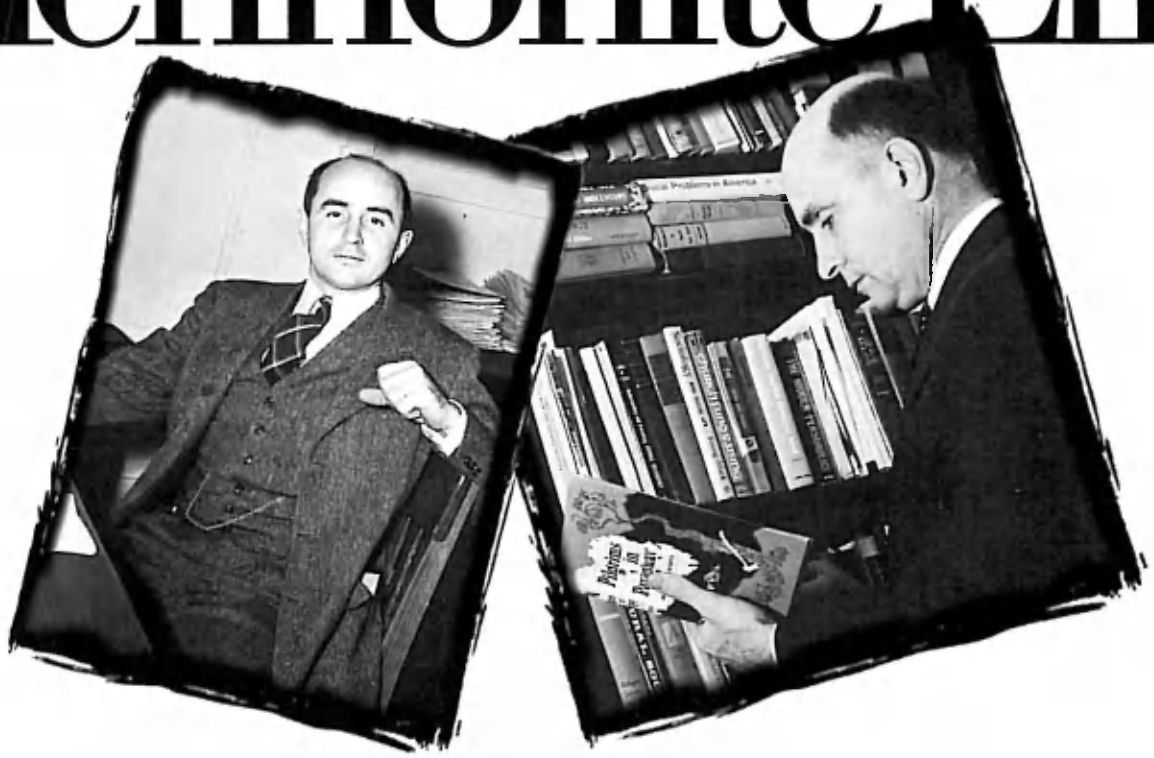
Mennonite Life



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In *this* issue

In this issue we celebrate the contributions of J. Winfield Fretz to the Mennonite community. We wish Winfield well in his 89th year. An article by Leland Harder, retired Mennonite sociologist in North Newton, Kansas, reviews Winfield's life story. Paul Toews, professor of history at Fresno Pacific University, places Fretz in the context of Mennonite scholarship in the twentieth century.

Calvin Redekop, another retired Mennonite sociologist, of Harrisonburg, Virginia, gives a retrospective review of one of Winfield Fretz's most important books, *Pilgrims in Paraguay*. Barbara A. Thiesen, co-director of libraries at Bethel College, presents a bibliography of Fretz's writings.

This issue also includes the annual Mennonite Bibliography for 1998, an ever-growing list of publications related to Mennonite history, life, and thought.

Photo credits: J. Winfield Fretz, p. 6, 7, 8, 14; Mennonite Library and Archives, front cover, p. 4, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 26

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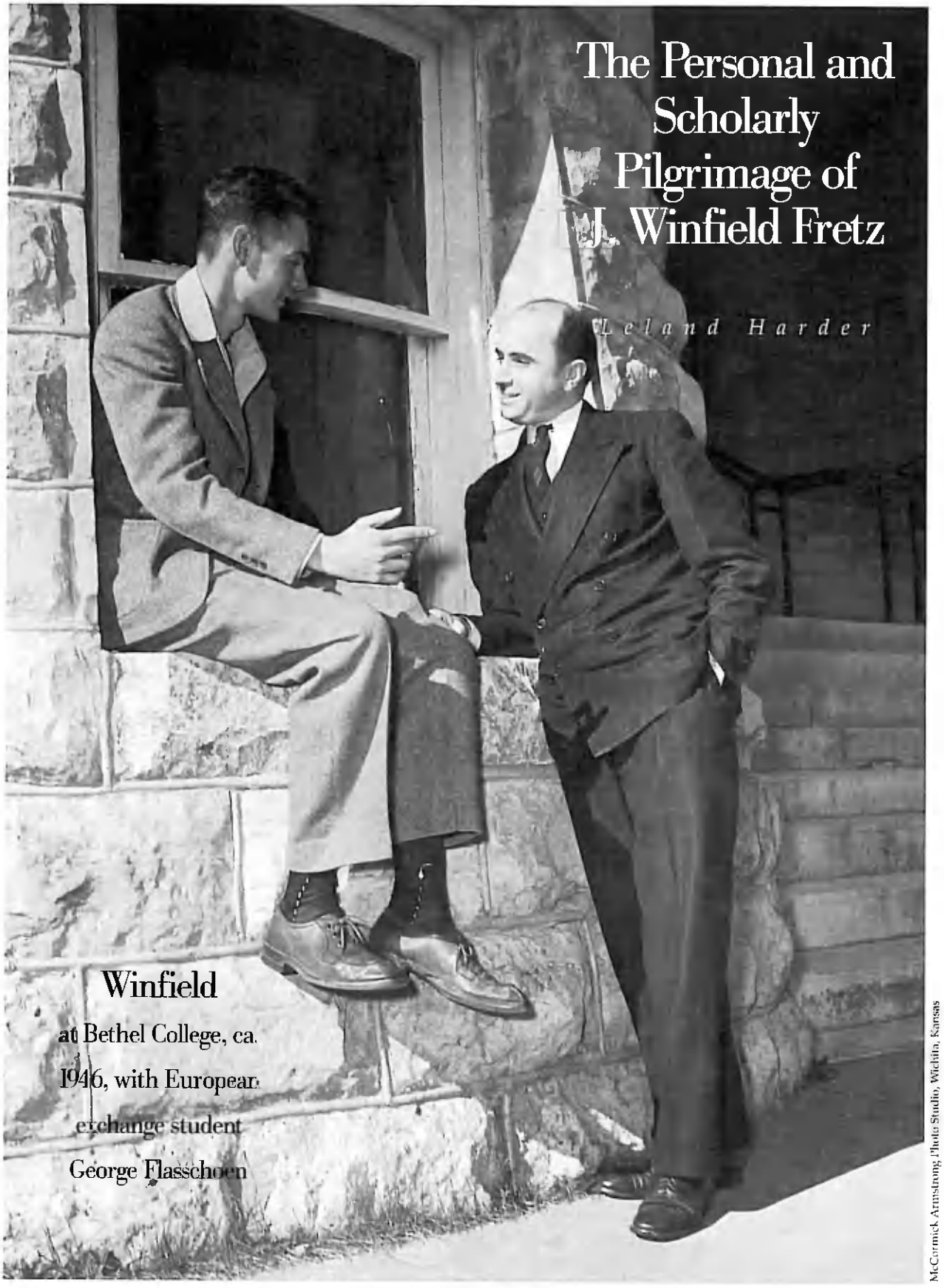
The Personal and Scholarly Pilgrimage of J. Winfield Fretz

Leland Harder



Winfield at Bethel College, ca. 1946, with European exchange student George Flasschoen

McCormick Armstrong Photo Studio, Wichita, Kansas

Winfield was the ninth of eleven children, all born to his mother at home. Hiram, the oldest, was the result of a date-rape by a man who married her under the duress of the unwanted pregnancy. After three years of an abusive relationship, she decided to leave him and walked the ten miles along country roads to her parental farm home, pushing baby George in a carriage with little Hiram walking along, and being pregnant with a third child—Winfield's half-sister Alice.

Her parents welcomed her graciously; and when her husband appeared, demanding that she return, her father intervened, telling him firmly, "No way! she's not coming back, and that's that!" Some time later they heard that the abusive husband, a carpenter, had stepped on a rusty nail and died of tetanus.

The widow with three children moved into an apartment over a creamery in the nearby village of Plumsteadville, twenty miles north of Philadelphia. Winfield doesn't know how his parents, Clarence and Ella Landis Fretz, met. Clarence was an only son, and his parents were aging at the time they were married. When they died he inherited their 100-acre farm on which were a ten-room brick house and an auxiliary four room "grossdawdy" house; and that's where Winfield spent the first twelve years of his life.

The Early Years, 1910-1925

In the milieu of that inter-Mennonite community, it was a mixed marriage. His mother had belonged to the Deep Run Mennonite Church-East (Old Mennonite), and his father to the Deep Run Mennonite Church-West (General Conference). The two churches were not over 300 yards apart. She was happy to be free of the restrictions her church had imposed upon her, such as the following dress ruling:

The standard for sisters is the cape dress. All dresses are to be made of material suitable for a plain dress. In every case the dress shall be modest in appearance without low necked cut necks, with long sleeves and skirts long enough to cause no undue attention to the lower limbs....[1]

And there were other differences. The members of the East Church drove buggies, and some members of the West Church drove cars. Winfield said that "when they came to church in their buggies, and we came in our cars, we literally left them in the dust." His father bought an Overland automobile in 1915. "Going to church required a two tier arrangement. My father drove, my mother sat next to him, holding my smallest sister Mildred. The next smallest sister, Gladys, sat in the middle between my parents. In the back seat sat John, Ida, and Martha, holding Ethel, Elwyn and me." Hiram and George had been fostered out at the time of their mother's second marriage.

Winfield and his siblings adored their mother—by temperament a loving, intelligent, optimistic, creative person. She loved music, sang often, smiled a lot, and told many stories about her childhood and family experiences. Those were happy years, and the children were largely unaware of their parents' financial problems leading eventually to bankruptcy and loss of the farm in 1922.

Their parents had underestimated the cost of modernizing their farm. They enlarged the farmhouse, installing indoor plumbing, hot and cold running water, a central hot-water radiator system to heat the large house, a telephone, modern kitchen, and electricity from their own generator. They built a herd of Guernsey cows and lost most of them to the foot-and-mouth disease. They purchased pure-bred Berkshire hogs which in a few months contracted cholera and had to be destroyed. They acquired a flock of registered Barred Rock chickens and built a long poultry-house.

This seemingly endless expansion seemed warranted by their recent inheritances from both

maternal and paternal parents. Winfield recalls his early years as wholesome and enjoyable. "Our parents didn't let themselves or us feel depressed. We were a large family and had a lot of fun together. Our father loved our mother dearly and had the good sense to defer to her better judgment in most things domestic. He once remarked, 'The finest crop I grew on that farm was my children.'"

The family members were totally interdependent, and the older brother John was especially supportive of Winfield's interest in school and quest for answers to constant intellectual questions. In all kinds of weather six of the eight children walked together to their one-room village school. Winfield recalls starting first grade, learning to read and simultaneously listening to his older siblings recite from literary works like Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village."

Winfield as a high school student, at home in Lansdale.

There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,

> The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
> A man he was to all the country dear,
> And passing rich with forty pounds a year....
> At church with meek and unaffected grace,
> His looks adorn'd the venerable place;
> Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
> And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.[2]

To Winfield it seemed that Oliver Goldsmith was writing about his Uncle Allen Fretz, who had been pastor of their church since 1883.

After the sheriff's sale, the family moved to the industrial town of Lansdale. Their father went to work in a pretzel bakery for twenty-five cents an hour and continued there as a shipping clerk for the next twenty-five years. Winfield's older brother John worked in a paper box company in Philadelphia, and the three older sisters went to work in a hosiery mill. Winfield began high school and the two younger sisters, Gladys and Mildred, attended elementary school.

High School Years, 1925-1930

When Winfield entered high school in Lansdale, he was put back a year to catch up with some of the missing basics. "My experience there at first was one of a country boy coming into this big high school of 300 students with great timidity." But then he began to thrive academically, socially and athletically. He went out for basketball and football and started dating girls. Proudly he displays his little gold football inscribed "J. W. FRETZ, LEFT END." In his last two years of high school he was president of his

"Proudly he displays his little gold football inscribed 'J. W. FRETZ, LEFT END."

class, and in his senior year, 1930, he was manager of the yearbook and captain of the championship basketball team.

During the summers he always found some form of gainful employment. He worked in a coil spring factory one summer, cutting off the irregular ends. On Saturdays he worked on a bakery truck, delivering bread, cakes and doughnuts on a regular daily route. Another summer he worked in a laundry, then got a job in a grocery store working Friday nights and Saturdays.

Church life in Lansdale was troubling. At the rural Deep Run Church, his great uncle Allen Fretz had been the minister for over forty years, modeling great respect for the General Conference Mennonite Church, serving as president of the Eastern District Conference for many terms, and helping to found the Conference paper, *The Mennonite*.[3]

In Lansdale Winfield's family and six other families including three of their minister's sons and their families were instrumental in founding the Grace Mennonite Church. The new church naively brought in a young graduate of Moody Bible Institute. At first the members thought he was a man who could preach and sing and evangelize, and yes, someone who was "on fire for the Lord, just what we needed." Winfield quickly added, "The fire that he had was more flame than substance. He immediately introduced non-Mennonite Sunday school material and invited non-Mennonite evangelists to preach each month and feed us with an alien fundamentalist diet."

During their high school years, Winfield and his cousin Jake Fretz attended Unruh's prayer meetings, but they soon tired of them. They were president and secretary, respectively, of the youth group at church; but when they resisted Unruh's attempt to reverse their decision to attend their Conference college at Bluffton, Ohio, "our goose was cooked," said Winfield. "Go to Moody's first and get a foundation," he told them. "Then when you have a foundation, you'll be safe enough to go elsewhere."

College Years, 1930-1934

At Bluffton College, Winfield discovered a life goal and a vocational sense of direction that steered his course for the next phase of his personal and academic pilgrimage. He majored in history under the mentorship of Dr. C. Henry Smith, the widely respected Mennonite scholar and writer.[4] In his four college years Winfield had a total of seven courses from Smith. He was widely traveled and often shared observations from his travels in his classes.

Winfield (left) with Bluffton College roommate Gerald Kriebel.

After teaching his classes, Smith usually returned to the First National Bank down town, where he served as its President; and Winfield came to appreciate that kind of linkage between campus and main street America. So he decided to minor in economics under the mentorship of Floyd Byers. He was the 30-year-old son of the venerable Mennonite philosopher and College dean, Noah Byers, from whom Winfield took Introduction to Philosophy and Logic.[5]

Almost as important for his vocational development at Bluffton were the extracurricular influences. Winfield and cousin Jake were roommates; and on the same floor of their dormitory was an older Methodist student by the name of John Keller, who had already taken several classes in social ethics at Garrett Biblical

Institute in Evanston, Illinois, and was an ardent Norman Thomas socialist. Conversations in the dorm often centered around questions of how the ethical teachings of Jesus could be reconciled with the principles of capitalism. This made Winfield aware of the incongruities between them. He began to look for alternatives and discovered the co-operative movement associated with the Ohio Farm Bureau.

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By the time he graduated in 1934 it was the middle of the economic depression, and for six months he couldn't find a job. Twice he hitch-hiked to Washington to see if he could get a job in one of the government "New Deal" agencies, but his applications were rejected. He worked occasionally for a farmer for seventy-five cents a day and meals. After another six months he was offered employment by Bluffton College as Field Secretary, contacting prospective students and soliciting funds.

The most significant part of that two-year experience was his courtship with a Bluffton College student by the name of Marguerite Geiger. They were married Sept. 9, 1936, and soon headed for the University of Chicago.

Graduate Studies in Chicago, 1936-1941

Given Winfield's interest in further study, it was natural to think of attending the University of Chicago. His mentor, C. Henry Smith, had taken his two graduate degrees from there. Ed. G. Kaufman, who was interim dean at Bluffton when Winfield was a freshman, had received his Ph. D. degree from there. Winfield had heard about the Department of Social Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the affiliated Chicago

Winfield and Marguerite
wedding day, Sept. 6, 1936

Theological Seminary; and he decided to apply for admission to CTS, which gave him the freedom to cross register at the University and its Divinity School at the same time.

When Dean Jacob Schultz at Bluffton asked him why he had decided to go to Chicago, he told him that he was interested in the co-operative movement and wanted to learn more about it. Schultz replied, "If you want to learn more about co-operatives, you ought to go to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and study all of the co-operatives they have in that Mennonite town. I suggest you go see my father-in-law, I. I. Bargen, who is well informed on the subject."[6]

So when Winfield got to the point of working on a Master's thesis in 1938, he went to Mountain Lake, which came to be a turning point in his life. Bargen, who was eighty-one years of age by then, welcomed him into his home for that week of intense interviewing. Bargen told him stories

about many mutual aid activities among the Mennonites in South Russia, where he had grown up. He told him about the time after harvest when they would form a tandem of twenty farm wagons on their way to Odessa to sell their wheat together—a week's trip. He told him about the various mutual aid organizations to share the many economic burdens and to provide other social services in the communities. It was an independent commonwealth in which the Mennonites had to provide their own roads, schools, local government and economic

"...when Winfield got to the point of working on a Master's thesis in 1938, he went to Mountain Lake, which came to be a turning point in his life."

organizations.

With that background it was natural for these Mountain Lake immigrants to establish a farmer's shipping association, a co-operative creamery, a co-operative filling station, a co-operative cold storage facility, and a burial society. A local lumber yard owner told Winfield, "If they get one more co-operative here, they'll run me out of business."

When his major professor, Arthur Holt, had read his thesis, he was delighted with it and said, "You should expand this for a doctoral dissertation and survey other Mennonite communities and groups as well, including the Old Order Amish, with more emphasis on the contributions that co-ops and mutual aid programs have made to Mennonite community building." In Holt's course, "Bases of Religious Community," he often commented to his students that "the Mennonites are among America's most successful community builders."

While he was working on his thesis, Winfield, got in touch with Mennonite scholars at Goshen College in northern Indiana—Harold S. Bender, Guy F. Hershberger, and Ernst Correll. They invited him to become a part of what they called the Mennonite Scholar's Guild. The invitation came as a result of his Master's thesis and the two chapters that Bender published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. In his editorial, Bender wrote, "The social aspect of Mennonite history has received little attention.... J. Winfield Fretz, now a graduate student at the University of Chicago, has dug the first spade in this rich soil with his Master's thesis on 'Mutual Aid Among the Mennonites.'"[7]

Meanwhile, Winfield had to be concerned about earning enough money for their subsistence needs. His matriculation at CTS offered several solutions. The director of Field Placement sent Winfield and Marguerite to the Onward Neighborhood House in northwest Chicago, where Winfield was in charge of men's and boys' work and Marguerite was assistant in the nursery school. For these services they received $100 a month for two years. During the second summer while living in Chicago, Winfield worked at the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, in a program designed for CU students by Henry Ford himself, who thought the students should have concrete experience in manual labor.

In the third year they moved into the Divinity School apartments on the University campus. The Divinity School had a contract with the Chicago Church Federation to make problem-solving church and community studies. Winfield and a fellow Mennonite student, Karl Baehr, worked for the CTS Department of Research and Survey under the supervision of Prof. Samuel Kincheloe. With the income from that assignment plus honoraria from weekend preaching in various city-wide churches, they were able to live for the three additional years that it took Winfield to earn two more graduate degrees.

The B. Div. degree from CTS was awarded in 1940 with a dissertation on "The Study of Mennonite Religious Institutions in Chicago." This was a critical analysis of eight Mennonite mission churches evaluated on a criteria of several historical-ecological factors. Winfield was honing his research and writing skills to a fine degree of sharpness.

Meanwhile, the courses he was taking counted simultaneously toward the fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph. D. degree. He took the

Preaching course, taught by the Seminary president, Albert Palmer. He took historical theology courses from the much published historical theologian from Germany, Wilhelm Pauck. He took two American Church History courses from William Warren Sweet, another widely respected scholar. And he took many graduate seminars from adjunct professors like Paul Douglas, a city alderman and later U. S. Senator from Illinois, and Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of *The Christian Century*.

Winfield tells about a social ethics travel seminar in which several of the professors took a small group of students to the American deep south, visiting black colleges, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and government resettlement projects. As they were driving the hundreds of miles, hearing the stories and jokes of each one, they turned on the car radio at the moment when it was announced that Hitler had moved into Czechoslovakia; and as they listened they got the benefit of Prof. Pauck's observations, having grown up in Germany.

During the five years in Chicago, Winfield completed all three of his graduate degrees before leaving the campus. While finishing everything for the doctoral degree, he was giving thought to next steps. Lloyd Ramseyer, president of Bluffton College, invited him to return to his *alma mater* to teach. Ed G. Kaufman, president of Bethel College, kept in touch with him also, A fellow graduate at CU, who was president of Rodgers and Clarke College in Portland, Oregon, invited Winfield to teach there; but Winfield preferred to remain in the Mennonite world and chose Bethel as the best place for the unfolding of his particular sense of vocation in the subjects of Christian mutual aid and the Mennonite concept of community.

The Bethel College Years, 1942-1963

The teaching methodology of many of Winfield's Chicago teachers had reflected the pragmatic experience-centered philosophy of John Dewey and George Albert Coe. Among its alumni who adapted aspects of this teaching-learning style were Edmund G. Kaufman and J. Winfield Fretz. Kaufman employed it primarily as a dialogical teaching method in his Basic Christian Convictions course,[8] and Fretz used it in his Sociology courses by taking his students on field trips and getting them to make community studies on location.

Winfield came to Bethel as Assistant Professor of Economics because E. G. Kaufman and R. C. Kauffman were already teaching Sociology. It wasn't long, however, before R. C. moved over to his field of Psychology and E. G. confined his teaching to the theology course. During his twenty years of teaching at Bethel, Winfield taught a total of seventeen sociology and economics courses. He would always select the best possible textbook for a course with limited outside readings and relevant field experiences.

> "One of the by-products of this renewed contact with the Goshen professors Bender, Hershberger and others was the launching of the late summer Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural Problems, which met annually from 1942 to 1947 and biennially thereafter to 1967."

Winfield came to Bethel during the first year of World War II when the student enrollment was at low ebb and the national economic depression had barely peaked. He was paid a salary of $2,000 on condition that ten percent of that would be a donation to the College. Had he gone to Rodgers and Clark College, the salary scale would have been significantly better and risen faster. After twenty-one years of teaching at Bethel, he was getting $5,000 a year. With a growing family of four children by then—Burton, Steven, Thomas, and Sara—Winfield and Marguerite had to manage their money prudently.

During his second year, four faculty members (R. C. Kauffman, Leonard Kreider, Bennie Bargen, and Winfield) asked for a private meeting with President Kaufman to protest the way salaries were negotiated on an individual basis rather than

a collective uniform basis. Winfield described their encounter as follows:

Kaufman would bargain with each of us for the best deal he could get. I for one thought that was very improper. Prexy had a little office in back of a board room, where we were all sitting around a big table. After ten minutes of waiting, he stepped into the room, cleared his throat several times, and said, "Well Fretz, what's this all about?" I told him that we had discussed administrative policies among ourselves concerning the treatment of faculty on an individual basis rather than on a common scale fair to all. He hem-hawed a little, as was his custom, but we had a good wholesome meeting. It was kind of a labor union tactic, but I think we made our point.

In those early war years, it was expedient for some of the teachers to find temporary assignments elsewhere to ease the constant financial burdens of the College. So after the first year of teaching, Winfield left for two years of voluntary service with the Mennonite Central Committee. His first assignment was to go to British Columbia to meet C. F. Klassen, who was serving the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization as Collector for the repayment of the so-called *Reiseschuld*, the travel debt of the immigrants from Russia. Winfield's assignment was to visit the new immigrant communities between British Columbia and Ontario.

After his return to Akron, Pennsylvania, he wrote a report that MCC published in a booklet entitled *Community Building in Canada*. Bender also published a version of the report in the *MQR* (January 1944). In his editorial he wrote, "Among the prophets of modern Mennonitism who see the Mennonite community as a tower of strength to meet the challenge of modern secularism as well as a source of power to revitalize the church as a whole, Winfield Fretz stands in the front ranks."[9]

In retrospect many years later, Winfield commented, "That was just a beautiful assignment for me. With C. F. Klassen as my guide, I had immediate access to the leaders of each of these immigrant groups, had excellent response from them about their activities and problems, and had the skills for writing up my findings." No doubt two caricatures of his subsequent career were germinating during these years—"Mr. Mennonite Mutual Aid" and "Mr. Mennonite Rural Life."Then MCC sent him to Mexico because some of the conservative Lancaster Conference Mennonites were threatening to migrate there as dissenters to the wartime rationing requirements. They had already emigrated to a "God-forsaken place" near the Gulf of Mexico, and Winfield was asked to visit them. This experience plus a visit to the Old Colony Mennonites were also written up by Winfield and published by MCC in a booklet entitled *The Mennonites in Mexico.*

One of the by-products of this renewed contact with the Goshen professors Bender, Hershberger and others was the launching of the late summer Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural Problems, which met annually from 1942 to 1947 and biennially thereafter to 1967. It was held in turn on the campuses of the various Mennonite colleges under the auspices of the Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges, and Winfield served as the chairman of the planning committee for most of those years. He also contributed seven of the major papers read there over the years, such as "An Evaluation of the Hutterian Way of Life from a Sociological Point of View," "The Growth and Use of Tobacco among Mennonites," "A Methodology for Studying the Local Community," and "Sociological Aspects of Divorce among Mennonites."[10]

Winfield's knack for popularizing his philosophy of rural life, community building, and mutual aid found further dissemination in his eight articles in *Christian Living* magazine and in his "Rural Life Page" in the *Mennonite Weekly Review.*

In over twenty years of teaching at Bethel, Winfield never had a paid sabbatical leave; but he took two voluntary leaves financed by the Mennonite Central Committee and by Fulbright and Guggenheim research grants. The first occurred in 1951-1952 under a mandate written

The Guest House

restaurant, 610 North Main Street, Newton, Kansas. James D. Rutschman, manager.

jointly by Orie Miller and William Snyder, the executive officers of the MCC, to make a sociological study of twenty-five years of Mennonite colonization effort in South America, with primary focus on Paraguay and secondary visits to Mennonites in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. This report was published in book form by Herald Press under the title *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, which is certainly one of the most important of Winfield's scholarly writings.

Following his return home he continued to look for ways to supplement their income. For several years he taught sociology courses at Hesston college and one year at Tabor College, both in central Kansas. For three consecutive summers, 1956-1958, he taught at Michigan State College in Lansing.

Then while continuing to teach full time at Bethel, he stepped out of the "ivory tower" to enter the business arena in Newton's down-town Main Street. He and his sister Ethel became restaurateurs in an establishment called "The Guest House." It was a successful cafeteria with the posted principle, "Take all you want, eat all you take." Following the termination of Ethel, Winfield was fortunate to be able to hire a competent and dependable manager in the person of James Rutschman.

One of his "learnings" from this experiment pertained to this earlier ethical idealism. "It is absolutely impossible," he wrote, "to act with pure ideals in the day to day decisions in business.... One frequently has to do, not what he would like

Winfield in a Bethel faculty spoof "The Hair-Raising Adventure

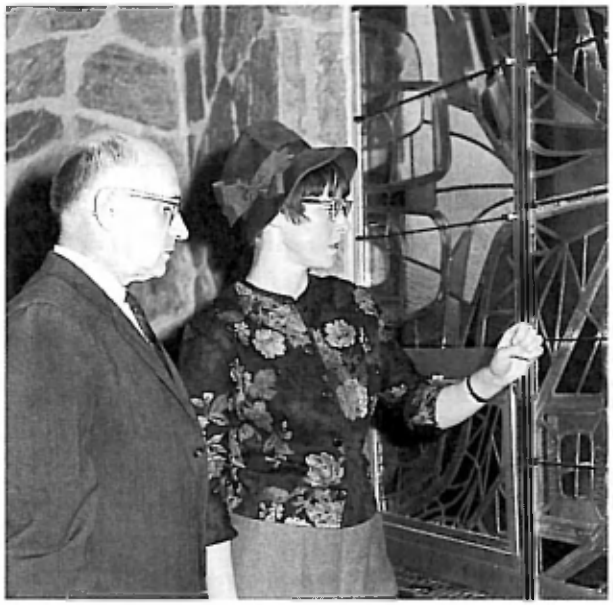
of Choosing an Acting President for Bethel College," 1959. Behind Winfield, left to right: Eldon Graber, Harold Gross, Gordon Corwin, ?, Peter R. Kaufman, Vernelle Waltner.

to do, but what he has to do in order to stay in business."[11] It should be added, however, that the Guest House was by intention the first restaurant in Newton to serve African-Americans and Hispanics on a non-discrimination basis, long before national civil rights legislation required it.

In 1958, having taught another seven years since the year in Paraguay and having the restaurant management in good hands, Winfield decided to update the Paraguay study with the help of generous research grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Congressional Fulbright Act. William Snyder of MCC had been working with George Warren, Under-Secretary of State, to find places for refugees from Europe to colonize. One question posed by them was whether Paraguay could take more refugees to colonize its hinterlands. Warren asked specifically, "If it was successful for the Mennonites, why not also for other groups?" In his application for the Guggenheim grant, Winfield attached a copy of *Pilgrims in Paraguay;* and on its Board was a well-known rural sociologist by the name of Carl Taylor, who seemed favorably impressed by the prior study. Although delayed until 1962, publication of Winfield's new book *Immigrant Group Settlements in Paraguay* was the end product of this year's research.

The reason for the delay was an administrative crisis at Bethel. David C. Wedel, who succeeded Kaufman as president in 1952, resigned abruptly in July of 1957. Under time constraint the College Board of Directors asked Winfield to serve as Acting President for the next year in consultation with Dr. H. A. Fast, chairman of the Bible Department, and Dr. P. E. Schellenberg, dean of the College. Winfield had just returned from Paraguay and was beginning to work on his book when Board president Menno Schrag appeared in person to make the urgent request. In retrospect many years later, Winfield confided:

Upon reflection of my decision to accept the role of acting president, I now think it was an unwise decision. It is a well established wisdom that it is risky for a member of a college faculty to accept the chief administrator position. Jealousy is as common among intellectuals as among others. I didn't seek the job and found it a decidedly unpleasant experience. I had no qualifications for the task except that of good intentions to help in an emergency.



Hunsberger Photography, St. Jacobs, Ontario

Winfield with artist Nancy Lou Patterson examining chapel windows at Conrad Grebel College, ca. 1964.

During that year Winfield decided that he was not going to remain at Bethel. "I decided that twenty years was enough, and that I didn't want to wear out or rust out, and just hang on." He did hang on for two more years of teaching; but by the end of the 1961-1962 year he had accepted an offer to become a country director for CARE, the leading postwar relief organization. A mysterious sequence of events occurred, however, to change those plans.

The Conrad Grebel College Years, 1963-1979

At an MCC meeting in Manitoba, when there was a lull in the proceedings, Harvey Toews, the

MCC Director in Ontario, sitting next to Winfield, whispered, "How would you like to become a college president in Canada?" They went outside to talk about a growing vision to start a Mennonite college in connection with the emerging University of Waterloo in Ontario.

Several days later back in Newton, Winfield received a telephone call from Norman High, Dean of Arts at the University of Waterloo and a member of the presidential search committee for the new Mennonite college, inviting him to come to Waterloo for an interview. After the interview came the official invitation.

It was one thing to be called to be president of an established school of higher learning and quite another to be invited to form a new school with little more than a dream on the part of the founders. When Winfield began his work in Waterloo, there was no building, no faculty, no library. There was only an emerging plan on paper in the early stages of fruition to establish a Mennonite College in affiliation with a recently founded university. Conrad Grebel College was to be the fourth of four affiliated denominational colleges.

Waterloo University emerged from Waterloo Lutheran College and involved a long struggle between those who wanted to expand the College into a university and those who wanted to

"It was one thing to be called to be president of an established school of higher learning and quite another to be invited to form a new school with little more than a dream on the part of the founders."

continue to be just a liberal arts college. When that could not be resolved, those who had wanted to establish a university moved out and made an application for a charter grant from the Ontario provincial government to do so. Inviting the denominational schools to an affiliate relationship not only gave the University added credibility but also additional faculty members it needed, especially for courses in religion and ethics. The University was willing to pay the lion's share of

Winfield at Conrad Grebel College, 1979

those faculty salaries on the basis of the number of students taught.

So when Winfield arrived, he immediately began to teach in the Sociology Department of the University, two courses each semester and one in summer. He developed a course on Cultural Minorities with practical exposures to over a dozen minority groups in Waterloo County, including the various Old Order Amish and Mennonite groups. Most of the questions in this class focused on the Mennonites.

That led to the creation of Winfield's most popular course, The Sociology of the Mennonites. He usually had around thirty members in that course, mostly non-Mennonites. The financial reimbursement to Conrad Grebel College for that course alone was substantial.

Meanwhile, Winfield had to develop the CGC campus and hire a faculty. He had a fine Board of Directors, and a capable energetic Building Committee. They assumed responsibility for most of the fund raising and the construction of the rather elegant multi-purpose CGC edifice that included

administrative and faculty offices, classrooms, library, housing for students, and a large lounge, cafeteria and kitchen. Because of his past experience in the restaurant business, he had some sense of what the foods personnel needed. But he was also concerned that the new building had character, that the chapel had beautiful windows, and that the stone masonry reflected stability. He rejected the architect's first flat roof. This led to a second design with a more attractive "saw-tooth" roofing design.

In hiring a faculty, he looked for what he called "renaissance people who had a liberal breadth to their learning." The first addition was Dr. Walter Klaassen, an Oxford University graduate who taught courses in Old and New Testament and served as dean of students and chaplain. This was followed by the fortuitous appointments of John Miller, a graduate of Basel University in Old Testament; Helen Martens, who had a Ph. D. from Columbia University in music; Frank Epp, with a doctorate in History from the University of Minnesota; Donovan Smucker and Calvin Redekop, both graduates of the University of Chicago in Social Ethics and Sociology.

One of Winfield's greatest challenges as CGC president was to establish his long-held ideal of Christian community, to have a truly Anabaptist-Mennonite college on a secular university campus and to select students who were in harmony with that ideal and who would be good witnesses to their faith. "I felt that it would be especially wonderful for Mennonite people who had emphasized ethical, moral living to try to that on a university campus. I felt that Waterloo University would be a very interesting place to test how strong our religious convictions are and whether we are able to give the kind of witness we have always talked about." Like the reality-testing of the restaurant business in Newton, the results of that test were mixed at best. However, one of the gratifying experiences of the affiliation with the University was to have a large number of non-Mennonite students participating in the religious services at Conrad Grebel College.

Winfield served as CGC president for ten years and thereafter taught full time for an additional six years until his retirement in 1979. At that time he was appointed Professor Emeritus of the College. In 1983 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the University, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree "in recognition of his distinguished service as educator, scholar, administrator and humanitarian."

A year before resigning the presidency, he had his first paid sabbatical in thirty years of teaching. He and Marguerite used the six months for a trip around the world, visiting mission stations of four different Mennonite church bodies and MCC service projects in twenty countries of Asia and Africa. It was Winfield's fourteenth trip overseas including five trips to Paraguay, four to China, and four with students to Haiti, of which two were with sociology classes studying the culture of poverty.

The Retirement Years, 1979-

Six years after his retirement, Winfield wrote an article entitled "Reflections of a Has-Been." He defined a "has-been" as a person who has previously served in a capacity of leadership and authority in which he or she had responsibility for decision making that affected other persons. With this authority came a measure of power, status, and a degree of prestige. Then in this perspective he reviewed his own vocational history:

My entire adult professional life was spent as a college professor and academic administrator. I also had twenty years of business experience on the side. Over this forty-year period I observed again and again how some people in leadership positions ... became changed persons after they retired. Their moods varied from bitterness ... to a total sense of futility.... Witnessing these reactions ... made me determined to try to avoid similar feelings when my time would come to step aside or "down" from whatever work in which I might be engaged.[12]

Winfield and Marguerite prepared well for their retirement. They had been good managers of

their funds through the years and had saved enough to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. They promised themselves to continue to read widely to keep intellectually alert. And they planned to be always gracious to the younger leaders who succeeded them.

The transition was undoubtedly made easier by the invitations Winfield received to serve on an interim basis, first as Acting President of Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana,

"J. Winfield Fretz's career and success have been due to his ability to hold various qualities, situations, and abilities in creative tension."

and second as Interim Executive Secretary of the denominational Commission on Education in Newton, Kansas.

In the former assignment Winfield had several opportunities to continue a commitment he had made earlier in his teaching career to practice the principle of Christian mutual aid that he had taught and proclaimed. No one really knows how many students he has helped personally and financially through the years, both international and American/Canadian students, not to mention many others needing a helping hand.

Upon their return to their retirement home on the campus of Bethel College, Winfield set to work writing his latest book, *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox*. During his final six teaching years at CGC in Ontario, he had applied for government research grants to give selected students gainful employment during the summer. For their work assignments they helped him gather social, economic and statistical information about the Waterloo County Mennonites. It was all on computer when Winfield retired to Kansas. When he completed the two interim assignments, he returned to those files to prepare the book manuscript published by Wilfred Laurier University Press, a book of twenty chapters and 391 pages.

In 1988 Winfield was awarded his second honorary doctorate by his *alma mater* Bluffton College. An excerpt from his citation provides a fitting conclusion to this profile of his life:

J. Winfield Fretz's career and success have been due to his ability to hold various qualities, situations, and abilities in creative tension—academy and church, theory and practice, mutual aid and private business, leadership and cooperation, Christian faith and life. The result is an uncanny ability to form strong associations and to build creative institutions. However, what characterizes Win or Winnie or J. Winfield to most persons is his genuine friendliness, his unfailing cheerfulness, his virtually inexhaustible vision and energy, and, of course, his mastery of the humorous anecdote.

ENDNOTES

[1]Timothy Rice, *Deep Run Mennonite Church East: A 250 Year Pilgrimage, 1746-1996* (Perkasie, PA: Deep Run Church, 1996), 63.
[2]Oliver Goldsmith, "The Deserted Village," *Our Heritage of World Literature* (New York: Dryden Press, 1946), 1235-1239.
[3]"Allen Fretz," *Who's Who among the Mennonites*, ed. A. Warkentin and Melvin Gingerich (North Newton, KS: Bethel College Press, 1943), 68-69. See also J. Winfield Fretz, "A Memorial to Allen M. Fretz," *The Mennonite* (May 4, 1943), pp. 4-5.
[4]"C. Henry Smith," *Who's Who among the Mennonites*, 224-225. See also feature articles by Cornelius Krahn, Noah Byers, and Carl Lehman on the life of Smith in *Mennonite Life* (April 1950).
[5]C. Henry Smith, "A Pioneer Educator—N. E. Byers," *Mennonite Life* (January 1948), 44-46.
[6]"Isaac I. Bargen," *Who's Who among the Mennonites*, 13.
[7]*Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 1939), 4.
[8]James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1994), 189-192.
[9]*Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 1944), 5.
[10]See *Proceedings of the Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural Problems*, I: 26- 34, 1942; V: 87-93, 1946; VII: 87-100, 1949; VIII: 132-138, 1951.
[11]J. Winfield Fretz, "A College Professor on Main Street," *Christian Living* (May 1958), 6-9.
[12]J. Winfield Fretz, "Reflections of a Has-Been," *Young or Old or In Between: An Intergenerational Study on Aging*, ed. Bertha Harder (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1986), 16-18.

J. Winfield Fretz and the Early History of Mennonite Sociology

Paul Toews

The January 1939 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* introduced a new figure to American Mennonite scholarship, J. Winfield Fretz.[1] More than just a new name, he entered the scholarly dialogue as the first Mennonite on the verge of earning a Ph.D. in sociology.[2] Mennonites previous to Fretz certainly utilized sociological categories and engaged in sociological analysis. Leo Driedger and Calvin Redekop, in a pioneering study of the development of Mennonite sociology, suggested that a category of "social thought" existed as a precursor to Mennonite sociology.[3] Edmund G. Kaufman was an exemplar of that previous tradition. His first major book, *The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among the Mennonites of North America* (1931), trafficked in sociological theory—the sect cycle—to interpret Mennonite history and missionary activity.[4] Among his many roles at Bethel, Kaufman was also a Professor of Sociology from 1933 to 1948. Yet his training was in history and in practical theology.

The tradition of Mennonite social thought, as defined by Redekop and Driedger, was preoccupied with three issues: "the need for community building, the threat of assimilation and the resulting conflict."[5] Those three issues were surely not peculiar to Mennonites. Rather they represent the nexus of thinking and concern among many distinctive cultural and religious communities wishing to preserve themselves against an intrusive and dominant culture. They were also the issues that would focus the early work of J. Winfield Fretz and other Mennonite social scientists.

Between 1938 and 1941 Fretz wrote three dissertations at the University of Chicago and the affiliated Chicago Theological Seminary: "Christian Mutual Aid Societies Among Mennonites" (M.A.,1938); "A Study of Mennonite Religious Institutions in Chicago" (B.D., 1940); and "Mennonite Mutual Aid: A Contribution Toward the Establishment of a Christian Community" (Ph.D., 1941).[6] They began an academic trajectory that shaped much of Fretz's subsequent intellectual work.

All three of these works were essentially descriptive. Fretz did not work as a theoretical sociologist but more like a historian describing social contexts. The linking of specific Mennonite beliefs and patterns with archetypical patterns of other similar groups, so common to sociological writing of the period, was largely eschewed in favor of a more narrative approach.

Fretz's early works came at a time when Mennonite historians were busily reinterpreting the contours of the Mennonite story. During the 1930s and into the early 1940s Kaufman of Bethel, John Horsch of the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale, Harold Bender of Goshen College, C. Henry Smith of Bluffton College, and other scholars were engaging in a spirited

Winfield at Bethel College, ca. 1948

discussion as to the central tenets of Anabaptism and the appropriate narrative for understanding its development over subsequent centuries. That discussion in some ways culminated with the 1944 publication of Bender's now famous essay, "The Anabaptist Vision."[7]

The work of these historians is frequently described as the "recovery of a usable past." It resulted in an ideological reorientation for Mennonites. By redefining the past, they opened up new possibilities for the future. The work of Fretz and what might be termed the sociological recovery was a second phase in this fashioning of a new ideological self-definition. Unlike the historians who focused on the sixteenth-century, the early sociological tradition examined the role of village society as the carrier of Mennonite idealism.

Mennonites in the 1930s and 1940s, due in part to the depression and the Second World War, were at the front end of a demographic shift that would see a geographical and vocational dispersion of Mennonites far beyond the small towns and agricultural-related pursuits that had dominated the past. What Fretz and other early Mennonite social scientists pondered and investigated was the capacity of Mennonites to take treasured values and practices into new social environments. The opening line of Fretz's second dissertation bluntly stated the issue: "It is a point of interest to many people to notice how the attitudes, the ideals, customs, manners and behavior of an individual undergo changes when he moves from the country to the city, . . . when he changes his cultural and social environment from a rural to an urban one."[8] The implied question was appropriate. Would the movement of Mennonites into the city mean a significant break with past values and traditions? What kind of intentionality was required to maintain those values in the face of the new urban and industrial structures?

For Fretz the practice of mutual aid and the revitalization of rural communities was the intentionality necessary for preservation. Mutual aid had its roots in the Anabaptists' concern to imitate Christ, to reject legal and formal associations, to resist state dependence, and to insist on the right of the individual conscience. Fraternal associations, ordered on the principles of love and peoplehood instead of on legal and coercive regulations, embodied these Anabaptist motifs. The rich history of mutual aid in Mennonite history—Hutterian communalism; Dutch assistance to Swiss Mennonites bound for colonial America; the *Waisenamt* (widows funds that evolved into much more) among Mennonites in Russia; various old-age homes, orphanages, and insurance societies of North America—were all demonstrations of the ability of God's people to fashion associational alternatives.[9]

> "...many immigrant groups in American society fashioned similar practices and institutions for mutual support. However, the presence of sociological necessities did not negate theological inspiration."

Fretz knew that these institutions and practices were a product of social and historical circumstances. After all, many immigrant groups in American society fashioned similar practices and institutions for mutual support. However, the presence of sociological necessities did not negate theological inspiration. The Mennonite mutual aid societies also embodied a "literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount" as well as structuring social life in Mennonite society. In the mutual aid networks people could define their "social status in the community" and "enjoy . . . Christian fellowship." The societies were instruments of "social solidarity and social cohesion" and tended to mitigate the "great economic and social inequalities within Mennonite communities."[10] Thus mutual aid was "one of the most important factors . . . [for] determining the character and significance of the Mennonites as a social group."[11]

Fretz's sense of the pivotal role of mutual aid was reinforced by the research of a fellow student at Chicago. In 1942, Karl Baehr, a General Conference Mennonite, completed a study of "Secularization Among the Mennonites" of Elkhart County, Indiana. Baehr identified both centripetal and centrifugal forces in the Mennonite universe. Foremost among the centripetal ones—those that held Mennonitism together—were mutual aid and community organization.[12]

The ability of mutual aid and other central qualities of Mennonitism to survive in the city was the subject of Fretz's second dissertation. The Mennonite story in Chicago probably pre-dates the Civil War. It took institutional form in 1866 with the formation of the first Mennonite church. This group soon faltered and its failure to develop into a strong and continuing fellowship was an omen of things to come. Beginning in 1893 various Mennonite conference groups began what then were called "Home Mission" projects. When Fretz studied Mennonites in Chicago in 1940 there were eight small "mission churches," all sponsored by different Mennonite groups.

The ability of these small churches to serve as carriers of past values and practices seemed minimal at best. Fretz wrote: "After studying the Mennonite churches in Chicago one is impressed with the fact that there is so little that is characteristically Mennonite about them."[13] This was true individually as well as institutionally. In interviews with twenty Mennonites who had moved from rural congregations into the city the "one thing that stand[s] out is the lack of Mennonite-consciousness."[14] These transplanted Mennonites reflected the social customs, practices and values of the new urban environment. They retained little sense of the "mission or destiny" of the Mennonite church and seemed not to understand that their church had anything "unique, vital and urgent . . . to offer to society."[15]

"After studying the Mennonite churches in Chicago one is impressed with the fact that there is so little that is characteristically Mennonite about them."

Even worse was the fact that only ten percent of the Mennonites who migrated into the city affiliated with any Mennonite congregation. The conclusion was inescapable:

> the discovery of these facts . . . impressed upon me the disruptive influence that a city environment has on Mennonite ideals and teachings and therefore, on the church itself. The urban soil is not the kind of soil in which the Mennonite church can grow. It is literally true that the city soil is too hard, stony and shallow for Mennonite ideals to take root.[16]

Fretz was not alone in articulating this kind of urban fear. Karl Baehr also concluded that Mennonites drifting into urban areas would undoubtedly secularize faster than those remaining in the protective sheath of the more isolated village.[17] Melvin Gingerich, a Mennonite Church (MC) historian teaching at Bethel College, was even more emphatic in a 1942 article: "Our former rural security is disappearing, we are becoming secularized, our community life is breaking down, and our culture is losing its distinctive qualities."[18]

Guy F. Hershberger, the MC historian and ethicist, shared similar concerns. The church's ability to maintain high "ethical standards" required the social intimacy of "primary groups." Hershberger, buttressing his position with the writings of Charles Horton Cooley, the American sociologist, Henry David Thoreau and others, contended that primary groups were the most effective means for minimizing the "selfish, lustful drives" that reside in all humans. In the closeness of the primary group those baser instincts were throttled. The success of the Mennonite Church was linked to its capacity to retain the characteristics of a primary group. Maintaining the primary group was best done by "keeping the church rooted in the rural soil." While the city offered many differing kinds of social contacts, they were mostly "impersonal and secondary."[19]

Two conferences in the early 1940s gave further voice to fears about the ability of Mennonites to carry their traditions into the urban context. With Fretz taking the lead, the Mennonite students studying in Chicago called a meeting on December 31, 1941 to discuss "Mennonite Sociological Problems." The one-day conference brought together 49 Mennonite educators and

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church leaders. It set in motion the creation of the Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems which, between 1942 and 1967, met either annually or biannually. For these several decades this was the key inter-Mennonite forum for intellectuals to discuss community problems, secularization, and other sociological trends.[20] A 1945 conference on "Mennonite Community Life" held at Goshen College brought together an eclectic list of participants from various Mennonite conferences. Several of the participants expressed

Winfield at Bethel College,

ca. 1948

positions congruent with this Mennonite fear of the city.[21]

Mennonites were hardly alone in expressing concern about the continuity of historic values and practices in the nation's new urban centers. Fretz and Baehr came to these positions from the milieu of the University of Chicago and the Chicago Theological Seminary. Arthur E. Holt, professor of social ethics at the Seminary, and Robert Park, the preeminent sociologist at the University, no doubt encouraged this kind of analysis. Holt was one of the foremost Protestant educators concerned with sustaining rural churches and with properly equipping ministers for country parishes. Park, in the vein of Hershberger's concern for the maintenance of primary associations, wanted to nurture neighborhoods as the necessary social institution to perpetuate "civic virtue."[22] During the early decades of the twentieth century a host of other social scientists and agencies were looking for ways to revitalize traditional communities amidst the nation's growing urbanization.[23]

The congruence of what Fretz and other Mennonites were observing, and the findings of other analysts, encouraged the development of

Conference on Mennonite Educational and Cultural Problems (probably 1959 at Elkhart). Front row, left to right: Aaron Epp, Cornelius Krahn, Melvin Gingerich, John C. Wenger, ?, Harold S. Bender, J. Winfield Fretz, ?, ?. Back row, left to right: William Keeney, ?, Jacob T. Friesen, ?, ?, C. J. Dyck, John Howard Yoder, William Klassen, Robert Kreider, Erland Waltner.

alternatives to this presumed drift to urbanization and its accompanying secularization. Fretz's earliest and perhaps most articulate statement of an alternative came in a 1940 essay entitled "Mennonites and Their Economic Problems." The problems affecting Mennonites were those common to rural America. According to the 1936 Census of Religious Bodies as taken by the United States government, 87 percent of Mennonites were still rural people. The adverse trends affecting agriculture, at least according to Fretz, included mechanization, the growth of large-scale farming, the expanding class of tenant farmers, and ever-increasing unemployment. The specific impact of those trends on Mennonites was that it forced "hundreds of Mennonite young people" to leave the rural areas and seek employment in towns and cities. Based on his study of Chicago, Fretz was sure that "a high percentage of Mennonites who leave the farm and find work in non-agricultural pursuits are lost to the Mennonite Church."[24] Not only were they lost to church membership, but the "ideals of family life and the ideals of neighborliness and Christian community relationships . . . undergo terrific tensions . . . and in fact are often completely destroyed."[25]

The appropriate response to this distressing reality was for the church to assume responsibility for its unemployed members. The essay's extended excursus through Anabaptist history and theology lead to the conclusion that only a reinvigoration of the principle of "social responsibility" could mitigate the inevitable decline for people leaving rural environments. Concrete action was required, and Fretz proposed that the Mennonites find ways to provide "opportunity for those who wish to live and work in rural communities." A central committee, organized along the lines of Mennonite Central Committee could purchase land and other

necessities that would permit such persons to remain in farming and related occupations. This would be mutual aid at its best. In essence it was a call for American Mennonites to do what the Russian Mennonites had done when faced with a landless population in the mid-century— establish daughter colonies. Only by such aggressive action could the church hope to "eliminate the annual exodus to cities and . . . keep hundreds of young people in the arms of the Mennonite church."[26]

Fretz was not the only figure to make such a proposal and to articulate the need for formalizing mutual aid in order to counteract new social realities. In 1939 Guy F. Hershberger, concerned about

> "In asking Mennonites to think about the meaning of moving from the seclusive and even somewhat segregated living patterns of the past to the pluralism and interactions of the city, Fretz and other social analysts performed a valuable service. It takes intentionality to preserve traditions and practices in new social environments."

labor/management/union issues as people moved into the commercial and industrial labor force, also called for mutual aid or a social security system to save Mennonite communities. The Mennonite Central Committee had lent American Mennonite money to purchase 300,000 acres in Paraguay so Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union could settle there. Was it not as reasonable, Hershberger asked, for a Mennonite organization to purchase land at home for the aid of "their refugee brethren who are about to flee to the city, or who would like to flee from the city, or who ought to do so?"[27]

On the front edge of the Second World War, Fretz and others could dream about the possibilities of mutual aid as a means of preserving Mennonite communities. The demands of the war, however, put on hold any attempt to carry out such dreams. The practical necessities of the alternative service system left little energy and few dollars to think about rebuilding rural communities and stemming the drift of Mennonites into the nation's urban centers.

In the concluding year of the war and the immediate post-war years these dreams of community revitalization and providing rural alternatives to Mennonite young people took two different, yet related forms. In October 1945, at a meeting ironically in Chicago, a few Mennonite leaders—all non-farm—formed the Mennonite Community Association. While Fretz was not on the initial board of directors, he was an ally of the movement. In 1947 the Association began publishing an attractive, slick paper magazine, *The Mennonite Community.* The periodical hoped to foster "stronger Mennonite communities, both rural and semi-urban," and "the preservation, in these communities of Mennonite principles and the Mennonite way of life."[28] The assumptions were that the face-to-face village was required for the full integration of Mennonite life and Mennonite faith. The Association wished to invite young people, particularly those returning from Civilian Public Service, to a new adventure in community building.[29]

Fretz's efforts were more directed toward a different way of perpetuating village society. He focused on the establishment of new rural communities more than the revitalization of old ones. He worked with the Mennonite Aid section of Mennonite Central Committee in the resettlement of refugees from the Soviet Union and in exploring the possibilities and dynamics of colonization. He was a tireless promoter of the possibilities of colonization across the Americas. Colonization was more than just a settlement of individuals, families or small groups. Colonization was the process by which "a group of like-minded people separates from a parent body and transplants itself to a new locality." It retained an organic connection with the parent body. The colony had a distinctive set of "common interests and ideals" as well as living in a defined geographical area. Mennonite colonies would be organized to perpetuate the distinctives of the tradition. Among their central characteristics would be the practice of mutual aid.[30]

By focusing, in the late 1930s and early 1940s,

on the difficulties of Mennonites transplanting their traditions to the city, the possibilities for planting new communities and revitalizing older communities, J. Winfield Fretz continued many of the preoccupations of earlier Mennonite social thought. That early Mennonite sociology would be largely concerned with rural Mennonites and their preservation was entirely appropriate, considering that Mennonites far into the twentieth century

"Urban Mennonites today are not prone to take Fretz's advice to flee the city if they wish to preserve the strengths of the Anabaptist-Mennonite story. Yet the history of Mennonites in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other American urban centers is the story of a large diaspora that is not entirely unlike what Fretz foresaw in 1940."

were still predominantly a rural people. In refocusing the possibilities of mutual aid and bringing to consciousness its long history among Mennonites, Fretz contributed to the fashioning of a usable past. American Mennonites, in the years following the Second World War, added another significant chapter to that story of mutual aid. In asking Mennonites to think about the meaning of moving from the seclusive and even somewhat segregated living patterns of the past to the pluralism and interactions of the city, Fretz and other social analysts performed a valuable service. It takes intentionality to preserve traditions and practices in new social environments. Today this early sociological fear of the city may seem quaint. Urban Mennonites today are not prone to take Fretz's advice to flee the city if they wish to preserve the strengths of the Anabaptist-Mennonite story. Yet the history of Mennonites in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and other American urban centers is the story of a large diaspora that is not entirely unlike what Fretz foresaw in 1940.

ENDNOTES

[1]Volume XIII of *Mennonite Quarterly Review* carried two articles by Fretz: "Mutual Aid Among Mennonites, I," (January 1939):28-58; "Mutual Aid Among Mennonites, II: Mutual Aid Activities in a Single Mennonite Community," (July 1939):187-209.
[2]Fretz actually submitted his 1941 Ph.D. dissertation to the Divinity School at the University of Chicago yet his training was with sociologists.
[3]Leo Driedger and Calvin Redekop, "Sociology of Mennonites: State of the Art and Science," (a paper presented to The State of the Art of Mennonite Studies in North America Conference, University of Toronto, June, 1982), p. 1.
[4]Edmund G. Kaufman, *The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among the Mennonites of North America* (Berne, IN: The Mennonite Book Concern, 1931). On Kaufman see James C. Juhnke, *Creative Crusader: Edmund G. Kaufman and Mennonite Community.* Cornelius H. Wedel Historical Series, no. 8 (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1994); James Juhnke and Leo Driedger, "Balancing Community and Outreach Visions: Edmund George Kaufman, Mennonite Sociologist," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXVIII (July 1994):396-417.
[5]Driedger/Redekop, "Sociology of Mennonites," p. 3.
[6]"Christian Mutual Aid Societies Among the Mennonites," (M.A. dissertation, Divinity School, University of Chicago, June 1938); "A Study of Mennonite Religious Institutions in Chicago," (B.D. dissertation, Chicago Theological Seminary, June 1940); "Mennonite Mutual Aid a Contribution Toward the Establishment of a Christian Community," (Ph. D. dissertation, Divinity School, University of Chicago, December 1941).
[7]I have briefly covered some of those discussions in *Mennonites in American Society, 1930- 1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community.* Mennonite Experience in America, vol. 4. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996) chapter 4. For a more extensive discussion consult Rodney James Sawatsky, "History and Ideology: American Mennonite Identity Definition Through History," (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1977).
[8]Fretz, "A Study of Mennonite Religious Institutions in Chicago," p. ii.
[9]Fretz, "Mutual Aid Among Mennonites, I," pp. 32-58.
[10]Ibid., pp. 31,58.
[11]Fretz, "Mennonite Mutual Aid a Contribution Towad the Establishment of a Christian Community," p. 220.
[12]Karl Baehr, "Secularization Among the Mennonites," (B.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1942), iii, 150.
[13]Fretz, "A Study of Mennonite Religious Institutions in Chicago," p. 171.
[14]Ibid., p. 162.
[15]Ibid., p. 162-163.
[16]J. Winfield Fretz, "Mennonites and Their Economic Problems," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 14 (October, 1940):201.
[17]Baehr, "Secularization Among the Mennonites," p. 150.
[18]Melvin Gingerich, "Rural Life Problems and the Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 16 (July 1942):169.
[19]Guy F. Hershberger, "Maintaining the Mennonite Rural Community," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 14 (October 1940). Quotes are from pages 216, 218, 219.
[20]"Program of Conference on Mennonite Sociology," printed in *Proceedings of the First Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems* (1942), pp. 96-98.

[21]See papers published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19 (April 1945).
[22]See my forthcoming essay "The American Mennonite Search For A Useable Past: From The Declensive To The Ironic Interpretation" in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (July 1999) for a fuller analysis of the role of the University of Chicago in the development of these themes in Mennonite ideation.
[23]See William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press Corp., 1974); Merwin Swanson, "The 'Country Life Movement' and the American Churches," *Church History* 46 (September 1977): 358-373; Jacob H. Dorn, "The Rural Ideal and Agrarian Realities: Arthur E. Holt and the Vision of a Decentralized America in the Inter-War Years," *Church History* 52 (March 1983):50-65.
[24]J. Winfield Fretz, "Mennonites and their Economic Problems," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 14 (October 1940): 195-199. Quote is from p. 199.
[25]Ibid., p. 201.
[26]Ibid., pp. 209-213. Quotes are on p. 209 and 213.
[27]Guy F. Hershberger, "Nonresistance and Industrial Conflict," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 13 (April 1939):154.
[28]Paul Erb, "A VISION and Its Realization," *The Mennonite Community* I (January 1947):10.
[29]Guy F. Hershberger, "Appreciating THE MENNONITE COMMUNITY," *The Mennonite Community* I (January 1947):6-7.
[30]J. Winfield Fretz, "Factors Contributing to Success and Failure in Mennonite Colonization," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24 (April 1950):130-135. Quote is on page 130. Other writings by Fretz that focus on this theme include: "Recent Mennonite Community Building in Canada," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (January 1944):5-21; *Mennonite Colonization: Lessons From the Past For The Future* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1944); *Mennonite Colonization in Mexico: An Introduction* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1945); *Pilgrims in Paraguay: The Story of Mennonite Colonization in South America* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953); *Immigrant Group Settlements in Paraguay: A Study in the Sociology of Colonization* (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1962).

Pilgrims in Paraguay: A Retrospective Review

Calvin Redekop

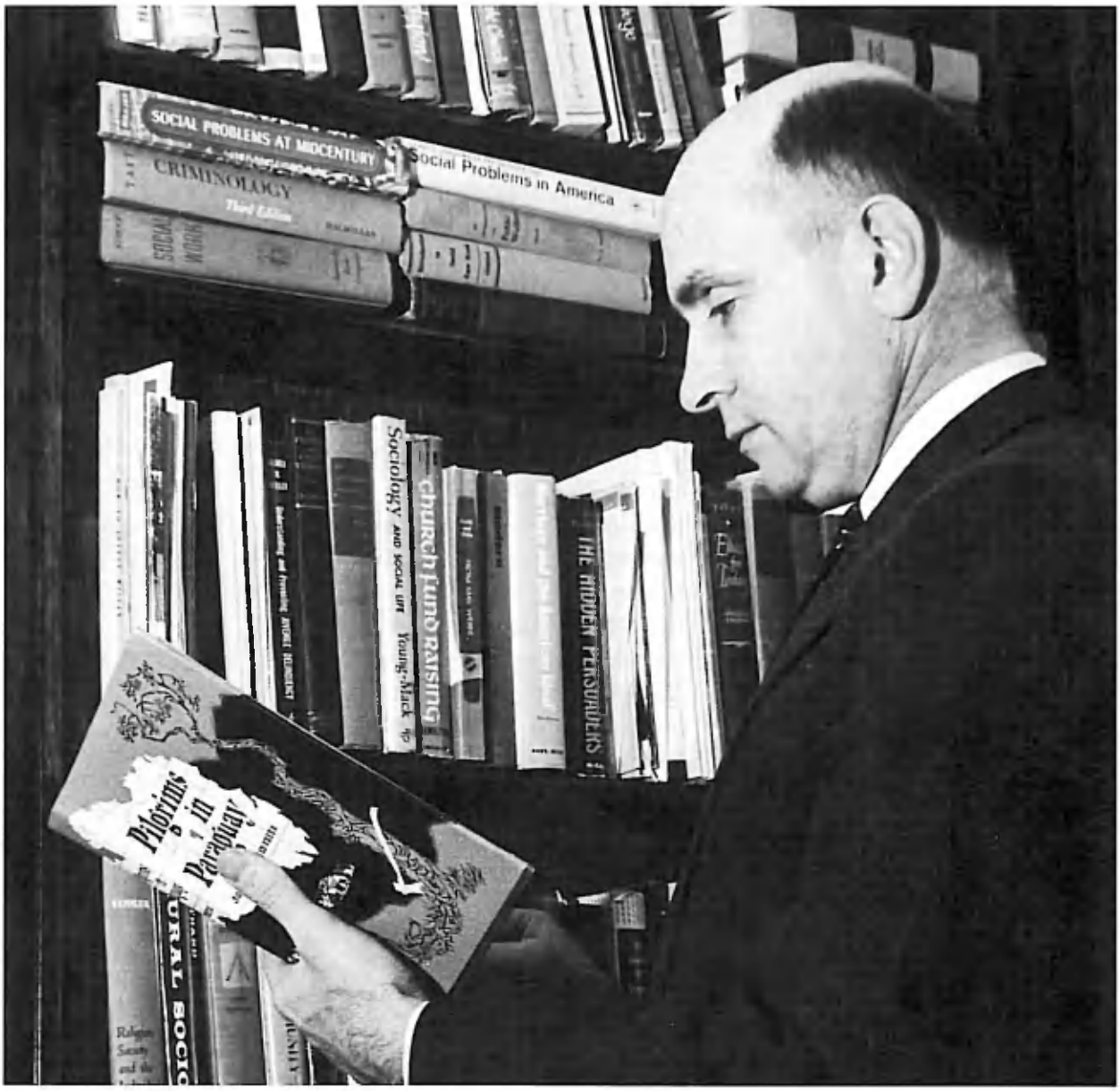
Occasionally an author writes a book that becomes his or her signature – a book by which the author is most widely known. Such a book is *Pilgrims in Paraguay*. Numerous persons evaluated the book on its own merits when it was first published in 1953. Most of the reviews suggested the book was very important in understanding the Mennonite saga in Paraguay as well as the larger Mennonite society[1]. In the latter context, Cornelius Krahn, for example, described it as "one of the finest books that has appeared recently on the Mennonite market." Commenting further, he stated that, among other things, Fretz had "diligently collected very valuable statistics."[2]

A more comprehensive way to evaluate the book is to look at it in the context of other research writing on the same topic in the years since the book was published. In this context, Fretz's book stands as a pioneer work, certainly in the English language. Fretz's bibliography lists a scant seven books and fourteen articles dealing with Mennonites in Paraguay before his book appeared. The pre-*Pilgrims* literature consisted basically of historical materials such as Walter Quiring's accounts of the emigration from Russia and settlement in Paraguay, or P. C. Hiebert's account of the MCC role in the settlement process. The articles in the Mennonite periodicals and source books such as the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, *Mennonite Life*, and church periodicals carried specific accounts and analysis of the settlement, missionary efforts, and the like.

It is mind boggling to survey all the material that has come out on Paraguay since 1953, the date of publication for *Pilgrims*. However, the bulk of literature that has appeared since *Pilgrims* was mostly in German, mainly by indigenous authors, among whom Martin Friesen (for Menno Colony) and Peter Klassen (for Fernheim) stand out. The most recent is an engaging account and interpretation of the building of the Trans-Chaco highway by Gerhard Ratzlaff.[3]

But Fretz's was the first comprehensive account of the phenomenally intriguing Paraguayan saga which provided the basis for most subsequent research in either language. No subsequent study could ignore his work, and it is indicated by the fact that most articles and books that deal with Paraguay in any way depend on or cite *Pilgrims in Paraguay*.[4]

Another way of approaching the book is biographically – to see the book as a reflection of the person behind it and the times in which it appeared. And it is true that *Pilgrims in Paraguay* is probably the icon which identifies J. Winfield Fretz. Historically, Fretz was the right man at the right time to provide a baseline of information which the Mennonite Central Committee



needed desperately for its policy formation and work with the Mennonites in Paraguay. He had the requisite training and the necessary curiosity to do a superb job. And conversely this was a signally important MCC assignment and relationship for Fretz's career and contribution to Mennonite life. It not only allowed him to become familiar with a significant segment of Mennonite society, but it encouraged him along his growing interest in mutual aid and community both so clearly operative in the Paraguayan colonies. These became his signature for the rest of his academic and personal career.

Finally, a personal perspective. I first learned of J. Winfield Fretz through *Pilgrims in Paraguay*. It, along with Francis' *In Search of Utopia*, became my models and aspirations during my graduate school years in so far as I was able to contemplate a scholarly future. The book did two things for me: it incited my interest in Latin America,

especially Paraguay, and it also helped set my course in the social sciences.

I finally and fortunately met the man behind the book when I began my teaching at Hesston College in 1954, the year after the book appeared. As I learned to know him, I realized how faithfully the book represented the man and vice versa – he saw the human community holistically – its history, the familial, the educational, religious, political, economic (agricultural and industrial) material and geographical elements – all were intertwined and interacting.[5] A life long friendship emerged, based partly on my being attracted to his kind of ethnography, sociology, and commitment to the Mennonite heritage.

Pilgrims in Paraguay became the basic source of information regarding the Mennonites in Paraguay and in South America for many decades for me. I am sure it was that for many others as they became interested in South America. The statistical information regarding the economic activities, as well as the location of the settlements and the description of the religious and social life are still useful today, both for original orientation, and for comparison with contemporary conditions. One cannot understand Paraguay, at least the Mennonite sector, without knowing Fretz's book. Nor can one do any comparative work which connects the past with the present without consulting Fretz.[6]

Which brings me to a paradoxical conclusion. Anyone visiting the Chaco or east Paraguay today, having read *Pilgrims in Paraguay*, will almost always wonder, "Am I in the same world that Fretz described?" There has been a dramatic social and cultural and material change among Mennonites in both east and west Paraguay. But I maintain that not being aware of the earlier saga of the settlement, the struggles and hardships involved in becoming established, which Fretz's book provides, leave the visitor with a very truncated and diminished understanding of the present situation and conditions.

Pilgrims in Paraguay is already 46 years old, but it is a baseline against which to compare what has happened since that time. But it is first an accounting of what was then. Fretz and his book help us to "remember all the ways in which God led" (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Endnotes

[1]See, for example, Willard H. Smith's review in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, July 1954, 229-230.
[2]*Mennonite Life*, January 1954, p. 47. Krahn however observes that Fretz does not indicate the sources. Krahn is correct, and in fairness to the colonies, it should be stated that it is obvious that they provided Fretz with much of the statistical data. As in Russia, the colonies have kept amazingly accurate records of all social and economic activities.
[3]Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Die Ruta Transchaco*, 1998, privately published. It is a fascinating and "revisionary" account by a Paraguayan Mennonite of the building of the Trans-chaco highway. His purpose was to correct the persistent false traditions in the Mennonite colonies of how the highway came about. He uses Fretz's book extensively.
[4]I am not aware of a comprehensive historiography of Mennonite Paraguay.
[5]These topics are literally the main chapters of the book. He obviously reflects the early Chicago school of sociology, which utilized institutions as a major approach to understanding society, an approach which I still believe is significant.
[6]Unfortunately the book has appeared only in English. It should have been translated into German and Spanish, for that would have helped to coordinate and unite the indigenous and North Americans in their common searches.

J. Winfield Fretz Bibliography

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