Come home," and abruptly hung up.

How long, I wondered, do battles like this go on? Is there no way to stop the momentum of old grudges? Gerhard had had his own disappointment. Hadn't it softened him? A small child when his family, my great-grandparents, emigrated from Ukraine in the 1870s, Gerhard grew up to discover he had an excellent singing voice, a clear, strong tenor. It seemed to have come from nowhere and surprised everyone. The church chose him to be the *vorsaenger*, the song leader who lined out each verse for the congregation singing a capella to repeat. One Sunday an outsider visiting the church heard him sing. Later, after introducing himself and asking many questions, the stranger offered Gerhard a singing job in Saint Paul, which was the big city in the area at that time.

I wondered what kind of singing job. My father didn't know. Quite possibly Gerhard himself didn't, though he certainly thought the story important enough to remember and pass down to his son, even missing that important detail. If he had been offered a church singing job, surely that would have been

part of the story he passed along. If one of those ever-popular male singing societies, a *Maennerchor*, had recruited him, that honorable detail would have been included. The missing detail suggests that Gerhard didn't understand the job offer. He probably did not know that a tenor, a popular voice in the 1890s, could make some kind of living singing in saloons, or that music stores hired singers to plug the sheet music to customers. I doubt he'd ever seen the inside of the Grand Opera House or even the smaller vaudeville theaters in Saint Paul. Did he even know that some people spent their evenings, or even afternoons, going to shows just to have fun? A farm boy growing up near Mountain Lake, Minnesota, had only seen people laboring in the afternoons and weary by sunset.

I tried to get inside the mind of my grandfather as young Gerhard. Did he, while talking with that stranger from Saint Paul, feel a thrill of excitement, even for a moment? Could he visualize spending his days in a crowded city and his nights facing applauding spectators? Possibly. I know he liked cities and certainly disliked farming. Did he consider the offer a temptation, even to contemplate which was sinful? Nothing in his heritage would have prepared him to live anywhere but on a family farm, or to accept money for merely using his voice. From their Mennonite farm village in Ukraine, his family had brought a complete civilization: a religious heritage, bloodline bonds, customs that guided behavior from birth to grave, two languages that expressed everything worth saying in one's

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My father  
settled the argument  
by dashing the  
Philco to the floor,  
scattering broken  
glass and torn wires  
all over the room.

sacred and profane lives, even recipes appropriate for every occasion and every season—all inter-related aspects of a way of life that sustained tightly knit families in a family-farm economy. If Gerhard had accepted the outsider's offer of an adventurous and unimaginable job, he would have torn or broken some part of a complex and precious civilization.

Did Gerhard's father explain any of this to his tempted son? Or did he simply say, "We can't spare you"? Either way, the community had been preserved. Gerhard continued to sing in the church for free, and years later he preserved the community, or thought he was doing so, by rejecting his son's, my father's, youthful dream of studying architecture. My father didn't explain this episode. His telling was, after all, a parable.

His harshest parable was his least articulate. In fact, he didn't tell it at all; he and I lived through it together. Having got me started riding ponies by the age of ten, he graduated me upward to a mid-sized mare that came to us with the name of Patsy. She also brought along a sweet, compliant personality always eager to please and to be trained. Since I rode every day and long distances on weekends, her hoofs began to wear down, and she clearly needed to be shod. One summer afternoon I brought her to the vacant lot next to my father's farm produce buying store, and he proceeded to nail those tiny shoes on her front hoofs. At first she was only wary, and my guess now is that she had never been shod. But as the work went on, she became more

frightened, though still controllable. A horse's front feet are relatively easy to control.

We expected the hind legs to be just as easy. But by the time he picked up the first of the back hoofs, she had succumbed to panic and started kicking. He dropped her hoof, in the same motion swatted her rump with his farrier's hammer, and immediately pulled her hoof up again to continue hammering. Confused for a moment she held still long enough for him to finish that nail. Before he could start the next one, her leg swung out again, and again he beat her with the hammer. He grabbed her leg, pushed her off balance, and started the second nail. If he had been able to drive through and clinch that nail, he might have been able to finish one back shoe between her kicking spells. But her desperation had taken over now and she kicked violently, not hitting him, just struggling to get free. The hoof slammed down. The nail was bent out of shape. The first nail was sprung loose. The shoe came off.

My father was known, even to mere acquaintances, for two characteristics. Once having decided to do something, he would never give up. And he was always calm and cool until he reached a threshold, beyond which his violent anger would break forth and he would destroy whatever stood in his way, an inanimate object, of course, not a person. I remember a Saturday evening when my sisters were squabbling about whether to listen to "The Hit Parade" or Jack Benny. My father settled the argument by dashing the Philco to the floor, scattering broken glass and torn wires all over the room. Dead

silence ruled the household the rest of the evening.

On this hot, dusty, horse-shoeing afternoon, however, he was fighting with an eight-hundred-pound pony that was sure she was fighting for her life. Hour after hour the battle went on, the pony jumping and kicking, my father trying to nail the shoe on and failing every time and then turning on her in red-faced fury with more and more beatings, both of them wet with sweat that turned the settling dust into mud. The only respites came when a customer showed up and my father had to go back into the store to buy a consignment of eggs or cream. At those times I, an insecure thirteen-year-old, had to stand by and hold her halter. I tried to pet and soothe her because I couldn't think of anything else to do. Every time a customer left and my father returned looking grimmer, I could feel Patsy's quivers that matched my own.

About four in the afternoon Carl Steinhauser, our town veterinarian, happened to drive by and saw the tussle going on. He was the kind of vet no one would trust a pet goldfish or canary to, but he was extremely good with large animals like draft horses or Holstein bulls, mainly because he was so immense himself. All humans and most animals were intimidated by his height and girth, and he knew many tricks for wrestling animals to the ground and immobilizing them. With hardly a word Carl got a long rope out of his car trunk, tied a non-slipping loop in the middle, hung it loosely over Patsy's neck, and ran the two long ends through the fetlocks, the open space just above her back hoofs.

With Carl pulling forward one length of rope and my father the other, Patsy's hind legs came up under her. She rolled over onto her back, and when they had immobilized her by tying all four legs together, she had to submit. The shoeing was done in fifteen minutes.

The aftermath lasted for weeks. When Carl had run the ropes around her fetlocks to wrestle her down, he hadn't bothered to put any padding there for protection. The ropes burning against the soft skin had rubbed off all the hair and the top layers. Bleeding, raw skin and muscle were exposed. Twice a day for a month I had to apply greasy salve to the open flesh. For a long time she shied if my father made a sudden movement near her.

The shoes wore out in less than a year, and I was fourteen by the time she needed new ones. My father bought some new ones and left them lying around but didn't offer to put them on. One evening I told him I had decided to shoe her the next day.

"All right," he said.

Surprisingly, she was calm through both of the front shoes. Maybe she had faith in me by then. But that went away when I started in on the left rear hoof. I guess her memories came back to her, and she went into a kicking campaign to equal the worst of the last summer's battle. But during the winter I had run across a drawing of a simple way to keep a horse's back leg up and safe. You need a short rope with a large, non-slipping loop at one end. This hangs loosely around the horse's neck, and with the other end of the rope you tie the rear foot up in the air. It worked. She didn't seem

Hour after  
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But on that evening when I had finished shoeing Patsy, when I had succeeded at a job which had aroused my father's raging temper, I began to realize I was going to have to become a different kind of person, a person for whom I had no model and whom I was unable even to imagine.

frightened so much as confused. It must be unnerving to become three-legged all of a sudden.

I used the whole afternoon to finish, partly because I was small for a fourteen-year-old and got tired. Maybe I was shrewd enough to give her a few breaks for oats and water. Some of the nails went through a little crooked, but when the job was finished in the late afternoon and I rode her around the pasture, the shoes held.

At supper that night I told my father I had finished shoeing.

"Any trouble?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Yah," he said, nodding.

"Good."

We never talked about it again, and from then on I shod all the horses we had during the four more years of my horsemanship. Sometimes my father would come around and watch for a while. He never offered to help.

But on that evening when I had finished shoeing Patsy, when I had succeeded at a job which had aroused my father's raging temper, I began to realize I was going to have to become a different kind of person, a person for whom I had no model and whom I was unable even to imagine. But I didn't dare think about it much that evening.



O nce upon a time  
upon a stage,  
once upon a box  
upon a platform  
upon a stage,  
a boy (that small) upon a box,  
all eyes upon the boy,  
silence upon the audience:  
hush,  
the story is about to begin.

The tale having ended,  
the hands having clapped,  
the lights burnt out,  
the audience forgetting,  
the boy forgotten,  
the moment past,  
the theatre closed,  
the box tossed away:

The man,  
years later  
inside the theatre  
upon the stage  
within the pools of half-light,  
heard again the silence  
of an audience waiting  
for the story to begin,  
heard again the boy  
(himself)  
matching the expectant silence  
with the most exultant  
of silences.

## A Story about Beginning

W a r r e n K l i e w e r

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## Tiffany Claasen

Dallas Wiebe

**A**fter the congregation had finished singing that song that I had heard so many times when I lived next door and after the closing prayer, I moved up the side aisle to the front of the church. It was easy for me to walk up the side aisle because the members of the congregation were moving toward the back of the church and out the main entrance. They gathered at the back, talking, laughing, saying good-bye to the minister as I picked up the flag with its three-footed, silver metal pedestal and carried it out the side door at the front of the church. There were three dents in the carpet where the flag had been standing for a long time. The door on the left side of the front led into a kind of vestibule where a short set of steps led up into the choir loft. Another set of steps led down into the basement. I stopped in the vestibule and rolled the flag up on its wooden shaft and walked out the side door.

I guess because I'm an old woman no one paid any attention when I walked out of the church and east along First Street past the parking lot where our house used to stand and turned south on Walnut. I carried the flag along just like a spear, under my arm, the shiny golden point at the top pointed straight ahead. No one said anything to me and I suspected they either didn't care that their flag was passing by or they were glad to see it go away. I thought I'd have to sneak it out of the church. I was surprised at how easy it was to steal it. My

husband always said the Mickeynites were trusting dumb. He always said that they thought people were good, so it was easy to steal from them or swindle them. He must have known what he was talking about because no one stopped me. I turned east on Southeast Second Street and walked to where there was a dumpster parked in front of a house that was being remodeled. I tipped the flag over the edge and into the dumpster. I didn't burn it the way Patrick told me to do it, but I did get rid of it and knew that it would be hauled away and put into some landfill. No one noticed except my husband Patrick, who is in heaven.

When I took the flag out of the First Mennonite Church that was my first time I'd ever been in a church. I didn't go to save my soul, to find religion, to pass the time of day. I went because my husband Patrick's last order was for me to go and destroy that flag. He's been dead now since 1991. He was ninety-three when he died in the nursing home where he'd been bedfast and helpless for almost seven years. At the end of his life he kept saying, "Sophia, burn that flag. Go in and get it and burn it." I finally realized he was talking about that flag in that church that he and his buddies put there in 1917 when World War I started. His babbling finally made me remember the story he once told me about the whole business. I said, "Patrick, I'm too old to do it. I'm seventy-three years old. I can't do

something like that." His last words to me were, "Do it. Do it for me so I can rest in peace."

It was Easter Sunday, April 12, 1998, before I got up enough courage or desperation, whatever, to go and do what Patrick had wished. Born on April 12, 1918, I was exactly eighty years old. Never been in a church, even though Patrick and I lived next door to the east of the First Mennonite Church for forty years before the church bought our house in 1974 and we moved to Southeast Second Street. The church tore our house down and made it into a parking lot. All those years I wondered what that church looked like on the inside and what it was they were singing. Especially what they were singing on Easter Sunday. They always sang that same song. I knew it was Easter when I heard it. When I realized last week that Easter Sunday was coming I decided to go and see and hear for myself for the first time.

Patrick Henry Plankton and I got married on Wednesday, February 14, 1934. I was not quite sixteen and he was thirty-six. I had dropped out of school and was just wandering around Newton. It was the Depression and everyone was out of work. When my cousin Phil Hagan introduced me to Patrick at the Old Settlers Picnic in Halstead in 1933, Patrick bought me some watermelon. He took me for a ride in his new tan Ford V-8 with its red wire wheels, convertible top, a rumble seat and a fold-down windshield. He told me he had a house in Newton on East First Street and I figured he had money. He had to have money to have a new car and a house.

The marriage was a mistake. After we got married at the Justice of the Peace in Newton, he took me to his house and told me to get busy cleaning up the place. We walked into the house and Patrick Henry Plankton said to me, "Sophia Flook, you have to take care of this house. That's your job. These floors need

**All those years I wondered  
what that church looked like on  
the inside and what it was they  
were singing**

cleaning bad." I took off my shiny taffeta wedding dress; a blue skirt with white polka dots, a white blouse with a red collar and red trim around the two breast pockets and around the bottom edges of the short sleeves. I packed the dress in the box it came in from the J. C. Penney Store, put on my gray sack dress and went to work.

Patrick's house was two stories high. It had four rooms upstairs and four rooms downstairs. Downstairs there was a vestibule, a parlor, a dining room, a kitchen and a bathroom. The house was plain white clapboard with a wide porch all across the front. Nothing special. What became important to me was that the house was only some ten to fifteen feet from the east side of the First Mennonite Church. When I was in the kitchen I could hear the congregation singing their hymns. If I opened the window and if the church windows were open, I felt like I was right in the church. I never knew the words to what they sang, but the singing was the only part of my life that kept me alive.

That first Sunday in February, for instance, I was despondent. My husband had me cleaning constantly, cooking, sewing, washing his clothes. That first Sunday I heard the singing for the first time. I didn't know then that they also sang on Wednesday evenings, Sunday evenings and that they had choir

**I never knew what my husband did for a living. He told me it was none of my business.**

practices on Saturdays. When the singing started, Patrick was not home so I opened the kitchen window and listened. When Patrick came home, I said, "Patrick, could we go to church?" He sneered and said, "Never. You go to one of those churches and I'll throw you out." "But," I said, "there's one right next door. Couldn't I go even if you don't want to?" He said, "If I even see you talking to those Mickeynites, I'll break your neck."

I never knew what my husband did for a living. He told me it was none of my business. He was often gone for three or four days at a time and I was left alone in the house. It was during one of his absences in about 1942 that as I was cleaning out the back porch I found the pictures of his first two wives. I found pictures of him in his World War I uniform. When he returned, I asked him about the pictures. "Yes," he said, "my first two wives left me and divorced me. Yes, I was in World War I and I was gassed at Belleau Wood. The U. S. government never gave me any money for my ruined

lungs and kicked me out of the marines because I was physically unfit for military duty. Any other questions?" I said, "Did you treat your first two wives mean?" "Yes I did and I regret it. I won't treat you that way." "Then," I said, "let me go to church." His answer was the same. "Never. I won't let you set foot in one of those rotten churches." "Why not" I said. "The house is clean, I cook your food, I wash your clothes, and I ask no questions about where you go and what you do with your American Legion buddies. Why can't I go? It doesn't cost anything and you're usually gone or asleep on Sunday mornings. I'll make you breakfast before I go."

"Look, Sophia," he said. "Listen. Here's what happened. On April 6, 1917, the U. S. declared war on Germany. We all got all hot and bothered about our country going to war. When we found out that these Mickeynites were pacifists and would not serve in the army we decided to do something about it. Besides, they were Germans and they spoke German and were traitors to our country. We decided to show them a thing or two. Some of the Newton men caught some of the Mickeynites downtown, tied them to lamp posts and whipped them with horse whips. Me and three buddies went and looked into their church and saw they had no U.S. flag. That meant they was supporting Germany against our country. So we got them a good one for \$29.57, a lot of money in 1917. Silver metal pedestal included. Varnished wooden shaft. Golden spearhead at the top. Colors guaranteed not to fade. This was

before they built the brick church. Then they had a wooden church and on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1917, me and three other men walked into the church, stood our American flag at the left side of the platform at the front of the church and told them that's where it belonged and that if they took that flag out we'd burn down their church.

"The people in the church just kept on singing and didn't respond to our presence. They kept on singing until the song was done and then they went on with their service. No one tried to stop us. No one spoke to us. We stood the flag there and walked out and it's still there. We checked on it every month or so for years, even after they built the new church. We checked on it all through World War II, because the church was never locked. They never moved it. It stayed right there. The very flag we set there, in its metal stand, right where we put it."

I remember that I asked Patrick then, "Did you feel good about it? Did it make you feel good that you walked in there and put up that flag without asking them or even speaking to them first? Did it make you feel good, you and those others? Did it make you feel good to force something on them? No matter how you felt, why does that prevent me from going to church? Patrick, please let me go. It won't be an inconvenience to you." He grabbed my already graying hair, jerked my head back and snarled, "You step in one and you're dead."

It was not for me to ask more questions. What my husband said had to be done. But I could listen and I did. It came to be for me that I

waited all week for the Mennonites to start singing. It came to be that I waited for Sundays and hoped that the weather would be good enough for them to open their windows and then I could hear them better. Then there was the summer Bible school when, during their play period, the children would pick the mulberries from the tree between our house and the church and eat them and throw them at each other while I stood hidden behind our curtains and watched. It was the singing and the children that kept me alive through the forty years that we lived there until Patrick sold the house to the church in 1974 and we moved over to Southeast Second Street. When we moved I still didn't know the words to that song they sang on Easter. Sometimes after we moved, I would walk over past the First Mennonite Church on Sunday mornings and try to hear the songs. I did that until Patrick had to go to a nursing home and then I had to spend all my time taking care of him.

**It came to be for me that I  
waited all week for the  
Mennonites to start singing.**

When Patrick Henry Plankton went into the nursing home at Bethel Hospital in 1976, I stayed in our house on Southeast Second Street because it was close to where he was. I went there every day to help take care of him through his series of strokes and years of incontinence. Other patients also needed my help and I did what I always did at home; washed clothes, cleaned floors, fixed

food and took care of my husband. What I did was important but what is even more important is that in the nursing home Patrick became something else. Because he was helpless, he couldn't hurt me or threaten me. But that wasn't the reason for his change. What changed him was another patient named Benjamin Paul Kitzler.

Ben Kitzler was the town drunk in Newton. He was always drunk, but never hurt anyone or even himself. He was supported by his nephew Peter Seiltanzer, a professor of English in some rich eastern university. Everybody knew the nephew was rich and so they weren't surprised when the nephew put Ben into the nursing home. The only thing was that Ben had to give up drinking and that's when he started preaching repentance and confession. On the first day he was there Ben began walking up and down the aisles of the Bethel

**Everybody knew the nephew was rich and so they weren't surprised when the nephew put Ben into the nursing home.**

Nursing Home and crying out, "Who needs salvation? Who needs to confess his sins? Who needs prayer in his life? Follow me to the rec room and in ten minutes from now you can find peace within your soul. Come along, sinners, The time is at hand for your salvation. If you don't know Jesus by now, now is the time to get your soul in order for that final collapse into eternity. The grace and forgiveness of Jesus is free. Do it now, before it is too late. Jesus

loves you and offers you his salvation to your broken bodies and your broken souls. Are you weary, are you languid, are you sore oppressed? Now is the time to find peace and love. If you kneel down and you can't get up off your knees after praying, the attendants stand ready to assist you up. That's what they're paid to do and, by God, they'd better. Just ten minutes from now and you will be a new person." Ben did that twice a day until it was put on the regular schedule for the patients. His daily prayer meetings became even more important than the TV soap operas.

That was 1989 when Ben Kitzler showed up. Patrick was already bedfast by then and completely helpless. His kidneys were gone, his heart was bad, he had prostate cancer. I couldn't figure out how he stayed alive. But he could hear well, even up until he died, and on his ninety-third birthday, January 3, 1991, he asked if I could get Ben to stop by the room. I said I'd ask, I did and B. P., as he was called, came in one day. Patrick talked quickly. He said, "Ben, I hear your calls to prayer but I can't move. So I can't get down there and pray with you. You think you might do a little praying here in my room? I never went to church. I don't know much about praying or nothing. I was never a mean man. I just did some mean things. I never meant no harm in what I done. I always treated my wife swell and took good care of her. We didn't have no kids, but we was a family." Ben said, "God's grace and forgiveness are available to everyone."

Ben sat there and listened. He was a good listener; I'll hand him



that. He said, "Patrick, what's bothering you about your life? What's going to put you in hell?" Patrick thought about it a while and said, "You got about two weeks to listen?" Ben allowed as to how he had other things to do also, but he advised Pat to get his sins in order in order to get his life in order. "Start with the big ones," is what Ben advised. "OK," Pat said, "First of all, there's all that whiskey I carried into Newton." Ben looked up and said, "Pat, you forget I was a number A-1 customer. I already know all about that. Me and Jesus done forgave you for all that. What else?" Pat looked at me and said, "There's that flag business."

Ben got interested right off. He said, "What flag business?" Pat looked at me and said, "The one we put in the Mickeynite's church. We walked in there and made them put our flag in their church. It's still there." Ben thought about it a while. It baffled him, I think, to think. He said, "Let's pray about what we got to do. God will tell us. He knows what's what in this world." Ben prayed for at least ten minutes. When he finished, he said, "God'll tell you what to do, Pat. Trust in him." When Ben walked out the door, Pat rolled his head toward where I was sitting and said, "Sophia, I can't do nothing so it's up to you. Go get it and burn it." "Burn what?" I asked. "The flag. Promise me you'll get it and burn it. It's our flag; we paid for it. God and the U.S. Supreme Court say it's OK." I made the promise just to get him to quiet down.

It took me seven years to get up enough courage to go to the First Mennonite Church on East First

Street and get that flag. It was Easter Sunday, June 12, 1998. Did I tell you it was my eightieth birthday as well? I don't have any dress clothes so I got out my wedding dress, unpacked it out of the tissue paper where it had lain for sixty-four years.

It took me seven years to get up  
enough courage to go to the First  
Mennonite Church on East First  
Street and get that flag.

The dress was unfaded. The blue skirt with the white polka dots, the white blouse with the red trim, all still shiny like new and still a perfect fit just like when I first wore it. When some of the buttons on the blouse came off because of the rotten thread, I pinned the blouse shut with safety pins. I thought I needed a hat so I asked Stephanie, one of the attendants, if she had one I could wear. All she could come up with was a red baseball cap with a white "C" on the front. I said it would do and put it on. I put on lipstick and powder, silver colored high heel shoes and called a taxi to take me to the church. It's too far to walk now because the old Bethel Nursing Home is now destroyed and I'm out at the Christian Home, about a mile from the church.

I walked into the church early and stood there. I was astounded. It was my first time in a church. Eighty years old and never in a church. The side windows were colored pale pink and blue like I saw them from my kitchen when we lived next door. It was the three front windows that surprised me. From the outside they always looked black. Inside they

were full of color. The light shined through them and there were figures in them in bright reds and blues. There was a lamb lying down and holding a banner that said, "Behold the Lamb of God." I saw crosses and flowers. All shining down onto the congregation. It was so lovely I regretted not coming sooner.

I didn't know where to sit so I walked down the side aisle on the west side of the church. I slid into an end of one bench near the back. A woman was sitting there, holding a small child. The child was waving

**"Welcome to God's house. I'm Vera Claasen and this is my daughter Tiffany."**

its arms, slobbering all over everything. The mother was smiling like she would break her face, she bounced the baby around, the baby tried to grab hold of the bill of my red baseball cap as I leaned over and said, "Is it all right if I sit here?" The lady leaned toward me and said, "Of course. You must be a visitor." I said I was and the lady said, "Welcome to God's house. I'm Vera Claasen and this is my daughter Tiffany." I thought, "Tiffany? What kind of name is that?" I said, "I'm Sophia Plankton and I'm pleased to meet you."

No one quite believes me when I tell them that my name is Sophia Rachel Plankton. Or worse, when I tell people my full name they laugh. It's that last name, I think, that makes them take a second look. When I was younger I never knew what the joke was. At least, I didn't

know it until I saw issues of *The National Geographic Magazine*. Anyway, it was my husband's name and I didn't have any choice. My maiden name was Flook, which is just about as bad.

Vera Claasen gave me a program when the service began. It was Easter Sunday and everyone seemed terribly happy. They sang enthusiastically, the preacher preached enthusiastically, they prayed enthusiastically. Never having been there, I didn't know what was all going on. When the ushers passed the collection plate around, I put in a quarter for myself and a dime for my husband. After the sermon, the congregation stood and sang the song I always waited for when I was married and living next door. They sang the song I heard for forty years and never knew the words. Vera put her sleeping child down, took one of the blue hymnals and opened to number 280. She handed me the hymnal and said, "Here's our last hymn. You might like to sing along. I don't need the book. I know it by heart." And everyone sang, except me. I, of course, had no idea how to sing the hymn. While they sang, I took out my pencil and copied the words down on the back of my program: "Christ the Lord is ris'n today? Alleluia!/ All creation joins to say: Alleluia!/ Raise your joys and triumphs high: Alleluia!/ Sing, O heav'ns, and earth reply: Alleluia!"

I stood in my happiness and remembered how wonderful it all had been, how that one song had kept me going through forty years of loneliness, how that song coming through those windows of that

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church was what helped me face another week of cleaning, scrubbing, cooking, washing there by myself. As the congregation worked its way through five verses of the song, I remembered how Ben Kitzler always said that confession is good for old people, that old people, especially, should tell all the evil from their lives, should unburden themselves, get rid of all their guilt, should empty their minds in the humiliation and degradation of old age and save their souls before rotting off into oblivion. When the hymn ended and the preacher was speaking his benediction, I said to myself, "Lord, whoever you are or wherever you are, please forgive me and my husband for whatever evil we might have done on this earth. I'm sure he didn't mean no harm by what he done. He wasn't a bad man. He just did bad things. I'm truly sorry for the both of us."

Vera Claasen picked up her sleeping Tiffany, leaned over and said, "Have a happy Easter, Sophia. May God bless you and your family," while I started moving down the outside aisle toward the front of the church. There it stood. Right where my husband and his buddies said they put it eighty-one years ago. White stars on a blue field. Red and white stripes. Unfaded. Golden point. Silver pedestal. No one stopped me as I moved toward the front of the church. I looked up at the white lamb lying in the red and blue glass window and said aloud, "Patrick, this is the last order of yours I'm ever obeying. Ever."

## Heavy Yellow Heads

R h o d a J a n z e n

Saint Sophia's Byzantine mosaics show  
the heads of saints balancing gold frisbees,  
or cumbrous yellow pleated into rays  
so heavy that heads bend like slender stems  
of sunflowers. Broad yellow still strokes heads  
cocked sunward, nodding wisely in the breeze,  
as if these, generations later, can  
remember hurried graves and tangled roots,  
the family that heard of troops in Schönsee,  
and knew their village would be next. Parents

whisper the sound of leafy stalks, rustling,  
darkness curling corners, twilight pushing  
like a bully, pictures knotted into  
hankies, zwieback counted and wrapped, rubles  
pocket-pinned, floorboards pried to hide the last  
watermelon syrup since the sugar  
ran out. Father explains that they will go  
to the sunflower fields, sleep on the ground—  
like Cossacks? the boy wants to know, and his  
father affirms, Yes, like Cossacks—they will

be quiet as cats, and unlike Cossacks  
they will pray. The oldest nods, suspecting,  
turns his brother's little lion torso  
and buttons his play-soiled blouse and smiles hard.  
In the long damp Rudy sleeps fitfully,  
starting awake to surprise a round moon  
on the rise like a bun. His father, still  
awake, puts a finger to lips that say,  
Amen. Sleep now because when the light comes  
pink and cautious over the sunflowers

the bayonets will find me. Your brother  
will die neatly of the cholera, your  
mother will survive the rapes to ghost your  
middle-age, lips moving silently as  
in rhythmic rocking on your patio  
she prays mercy, mercy, mercy. But you,  
my son, alight on a wagonbed of  
corpses, brush away the sweetrot odor  
like a moth, hop down smartly at the train.  
I predict that the stars will favor you,  
that you will at sixty-three return on  
a Mennonite Heritage Tour. And when  
our muddy country roads confound your bus,

---

try bribing peasants on their motorbikes  
to bump you back to Alexanderfeld.  
Don't forget this map. Find your childhood home.  
Give to the babushka (your childhood friend)  
some kopeks to see the casual hens,  
the mouldering walls, the very mattress where  
you were born, the rat on its way, the hole

in the floor where your wife pants, There it is,  
after all these years, the jar still rosy  
with sluggish watermelon syrup. Bend  
and inhale—ah, it is fragrant July,  
it is your final cup of tea sweetened  
with the heart of summer melons, it is  
pink uncomplicated breath of babies  
asleep in a field of fear beneath a  
broken zwieback moon, and one half hugging  
the sky, the other already eaten,

the urgent hunger for more, the crumbs that  
fall to earth, to the fields of sunflowers.  
In unison melancholy, these bow  
their heavy yellow heads to the broken  
bread of remembrance. The stars are crumbs  
falling whitely into mouths that open  
galaxies, and sunflowers stoop under  
onus of what shoulders can bear: they have  
a long way to Byzantium, pale roots  
trailing, heads gold-tipped and insatiable.

## Saints! Saints! Saints!

Rhoda Janzen

Envy the saints who had the luck to be  
exalted, not for stunning showmanship  
(like Moses), but for their sliding scale  
of sanity into celebrity psychosis.  
Santa Rosa of Peru sustained the curse  
of beauty, praying God would smite her  
as ugly as her dog. Thus to assist

she blanched her skin with chilies,  
inserting pins into her head, punching  
piety the way we prick demography on maps.  
Applauded and unwed, her skin in little flaps,  
she made a beeline for the convent, where  
she received Christ's blessing and, presumably,  
a reticule of tasks. Or take my favorite

Saint Norbert, who, during mass, resolved  
to swallow a brown wolf spider rather than  
fish the intruder out of Christ's cup.  
In school there was a guy named Al, who on  
a college dare ate a spider for twenty-eight  
bucks. Long before I read about Norbert  
I'd wondered where Al was and if, now old

and ironic, he told the spider story  
at parties with a foolish half-smile of pride,  
swirling a vodka tonic—had wondered if  
over the years Al's memory had absorbed  
new contours, like the Turin shroud,  
until he could barely tell the anecdote aloud,  
but secretly slipped over it, a rosary on which

one rehearses piety. Beautiful, relentless,  
this perfect submission to the gods  
of discipline, cthonic devils we soothe  
or medicate. La Rosa today would reveal  
a history of abuse on *Oprah*. She'd pop  
Lorvox to loosen screws of hysteria,  
until, richly placid, she'd channel-surf

---

the calms. Those sainted silvered genitals  
remind us we need to sacrifice our parts  
for show and even encore for the show-  
bits that brace like fans, raucous but  
expendable. If, like Simeoen, we contrived  
smallish platforms on which to live high  
above the masses, we'd hear the voices

subside into indifference at our severity  
high on our poles, in our posture of praise.  
Years from now you may have my thumb  
and invoke it against disaster, blight,  
petit bourgeois, or stigmata of cliché. Why,  
a thumb like mine can be employed a hundred  
holy ways. I invite you, therefore, to salute

with me the sacred panoply of saints, to stand  
and utter, *Ah, selah, those were the days.*

*for David, and for David*

Reading late at night he scares himself:  
it's too familiar, he can see his children  
at home in Stuttgart or Holliday.

At Stuarts Draft they kept the car  
at bay for seven years, time plucked  
from history's gyre—for what?

To see their grandchildren drive Mazdas.  
On the day the Bedford standard fell  
one family went from suspenders

to belts, quick as winter, ice  
from the tin of any roof. Sometimes  
it would be so easy to leave.

He did it once before. That life—  
construction, bartending—had its own rules.  
Across the dark hall

his sons are sleeping. Light from the page  
moves only as far as the younger one's hair,  
faint crescent at pillow's edge.

He doesn't know what to do with his hands.  
They pluck at the signatures, sheets spilling  
onto the hardwood floor,

slick-surfaced, helplessly inscribed, each  
a bit of something that once hefted branches  
into the air of the world.

## The Amish Settlement That Failed

G . C . W a l d r e p



—Matthew 18:8

Plied with whiskey  
 this one last time  
 he couldn't have known  
 the subsequent ache of absence,

only delirium, the drink  
 and the pain likewise  
 cycling up and down  
 beneath the thick eroded surface

of his skin. Below his knee  
 the swelling had forced  
 his wife to cut away  
 the pants; his last thought

before the hacksaw  
 bit deep into the thigh  
 was how swollen and immodest  
 his calf must seem,

how exposed. The leg,  
 having been formerly human  
 and thus too good for carrion,  
 they buried in a far

and unmarked corner  
 of the churchyard.  
 By the time he died  
 twelve years later, free of gangrene

and rejoicing in a glorious  
 inheritance, no one remembered  
 the precise spot. They buried him  
 as he was, incomplete,

leaving farmboys  
 to imagine what shout  
 would call either from this earth,  
 what stumbling reunion.

## First Gentile Convert in a Mennonite Community

G . C . W a l d r e p

## Shelter

G . C . W a l d r e p

At Lehman's in Kidron  
the videotape of the barnraising  
loops and spools continuously:

the barn's there and then  
it's not, and then it's there again,  
clean rafters crowded with the dark

and moving shapes of men,  
the sounds—strangely absent—  
of tools this store will sell you,

curious, rear and back throbbing  
from the hard seats of the tourist bus,  
eyes glazed from farm after farm

laid out in the green symmetry  
that is Ohio. Six hundred miles away  
someone grunts as walls go up,

someone is humming a hymn  
that could be your ticket out of here  
were you not always wanting

more water, ebb and flow,  
the cool of it on your palm  
or laved over the limbs of a lover.

The tape reverses. Your head aches.  
The tiny carpenters, tireless, begin again,  
victims of some documentary compulsion

as you miss your bus,  
as a child cries, as someone, somewhere  
slaps the last shingles into place.

–Galatians 6:11

No one writes in this language.  
 Around the kitchen table  
 it flows naturally; on paper  
 a jumble of consonants  
 and pale phonetic markings,  
 as if some novice proofreader  
 had been let loose  
 on anonymous galleys,  
 the collected works  
 of someone long dead,  
 unable to dispute the changes.  
 He's zealous. Every smear  
 of ink becomes a dialect.  
 Every minute he's adding umlauts  
 in Allen County, Indiana,  
 subtracting a word or two  
 from Kalona's youth.  
 And when the scholars meet,  
 linking hands to hold back the world  
 in the only way they know,  
 he's there: all night  
 the long vowels of the concision,  
 how to manage tone  
 in those last verses of Mark,  
 whether Tobit's worth  
 the time and effort.  
 How He Himself would have sounded  
 in an unfamiliar tongue—  
 Manx, say, or Tuscan—trusting words  
 to speech that even then  
 would have been slipping  
 from Him, moment by moment  
 beneath the weight  
 of the proofreader's  
 violent scrawl: *Du uns sell  
 gleichmis auslayya: ich sawk diah,  
 vennichsht kaysa sei  
 im Himmel-reich.*

## Manuscript Evidence

G . C . W a l d r e p

## Nightworld

G . C . W a l d r e p

Children in bed, adults in the dooryard,  
the deer itself caught up between  
earth's surface and the oak's broad limb  
by a single hank of rope, twisting  
slowly as one knife does its work  
ahead of the others, a neighbor's  
accidental kindness at the onset of winter.

Shop orders have been down this fall.  
In town the empty streets play out  
a workman's half-forgotten tangle of wires,  
splayed and useless. Night is best for deer  
because the air is cooler, less chance  
of spoilage or odor, should the knife slip.  
Roadkill's edible enough worked with skill

and so we work in silence. The deer's  
diminishing carcass revolves in the breeze.  
We'll freeze the shanks and can the rest  
for soup. The moon rises so bright  
that even in darkness the colors leap out  
like the rings of Saturn, like Jupiter,  
nothing we've ever seen in day.

People like flies  
fingering the tables,  
orange flowered water pitchers,  
boxes of books,  
frames of men praying over soup,  
antique plaques of shimmering stones  
proclaiming Jesus Never Fails.

Baumans and Horsts,  
blue jeans and T-shirts,  
long black dresses  
in the hot September sun.

It doesn't start till eleven.  
The boyfriend of a girl  
from Grandpa's church  
his voice fast, slick and young  
begins when Grandpa interrupts  
in sudden prayer  
arms outstretched over the crowd  
his thunderous invocation covering bowed heads.  
Everyone says Amen.

The auctioneer hurries our family  
with boxes of clocks with frayed cords,  
old juice glasses,  
window cleaning gadgets.  
A tall man I can't place  
coaxes me to bid higher  
his arm nudging mine  
on the blue clay butter dish,  
the wobbly plant stand,  
the ceramic donkey.

I remember when Grandpa  
preached in New York,  
how he paced and raised his arms  
sure of what God was saying  
spilling it down the pews  
like something sweet and wet  
you couldn't help but dip your fingers in  
and taste.

## The Auction

*C h e r y l D e n i s e*

At dinner we ate off those  
yellow and gold plates.  
Grandpa quizzed us on the sermon.  
Mashed potatoes, roast beef, gravy,  
Dar and I ate only the oatmeal rolls  
with homemade strawberry jam  
at least five apiece.  
The plates now held up  
by uncle Charlie and Rod  
going for seventy-five dollars  
to a blonde antique dealer.

Jeremy gets the blue chair  
and Lucy the wall hanging.  
A woman in stretch pants  
gets Aunt Lois's glass pear,  
it used to be filled with perfume  
she'd let us girls dab on our necks.

Aunt Elsie in her black bonnet  
and sturdy shoes  
tries to figure out my long haired husband,  
tells him stories of my mother in the fabric store,  
while holding his arm.

John smiles says hi  
in his jean jacket  
permed blonde hair  
looking like high school.  
I had a crush so bad;  
I never talked to him before.

The Old Order men  
with black hats  
and thick bass laughter  
eye the garden tools in the backyard.  
They know a fair price.

Julie and I share a root beer  
and decide how high to bid  
on the bookcase  
for Mom's Christmas gift.

Three thirty and everything's done.  
An Old Order woman  
sits on Aunt Lois's bed, by her dresser  
and nightstand waiting for her husband  
to come with the buggy.  
Mom offers her two unsold  
boxes of quilt pieces  
which she takes with a slow smile.  
Our family leaves for lasagna at Mom's.  
Rod takes Grandpa and Grandma to their new apartment  
while I imagine drinking orange juice  
in the morning,  
like a little girl at Grandma's  
with the special cups.

## At Church

C h e r y l D e n i s e

While singing "Children of the Heavenly Father"  
 I hear your distinct tenor voice.  
 I remember baby-sitting your children  
 when I was fifteen,  
 sitting in the dark glow of the TV,  
 your boys asleep under race-car blankets,  
 popcorn gone,  
 the fridge emptied of the last piece of shoofly,  
 my eyes shocked at the  
 brown bottles of beer in the back.  
 It was then that I found them,  
 under the Sears Catalogue.  
 Shiny naked women.

After five minutes  
 the slow sweat of my hands  
 turned pages  
 to arched brows  
 and pink cheeks.  
 I followed the curve of hair down shoulders  
 over mountainous breasts  
 deep valley middles  
 pulling into tiny buttons  
 sliding down round hips  
 legs slightly parted.  
 They laid on white couches,  
 kitchen floors,  
 in sunken bathtubs  
 touching themselves  
 like they too were too beautiful to resist.

I pictured you in bed with Janice  
 eyes closed imagining July's favorite.  
 Janice, a Barbie Doll figure  
 who played fast pitch for church league.  
 She said you remembered me  
 riding my tricycle to church  
 blonde ribboned pig-tails,  
 in a blue dress.



In the bathroom closet  
behind the plush white towels  
stood a poster  
a brown haired woman  
lying on the beach,  
breasts strewn with sun,  
sand glistening on her thighs  
ready to kiss you.

I wondered how many  
Mennonite men had her in the closet.

At two a.m. in my bedroom  
naked  
I stared in the mirror,  
imagining the falling disappointed eyes  
of my future husband.

Even now, years later,  
I'm still afraid  
to get seated next to you,  
to be bumped by your arm  
taking coats off in the foyer  
before sermons,  
watching your green eyes  
tear open my dress,  
laughing at my apricot breasts  
grabbing them anyway.

## Inter-Mennonite Scholarly Dialogue in 1929: Edmund G. Kaufman and Harold S. Bender

James C. Juhnke

**E**dmund G. Kaufman, president of Bethel College, and Harold S. Bender, dean of Goshen College and Goshen Seminary, were two of the strongest Mennonite leaders in the middle decades of the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>. Kaufman and Bender were denominational progressives, both well positioned to promote ecumenical cooperation among their respective Mennonite groups—the General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) and the Mennonite Church [MC or (Old) Mennonite]. But these two men did not seek out each other for cooperative work. Among the reasons for their apparent coolness was an incident that took place in 1929, when Kaufman and Bender were early in their careers. Their relationship began inauspiciously.<sup>2</sup>

In 1928, after a missionary term in China, Kaufman completed a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago. The title was “The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among the Mennonites of North America.” He wanted to publish the dissertation in book form. In early 1929 Kaufman sent his dissertation to Bender at Goshen for possible publication in the new series, “Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History.” In March Bender accepted the manuscript for publication. Six months later, after the editorial process was well advanced, Bender wrote that an “unanticipated block” would prohibit the project. Kaufman would have to find another

publisher. During this half year exchange, both Kaufman and Bender learned some troubling lessons about the limits of inter-Mennonite cooperation and the differences between their separate Mennonite groups. They never really overcame this false start.

In 1929 Harold Bender was a rising star on the Mennonite scene. Six and a half years younger than Kaufman, he had a masters degree (1923) from Princeton School of Theology. He had earlier been allied with a group of youthful insurgents who fought the conservative authoritarianism of the (Old) Mennonite leaders, especially Daniel Kauffman, editor of the *Gospel Herald* at Scottdale, Pennsylvania. After taking a teaching position at Goshen College in 1924, Bender gradually cut ties with the insurgents while developing an alternative center for Mennonite study and renewal over against the old guard. Bender’s agenda, an ingenious breakthrough in its time, was to pursue progressive Mennonite ideals through study of the past. Above all, he called attention to the faith of sixteenth century Anabaptism. A major publication enterprise was central to the effort. Through a new “Mennonite Historical Society” in Goshen, Bender founded *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, and a new book series, “Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History,” for which Bender wrote the first volume. Kaufman’s newly approved



Edmund G.  
Kaufman,  
Harold S.  
Bender

doctoral dissertation from the University of Chicago reached Bender's desk just as the book series was taking shape.

Bender was eager to have Kaufman's book in the series. In early March he wrote that several faculty colleagues at Goshen College had read the chapter on (Old) Mennonites "and all are much impressed by the fairness and thoroughness with which you handle the material." On March 20 he sent a telegram to Kaufman in Chicago, approving terms for publication. A subsidy of \$500 from the General Conference Mennonite Board of Foreign Missions would enable the printing of 2,000 copies. Bender undertook the task of editorial critique with gusto. Not only did this volume from a newly minted Mennonite Ph.D. promise to add luster to the series, it would also give Bender an editorial opportunity to shape the terms and the content of

the new thrust of Anabaptist-Mennonite history. Bender marked up the manuscript thoroughly and added six typewritten pages of corrections and suggestions for Kaufman to incorporate. Bender acknowledged that his comments were "very free and pointed," not meant to be taken personally but rather in behalf of scholarship.

Bender's critique marked some critical boundaries between the two Mennonite groups and staked out his own interpretation of Mennonite history. One issue was group names. Kaufman's manuscript used the name (Old) Mennonite Church for Bender's group—the name used popularly to distinguish it from various "Old Order" or "New" Mennonite groups, as well as from Kaufman's General Conference Mennonites. Bender "strongly urged" that Kaufman use the official name of the body, "The Mennonite Church." To use an inclusive name

In the long run, the Goshen school succeeded, with the help of an inclusive name, in creating the impression that their normative image of Mennonite history applied to all Mennonites.

for just one group in the wider complex of Mennonitism would inevitably foster the impression that the material at hand dealt with all Mennonites in America, not just one group. Bender earnestly denied "any desire to arrogate to ourselves the sole use of the name 'Mennonite' in a way derogatory to other groups."

From Kaufman's point of view, of course, benign intentions could not overcome the fact that most readers would take "The Mennonite Church" to refer to Mennonites in general. Kaufman accepted a compromise which Bender offered—to put the adjective "old" in parenthesis to indicate it was not part of the official title. Bender's publications at Goshen did not use the adjective. In the long run, the Goshen school succeeded, with the help of an inclusive name, in creating the impression that their normative image of Mennonite history applied to all Mennonites. For Kaufman and other General Conference Mennonites, this remained a point of irritation through the years.

Another issue in Bender's critique of Kaufman's manuscript was the relative weight given to the Dutch and the Swiss in the origins of Anabaptism. Bender's hero was the Swiss Anabaptist Conrad Grebel, not the Dutch leader, Menno Simons, to whom Kaufman gave priority. It was important for Bender that the first Anabaptist baptisms took place in Switzerland. He wrote to Kaufman, "Menno Simons should not be the first man treated. The first should be the leaders of the Swiss Brethren." Moreover, Bender objected that Kaufman had cited authorities on

Menno Simons from his own tradition (C. H. Wedel, J. H. Langenwalter, P. M. Friesen) rather than John M. Horsch. Bender wrote, "All the others are only second or third hand authorities. Horsch is the only first-hand English authority. Scratch the others." Horsch was Bender's father-in-law, an outspoken anti-modernist, a scholar of Anabaptism, and author of a 1916 biography of Menno.

Kaufman's failure to cite Horsch was indeed a serious omission, one which he corrected in the published version. But Bender's petty dismissal of such a distinguished scholar of Mennonite history as C. H. Wedel must have seemed partisan and narrow-minded to Kaufman. Wedel was a notable authority on Anabaptism, author of numerous Mennonite history books, and Kaufman's former teacher at Bethel College. In denigrating Wedel on the spurious grounds that a German-language source was more secondary than an English-language source, Bender was belittling the tradition in which Kaufman stood.

The most significant issue between Bender and Kaufman was the central sociological thesis of the manuscript: that the evolution of the "sect cycle" could explain the development of Mennonite missionary and benevolent interests. On this point Bender was equivocal. "I can thoroughly agree with the major thesis," he wrote, "but hesitate to accept all of its applications and implications." Bender doubted whether "the conflict between non-conformity and missions is as clear and decisive as your discussion seems to make it." But Bender, who

was quite detailed in other criticisms, did not specifically say in what respects the thesis was accurate and in what respects it was misleading. He rather found it generally valid but somehow "incomplete." He did not ask Kaufman to revise the thesis for publication. Nor did Kaufman respond with extended argument on this or any other point in Bender's critique.

Why, then, was Kaufman's book rejected for the Goshen series? The decision came when Bender was in Germany. Conservative members of Goshen's Mennonite Historical Society protested against Kaufman's sociological thesis. The most outspoken voice was that of John Horsch, editor of Mennonite publications at Scottdale, Pennsylvania. He thought Kaufman's sect-cycle theory betokened modernism and discredited the Mennonite teaching and practice of separation from the world. Bender protested the decision and wrote to Horsch from Europe: "The only question of course is,—do sects actually according to their history run through such a cycle. I believe that the theory on the whole is borne out by facts."<sup>3</sup> But Bender could not overturn the decision to refuse Kaufman's manuscript.

The 1929 dialogue about Kaufman's Ph.D. dissertation was a foreshadowing of polarities which would characterize Mennonite scholarship through the twentieth century. On one hand was a position of cultural engagement, articulated by C. H. Wedel, C. Henry Smith, and Edmund Kaufman, all of whom endeavored to embrace the methods

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
MISSIONARY AND PHILANTHROPIC  
INTEREST AMONG THE MENNONITES  
OF NORTH AMERICA

BY

EDMUND GEORGE KAUFMAN, Ph. D.

FORMERLY MISSIONARY TO CHINA UNDER THE NORTH MISSION BOARD OF THE  
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LATER, ASSISTANT DEAN, BERWYCK COLLEGE, LITTLETON, OHIO; NOW  
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THE MENNONITE BOOK CONCERN

Berne, Indiana

1931

and fruits of modern learning and civilization for Mennonite identity. Kaufman's contribution to this position came from the discipline of sociology—a social historical explanation of Mennonite development.

An alternative view of the Mennonite tradition was a position of nonconformity-minded religious history, which endeavored to define Anabaptist-Mennonitism in terms of its spiritual essence. In 1929 Bender had not worked out his historical philosophy. But in 1944 he wrote the manifesto for this tradition in an

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the end of the  
twentieth century.

essay, "The Anabaptist Vision," which located the spiritual core of Anabaptist-Mennonitism in the teachings of Conrad Grebel and Swiss-South German Anabaptism. Bender's religious-historical approach dominated Mennonite scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s the "Goshen School" interpretation was challenged by social-historical approaches more akin to Kaufman's 1929 dissertation.

The tension between social-scientific history and intellectual or spiritual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) continues to enliven the field of Anabaptist-Mennonite studies at the end of the twentieth century. The 1929 exchange between Kaufman and Bender, and the conservative intervention of Horsch, represent an early expression of interpretive options.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community* (North Newton: Bethel College, 1994), and Albert N. Keim, *Harold S. Bender 1897-1962* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> The letters and documents on which this article is based are in the Edmund G. Kaufman Collection at Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, box 8, folder 88.

<sup>3</sup> Bender to Horsch, 8 August 1929, folder A-H, box 4, Horsch papers, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana.

# Mennonite Life

*An Illustrated Quarterly Devoted to Mennonite History and Culture*

ISSN 0025-9365

## Founding editor

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## Graphic Design:

*Denise Brueggeman-Siemens, Mennonite Press, Newton, Kansas*

*Printing by Mennonite Press, Newton, Kansas*

## Internet

*e-mail: [mennonite-life@bethelks.edu](mailto:mennonite-life@bethelks.edu) / web page: <http://www.bethelks.edu/services/mla/mennlife/homepage.html>*

## Mennonite Life

*is a self-supporting, non-profit publication, and appears each March, June, September, and December.*

## Subscription rates:

*1 year - \$20.00; 2 years - \$30.00. Foreign: 1 year - \$25.00; 2 years - \$35.00.*

*Single copies: 1990-present \$4.50, pre-1990 \$3.00.*

## Editorial Correspondence

*should be directed to Mennonite Life, Bethel College, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67117-0531 or to our e-mail address.*

## Change of address

*Change of address notification should be sent to Mennonite Life, Bethel College, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67117-0531.*

## Postmaster

*Periodical postage paid at North Newton, Kansas 67117. Please send change of address to Mennonite Life, Bethel College, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67117-0531.*

## Abstracted and indexed

*in Religion Index One: Periodicals, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, and Christian Periodical Index.*

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