

Ontario Mennonite History

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Our Tribute To Herbert Enns

MHSO CHARTER MEMBER

MHSO Treasurer 1965 - 1974

Vice President 1977 -1981

At the age of 12 years, Herbert Enns emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1924 with his parents, sister and brother.

Except for ten months in 1925 he resided in Waterloo. He became a charter member of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church in 1931, and became active in the choir and in the Christian Education program of the congregation.

In 1965 when Dr. J.W. Fretz, president of Conrad Grebel College, founded the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Herbert Enns became a charter member. He was elected Treasurer and served in that capacity from 1965 - 1974.

Herbert subscribed fully to the purpose of the Society to encourage and support research and publication of Ontario Mennonite history and thus acquaint members and inquirers with the Mennonite mosaic found in the province of Ontario.

The Society's first publication, an informational booklet on Mennonites in Ontario written by Dr. Fretz, was printed in 1967.

As a craftsman in the graphic arts Herbert gave valuable guidance in the preparation of this popular booklet.

When Volume I of Mennonites in Canada, written by Dr. Frank Epp was published in 1974 by the Joint Committee of provincial Mennonite Historical Societies in Canada, Herbert Enns served as treasurer for the project.

Herbert served on our Newsletter Committee until 1998. He translated letters/articles written in German regard-



Herbert Enns (1912-1999) and
Marie (Warkentin) Enns (1912-1992)

ing Mennonites in Russia.

He attended our November 10th meeting program "Remembering the Arrival of Mennonite Refugees from Russia in July 1924".

Herbert was one of that group of refugees. Their family was billeted at the farm home of Walter Snider, son of Bishop Jonas Snider, north of Waterloo. Herbert had maintained a contact with members of that family who provided his family's first residence in Canada.

Unimagined Tragedy: Sudden Hope

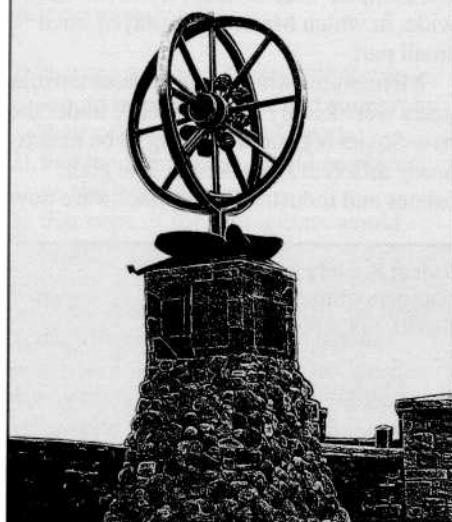
The Background to the Erb Street meeting of 1924

by Leonard Friesen

I begin with diary entries from the 23rd and 24th of October 1919, written in the village of Khortitsa, which was the oldest Mennonite village in the former Russian empire. I want to begin in this manner because I believe that they powerfully describe the mood and circumstances that were unfolding for almost all Mennonites in the empire at this time:

October 23: "We feel as if we have been condemned to death and are now

simply waiting for the executioner to come. Those who are not sunk in apathy are thinking of escape. But we have been notified that anyone caught three steps from his house will be shot without warning. Actually, there are so many armed riders around that any attempt to escape would mean certain death. Besides, there are the families to consider. And where could one go? The only safe escape would be across the border to another country!"



October 24: "There has been a terrible massacre. It was rumored several days ago but we didn't believe it. Today the rumor was definitely confirmed. The village of Eichenfeld-Dubovka - only twenty miles north of here - no longer exists as of the eighteenth of October. Many of the people here had relatives and friends there.

On the evening of the 17th, mounted bands suddenly surrounded the village in a carefully organized, surprise raid. They attacked all the farmsteads simultaneously, so that the inhabitants could not warn each other. They proceeded to cut down in cold blood all the villagers over fifteen. Eighty-four people lost their lives."

So it was with the people that we know as Russian Mennonites. More than a 100,000 strong in 1917, they had first entered the Russian empire more than a hundred years earlier during the reign of Catherine the Great. In doing so, they had managed to escape the swirl of events that had seen Prussia take over their previous refuge in Poland. Under the circumstances, Catherine's invitation policy had been too good to turn down.

It allowed for Mennonite settlement in a vast prairie just north of the Black Sea. The land was barely populated, and the under governed nature of the Russian empire meant that they could freely establish their settlements. The first years were difficult ones, and these Mennonites soon learned that they needed to adjust to their new homeland. Yet, in time, they prospered, though historians have disagreed as to why. The generous terms of settlement were clearly a factor, though even peasants in this region before 1830 had more land than they could possibly work.

Instead, their success was more likely found in the diversity of their communities. Many Mennonites who arrived from Poland had not been farmers, but artisans and shopkeepers. Not all wanted to farm now. At the same time, the government did not permit Mennonites to divide their holdings among all heirs. Instead, only one child received the land; the rest became landless, and had to look elsewhere for other livelihoods. Thus, Mennonite villages were more diverse than were neighbouring peasant villages where all

sons became agriculturalists. (I also think that this points at a significant difference with the history of Ontario, or Swiss Mennonites, and helps account for some of the dynamics and differences when they first meet each other.)

Russian Mennonite grain producers benefitted from the landless in their own midst who developed thriving implement and milling industries. In fact, by 1860, the vast majority of Mennonites were landless, and most of these had not become wealthy in industry or commerce. A stormy decade followed, as the landless appealed to St. Petersburg. Eventually a compromise was achieved, whereby rich and poor Mennonites jointly founded new "daughter" settlements for the previously landless.

The middle decades of the nineteenth century also saw a major religious division, as some Mennonites were influenced by German pietism, and from this the Mennonite Brethren movement was born. Finally, Mennonites were effected by military reforms which threatened their exemption on grounds of pacifism. Eventually (in 1874) a compromise was reached, but not before a third of the empire's Mennonites had emigrated to North America.

Their success in overcoming each of these crises resulted in a period of stability, if not prosperity, for Mennonites in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their influence went well beyond their settlements, as was evident in the widespread use of Mennonite-manufactured implements among the region's peasants. At the same time, Mennonites adopted many local customs, especially in the introduction of Paskha, borshch, and other food dishes.

Life Overturned: Mennonites and the Soviet Era

If the crises of the mid-nineteenth century emerged from within Mennonite settlements, the same cannot be said for the period after 1900, when Mennonites found themselves under siege from all sides. First, Russian nobles and administrators became captive to a nationalist ideology that made them suspicious of all "outsiders". The emergence of Germany

further worked against Mennonites, whose Germanicized culture hid their Dutch origins. Restrictions on Mennonite land purchases were in place within the Russian empire by 1914, despite Mennonite pleas of complete loyalty to the Tsar and the fatherland.

But the worst was yet to come. The four years that followed the Revolutions of 1917 and the resulting Civil War were an especially dark time. For reasons of pure physical geography, these once quiet Mennonite settlements suddenly found themselves at the crossroads of national armies and fierce local peasant movements. The situation was chaotic in the extreme, as political control in many of their settlements changed upwards to twenty times in a four year span - sometimes only days apart - and each new master became increasingly desperate, demanding, and bloody.

Imagine a world in which your loyalty is utterly required of you by the Imperial Russian state, the Provisional Government, the newly formed Ukrainian state, the German army, the White loyalist army, a gigantic regional peasant movement, and a fledgling Bolshevik government? And not all in turn, but all at once? No wonder the Mennonites felt as though this was the end for them on this earth. Sadly, as the diary entry from the outset suggests, for countless thousands it was the end, as massacres in 1918 and 1919 were followed by a typhus epidemic in 1920, and widespread starvation in 1921.

How does one respond to this tragedy? Like Job's so-called friends, many have been tempted to say that Mennonites somehow deserved their fate as payment for their supposed sins before the revolution. And while this might make sense in isolated cases, it is utterly unable to account for the scale of what transpired among these Mennonites. Instead, it is more accurate to see these as tragedies that were empire-wide in scale, if not continent-wide, in which Mennonites played but a small part.

Mennonites who survived these terrible years were keenly aware that life under the new Soviet regime was going to be matchlessly different from before. The giant estates and industrial enterprises were now

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gone, and even relatively modest village holdings, where most Mennonites lived, were severely reduced. Furthermore, the new regime was clearly suspicious, if not downright hostile, to organized religion.

Faced with a desperate recent past, and an uncertain future, many Russian Mennonites now sought a way out. Already in 1919 they had formed a so-called Study Commission, which was intended to travel abroad where it could inform Mennonites in Europe and North America of their desperate plight, secure material aid for their sick and the starving, and explore possibilities for emigration.

To their delight, these delegates discovered upon their arrival that Mennonites in North America were not uninformed by these developments. These North American Mennonites were, in fact, a unique lot: they had already participated in the 1874 migration of Mennonites from the Russian empire, and been moved by it; in addition, many of them had recently come to see their faith as having a greater connection, and responsibility, to the larger world; to the extent that a religious division had occurred within their own midst in the late 1880s. Still for others, progressive or conservative, the plea for help required a response for which there was but one option.

Soon remarkable possibilities presented themselves, and were seized upon. At a general meeting of all American Mennonite relief organizations in July of

1920, agreement was reached on the formation of a Central Committee. This made it possible for all Mennonites to coordinate relief action among Mennonites, and in this way, MCC was born.

The opening of the door for immigration was a much more difficult problem to overcome, as the Canadian government had only recently declared that no immigrant from Central and Eastern Europe would be permitted to settle in Canada. So that there could be no doubt, a 1919 Order-in-Council amended the Immigration Act of Canada to explicitly deny Mennonites entry into this country, along with Hutterites and Doukhobors. The reason given is that they were deemed to be undesirable, owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of living, and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated to assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within a reasonable time after entry.

With the Canadian door closed, it seemed that the desperate hope of Russian Mennonites who had survived the horrors of 1917-1920 would now be dashed. It was at just this time that S.F. Coffman and T.M. Reesor of the Ontario Mennonite churches joined in the delegations that traveled to Ottawa to petition on behalf of their co-religionists. At first, even this seemed to be to no avail, as the Conservative government of Arthur Meighen offered little hope.

Then, as things sometimes happen, the Meighen government was defeated in the election of 1921, and replaced by the Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King. His connection to the Waterloo County Mennonites was direct, positive, and strong. Less than a year later the immigration ban directed against Mennonites was rescinded, and less than a year after that, on the 22nd of June 1923, the first group of 738 Russian Mennonites departed from Khortitsa en route to Canada, and the homes that awaited them there. Amazingly, and against all odds from just a few years previous, an encounter at Erb Street was about to happen.

NOTE:

The selections from the diaries are taken from Dietrich Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death, Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine*, trans. & ed. By Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), pp. 43-44.

The text on the exclusion of Mennonites is taken from Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920, The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p.407.

Leonard Friesen
Wilfrid Laurier University

Introduction To 1924 Ontario Mennonites First Contact With Mennonite Refugees From Russia

by Lorna L. Bergey and Linda Huebert Hecht

The Government of Canada's approval to admit Mennonite refugees was contingent on three conditions:

- 1) that the admitted Mennonite Refugees would be given shelter and support by their co-religionists in Canada;
- 2) that the immigrants would be placed on the land as farmers;
- 3) that none of the immigrants would become a public charge.

Thus, it became evident that the fate of the Mennonite refugees in Russia now rested with Mennonites in Canada. Rising to the occasion, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was set up in Rosthern, Saskatchewan in 1922. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) signified its willingness to contract trans-

portation arrangements of Mennonite refugees from Russia to their destination in Canada.

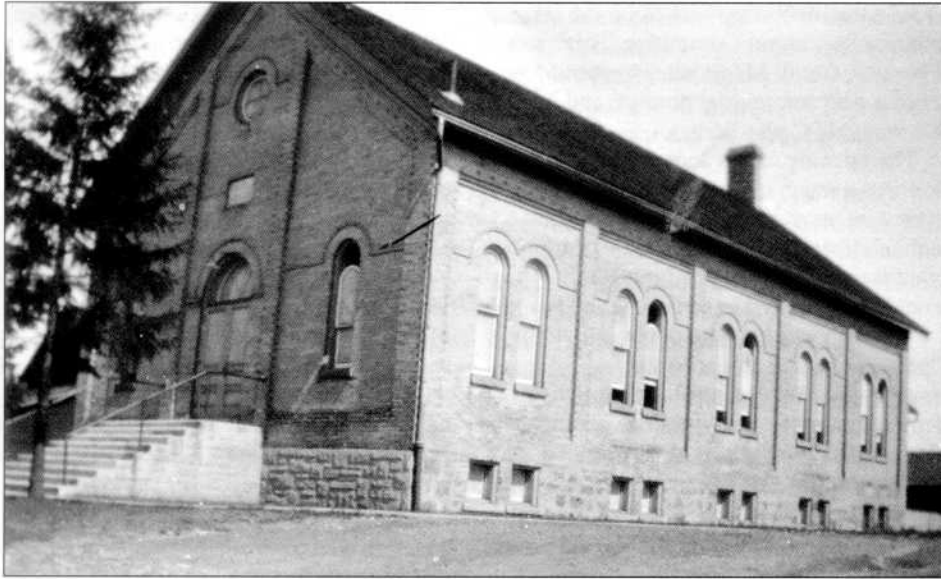
On July 21st, 1923 the first trainload of Mennonite refugees from Russia arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. A Rosthern reception committee had been organized to arrange for the billeting of the immigrants in various districts in the west.

In 1924 a second contract was made with the CPR and over 5000 immigrants were brought to Canada. Most of them planned to go to the western provinces but accommodations there were stretched to the limit and the Mennonites in Ontario being sympathetic with the plight of the refugees agreed to be involved in the resettlement of Mennonite refugees from Russia. A Billeting Committee set up in Ontario was responsible for the placement

of 1300 refugees on local Mennonite farms in 1924.

Ira Bauman from the Erb St. Mennonite Church, Waterloo headed a committee which was responsible for a vast number of details including arranging the meeting of refugee families with their host family, one of which took place here on this site in Waterloo in 1924. Noah Bearinger of the Old Order Mennonite community in Elmira had been delegated by the CPR to meet the immigrants at the train which arrived in Waterloo on Saturday, July 19th, 1924.

Upon arrival at the Erb St. Mennonite Church he assisted in the registration of the new arrivals as interpreter, asking the name of the family and the number of children in the family. In response to the question regarding the number of children



Erb Street Mennonite Church as it looked in 1902. Note horse sheds at back and side.

in his family, one immigrant answered in German "NEIN" [none]. (Bearinger's interpretation of the immigrant's answer was that there were nine children in his family).

Bauman and Bearinger had been successful in arranging billets for 600 people as requested "to provide temporary accommodation until the refugees could be accommodated in the west". But on July 19th, 825 people stepped off the train down at the corner of Caroline Street and Erb St. Waterloo. All were in need of accommodation.

They walked to the Erb St. Mennonite Church where their prospective hosts awaited them. To the credit of the Waterloo

area Mennonites it was reported that everyone was billeted by midnight. Accommodation was stretched to the limit. As an example, in the rural Blenheim Mennonite congregation of 15 households, eleven households provided billets to Russian Mennonite refugee families, some for a few weeks, others up to a year.

There is a memory of a supply depot established in every Mennonite community where donations of clothing, bedding, and miscellaneous household supplies were available to any refugee immigrant family. The donors included community people of various faiths.

Years later at a Mennonite Historical Society meeting, our president, Dr. J.

Winfield Fretz, commented, "The Swiss Mennonites in Ontario and the Mennonites from Russia of Dutch German descent were brought together under trying conditions. They had never met before this occasion. However in true Mennonite fashion they made the best of the situation and the melding together of two cultures was begun."

It was observed by a writer in the 1998 January issue of the *Mennonite Historical Journal* "that stories give meaning to historical events for posterity". We are grateful that stories of this great event in Ontario Mennonite History can still be shared by members of various refugee and host families.

In an article written for the 50th anniversary of these events Barbara Smucker wrote, and I quote:

"Events in history become more vivid, if those who take part in them, relate their personal experiences."

She also says there:

"Each of their stories is a separate drama." (P. 17)

Some of these stories are taken from the letters, interviews and writings of people involved in these events. Some of the stories are by persons present at that time or their relatives, while others are by those who are interested in this part of our history.

We hope these stories will perhaps jog your memory and your interest and that you will share them with others.

Henry P. Hiebert

by Vic Hiebert

After seven years of war my father Henry P. Hiebert married my Mother Suzanne Dueck in Alexanderkrone, Molutschna South Russia, now Ukraine. A teacher by profession he obtained the position of village secretary for the central government. As the famine tried their very existence, and the political scene became doubtful, they wanted to get out of Russia and decided to emigrate to Canada. Our grandparents, and most of our aunts and uncles, declined the opportunity thinking better times were ahead. As village secretary Dad had to put together a list of people wanting to emigrate, for the men that worked there, so he put himself and his wife onto that list.

The cattle boxcars of the train in which they rode had first to be cleaned. There were no toilet facilities. The men rode separate from the women and children in another car. The boat trip took about a month and my mother and father were both troubled with seasickness. Thank goodness for a cousin Mary (Dyck) Friesen who helped by taking care of Agnes who, with her little tin cup went about begging for milk!

Leaving with the first group by train from their village and on the first ship crossing the ocean, then onto a train from Montreal to Waterloo, they arrived just past the station at Erb St., West on July 19th, 1924. On that first Canadian cross

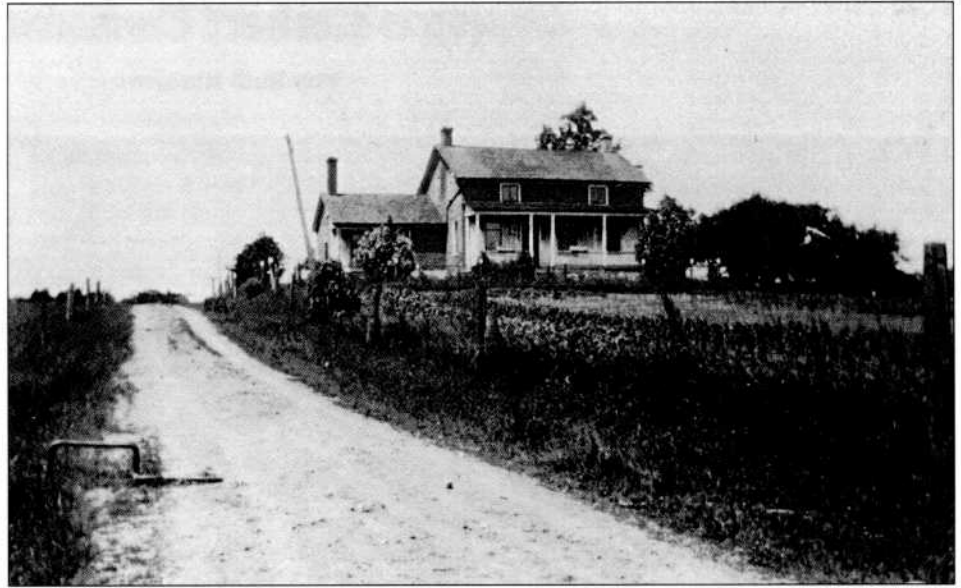
country trip they were intrigued and surprised at the landscape and what they saw of the new world, like a man milking a cow, unheard of in the old country, that was only a woman's domain!

In the horse shed at the rear of the Erb Street Mennonite Church names were called of families, but not the Hieberts. Who would want a couple with a toddler and a baby? Finally near the end their name rang out; "Henry and Susan with two children." Indeed Moses Baer from New Dundee had been instructed by his two teenaged daughters to bring back a family with babies! So he went about asking "Who is Henry with two children?" And while they were sitting there with

their little belongings they came and presented themselves as Moses and Adeline Baer. Now, it was homeward bound in the 1923 model "T" (or was it a horse and buggy?) to the farm just west of New Dundee and upstairs to the bedroom of their new abode for Mom, Dad, Agnes and Elizabeth - plus Henry Jr. yet to be born. As my father said, "So we were welcome there, and I tell you those people welcomed us to their homes. They welcomed us to their hearts. They were real good."

Life with the Baers; Moses, Adeline, daughters Leah 19 and Elsie 17, and son Josiah 14, was a shared style, inside Mother helped with the household chores including cooking. They liked her Russian Mennonite dishes and baking, especially "zwie-bach". Dad started work on Monday morning harvesting hay and all the other farm work for \$10 a month and at times he was loaned out to neighbouring farmers.

In the home, meals were shared at the same table. Their private life in the upstairs bedroom was crowded, especially when Henry arrived. Also it was cold in the unheated room and often mother would go downstairs to warm her hands at the kitchen stove. At the time of my brothers birth they wanted him to be named after Moses! This opportunity would have been a fine gesture of gratitude but they postponed the opportunity until Adeline was born and gave her the name of Mrs. Baer. The Baers loved Elizabeth with her



The house owned by Warren and Margaretha Bean where the Hiebert family lived in 1925.

curly auburn hair and wanted to adopt her.

To attend church they sometimes borrowed the Baer's horse and buggy. The language was not a great problem as the Baers spoke a "Pennsylvania Dutch" German dialect which was similar to what the German Lutherans in Russia spoke, not too hard to understand. In a couple of weeks dad was speaking Pennsylvania Dutch!

After a number of months they moved across the road to a vacant house. Although it had more room it was located

in the bush and that made mother fearful. The problem was solved when father obtained a hired hand position at the nearby Warren Bean farm. A year later they moved to Essex County, about a mile from the Jack Miner's farm. It was at this time that dad's brother in Kitchener arranged for a job in the Rubber Machinery Shop of The Dominion Tire Company (now Uniroyal) as a machinist, a job he held for over 30 years and had stabilizing effect on family life. But before he started that job he was satisfied that he had completed the 5 years on a farm that he had promised the government.

During the years that the three were growing up they were often invited to the Baers for holidays. When Agnes was about 14, Baers needed help and so she worked there for about 2 years being a mothers helper. The work included milking, and running the cream separator. It was a good relationship, she called Mrs. Baer "oma". During this time she attended the local Mennonite Church at Blenheim and got to know some of the neighbours with whom she is still friends. Over the ensuing years we were invited to weddings, funerals and various family tests of the Baers, Hallmans, Sniders and Beans and of course the case was reciprocal. An almost weekly occurrence was meeting some of the family at the Kitchener Market where they sold apples and vegetables.

And we are enriched, because that visiting continues even to this day. Thank you, Mennonites of Ontario.

Vic Hiebert
Waterloo, Ont.



The Hiebert and Dyck Families. Back row: Susan Hiebert and Susan Dyck. Second Row: Henry Hiebert and Jacob Dick. Front Row: Agnes Hiebert, Henry Hiebert Jr. Elizabeth Hiebert and Frieda Dick.

Herbert Enns

by Ruth Klassen



I would like to thank Herb for his many articles and contributions to the Mennonite Historical Society over the years. I will share reflections of a twelve year old Herbert in a new land, and from letters by his mother, Marie Enns, my Tante Michi. Herb writes:

"It was a hot day, we had arrived at Erb and Caroline street and walked to the church. We assembled near the horse sheds where attempts were made to make us as comfortable as possible. Clothes had been gathered and those who needed some were invited into the church. The young people didn't dare go into the church.

Another committee had made sandwiches which were served to us. We had never seen sandwiches before and thought, they were quite something.

Near midnight we still had not been placed in a home. We thought nobody wanted our family of five. Since I have heard this feeling from three different people. My mother said we were the last to leave the church, the Neufeld girls thought they were the last to leave the yard and another family had the same feeling. All were very lonesome and quite relieved when finally someone came and took them.

Tante Michi's comments had been, "You see they wanted somebody who would help on the farm, not just children, you know, extra children. Families with young people had been placed immediately, they were the workers.

We have often talked about our difficulties in coming to a new land. On reflection we now know it must have been very difficult for the local people who hosted this huge group. We had been told we would be hosted for one week, possibly two. This stretched into one or two months, half a year, even a year. This was really something.

The day after we arrived was Sunday and our hosts were up early preparing to go to church. "Mia geh'n in die Kerch" our hosts told my family. We were glad to go to church. But where? Where was the church?

When we left the church yard Saturday night it seemed to us we had driven a great distance into the country before arriving at our host's farm. Now again it seemed as if we were driving a very long distance, but suddenly we were back on the church yard and those horse sheds — it was the same church and our hosts were members here.

The church service began. We sang German hymns, not chorals, but we could sing along. An elderly man entered the pulpit and began speak to in German — "well Pennsylvania-Dutch." In his speech of welcome he used only a few English words and the immigrants present could understand what was being said. However, the remainder of the service was in English.



Bishop Jonas Snider

The person extending the welcome was the recently retired Bishop of the congregation, Bishop Jonas Snider. Sometime later he and Mrs. Snider were to become our hosts, and to us children, they soon became Grandma and Grandpa Snider. A wonderful couple indeed.

In the coming months the Sniders sometimes dropped us off at the street car line at Central Street in Waterloo, so we could attend German services, sing chorales and hear the organ at St. Johns Lutheran Church, then on the corner where the Waterloo Post office is now."

I will share some excerpts from a letter Tante Michi wrote to her sister Agatha in Russia. Altester and Agatha Enns and their family eventually emigrated to Winnipeg. Years later Bishop Enns was awarded the Order of Canada, in Ottawa.

We like it were we live. Our family of five, and the Herman Enns family of four, share the kitchen facilities. Anna, my sister-in-law and I are away much of the time. This week for four days I picked beans, half for the owner and half for us. I believe I have picked for us alone, no less than 100 lbs. Living quarters, fuel and for the most part food, is supplied to us. Our hosts are very friendly and helpful. They will ask are you in need of potatoes, lard, eggs and if we say we need these, they bring them to us immediately.

When we arrived here, the beds were ready for us, with blankets, pillows and sheets. There was a nice metal stove for cooking, a frying pan, six cups, six plates, knives and forks and spoons. We even have a sofa and rocking chair. We were speechless, unable to express our feelings. It raised our emotions to the point of breaking, as we realized how concerned our hosts were in supplying everything in such detail.

The children are now in school, our three, Herman's two and Walter Sniders three, eight children from one farm. We are getting along fine.

Greetings from your everlasting sister,
Maria

Ruth Klassen,
Waterloo, Ontario.

Lorna L. (Shantz) Bergey

by Lorna L. Bergey



Feeding the pet lamb in the farmyard of Walter Shantz. Left: Jeanne Shantz; right: Lorna Shantz; centre front: Hans Friesen, son of the refugee family from Russia billeted with the Shantz family in 1924.

I have a vivid memory of that day in the middle of summer 75 years ago when my parents were busily engaged preparing to host a Mennonite family from Soviet Russia. I was told that we were having company from Russia who would stay in our home for several weeks. Up to this time in my life I was accustomed to having guests from Pennsylvania stay in our home for a few days. Naturally then my next question was "Why is the company from Russia going to stay with us for several weeks?" I was told about a war and a terrible famine which left people without hope for the future. This news stirred my childish sympathies deeply.

Finally the day dawned when our expected guests, The Johan Friesen family, arrived at our house. Their little boy was called Hansli. My curiosity was immediately aroused by the shirt worn by the father of the family. It resembled the cut of my father's nightshirt, and I thought if he was wearing that article of clothing during the day, why didn't he tuck his shirt tail in? Their luggage - the woven basket trunks intrigued me. The kerchief worn by the woman was not unlike those worn by my mother and both of my grandmothers at times. Likewise the use of tobacco by the man did not disturb me as my grandfather was a moderate smoker. With the arrival of our

guests came the news that our guests would stay with us for several months, not several weeks as previously planned. They would not proceed to Manitoba until early spring. Upon receiving that information my parents began to revamp our personal living quarters to provide our guest family with a separate living unit of three rooms: a kitchen, a livingroom and a bedroom.

At this point our personal life was invaded and I felt displaced in our own home. Our household now consisted of: a Pennsylvania German Mennonite family of four; my parents, my younger sister and myself; a Russian Mennonite family of three; a father and mother with their little son; plus our 16 year old hired man who had just emigrated from Ireland.

Both the immigrants from Russia and the immigrant from Ireland spoke of not having enough food to eat in their homeland. Such a state of affairs was beyond the comprehension of a child born and raised in a Pennsylvania German home in Ontario where there was always plenty of food available.

Johann the father was ill upon arrival and within a week he became very ill. Our family doctor was called to the house, and my father had to serve as interpreter for the patient and doctor. While question-

ing Johann about coping with hunger pangs during the famine, the doctor learned that when Johan was on board the ship coming to Canada he was so hungry that when he came to the diningroom and sat down to a table where half of the guests were seasick and could not partake of any food, Johann ate their portions of food as well, with the result, his stomach was not able to accommodate his appetite. He was confined to bed for a time, until he slowly regained his strength.

As already stated I had only a younger sister at this time. We played together as harmoniously as is possible when a younger child finds herself dominated by an older sister. However in this extended family situation we both for the first time became subjected to male domination and boisterousness in our play which was quite distasteful to both of us at times. This experience no doubt prepared us for the rigours of family life when our three brothers appeared on the scene.

*Lorna L. Bergey
Kitchener, Ontario.*

Greta (Snider) Hunsberger

by Brent Bauman

This story involves Greta Hunsberger. But in 1924 she was a ten year old girl known as Greta Snider. Her parents and grandparents both hosted families who arrived on that Saturday afternoon in July of 1924 at their home congregation - Erb Street Mennonite Church. Her grandparents had built a new house and barn across the road so the doddy house at Greta's home was empty and furnished for their guests, the Herman Enns family. Herman's brother Peter, and his family, were hosted by grandfather Jonas Snider.

In Herman's family there was a boy, Jake, and a girl, Agnes. Greta remembers twelve year old Jake the first night he was there. He wanted Greta to teach him what everything in the house was called in English. Every piece of furniture, every dish and ornament. They could communi-

cate quite well in their two dialects of German, but Jake wanted so much to expand his vocabulary in the dominant language of his new home. He was a quick student, although Greta says he never quite got the knack of saying her name properly.

The Enns' stayed with the Sniders for maybe a year, until moving to Bricker Ave. in Waterloo. Up to this point in her life, Greta's exposure to people from different countries had been very limited, but during their time together the young girl got to know the two Enns families as fine, honest, hard working people. She saw different customs, and tasted different foods. She had never tasted anything like borsch before - there was nothing like it in their cookbooks.

She would notice every time there was a thunderstorm the mother would gather her children around her, and they would sit

quietly waiting for it to pass. Greta never found out why they did that.

Their guests also dressed differently, the men wore caps unlike those of the men in the Waterloo area. When they went out in public she remembers they stood out from those around them because of the cut of their clothes. But she points out that she and her family did too because of their Mennonite clothing and bonnets.

But for all these differences the children played as all children do, and any barriers between them fell away in their joyous times together.

Because they were both Mennonites, she feels a common bond was easier to achieve. And that their arrival into the community was a benefit as they brought skills and ambitions to start over again in a new land.

Nancy (Martin) Bauman



Nancy (Martin) Bauman and Helena Warkentin pictured around 1960 at a bridge near Nancy's farm in Floradale.

My second story is about Nancy Bauman and Helena Cress. They first met when they were both six years old, and Helena and her family moved into Nancy's house. No one knew that when my grandparents, Levi and Sussanah Martin, were asked to host a Russian Mennonite Family that a life long friendship would result.

This was not the first host family for the Warkentin's since coming from Russia. When John and Mary Warkentin and their three children: John, Maria and Helena,

first came to Canada they lived with an Old Order family on a farm near St. Jacobs. But the hosts were not prepared for their visitors to stay so long, and things did not go well.

All this changed when they moved in with the Martins. Though my grandparents had four children of their own, with another baby (that would become my mother) on the way, they made room for five more people in their home in St. Jacobs. It was in these close quarters that Nancy and Helena became good friends.

It was eventually found out that the Warkentins had a fourth child, a girl, whom had died in Russia during the chaos of the Revolution. The details of her death were never fully explained to the host family, who could only try to understand the hardships the Warkentins had gone through before their arrival in the Martin's home.

Father John found work at the Smitty Shoe Factory in town, and the family was eventually able to rent a house of their own. Two years later, Lavina Weber, an elderly neighbour of the Martins died. She had named Levi the executor of her estate, and so he was able to arrange for the Warkentins to buy the house.

The two families remained neighbours until the Martins bought a farm near Floradale in 1938. But they remained in contact through regular letters and visits, including Maria's children spending summer vacations on my Aunt Mary's farm. The bond grew strong, especially between

Nancy and Helena.

Nancy and Helena shared the highs and lows of each others lives: celebrating with one another as they married and had families of their own; grieved the loss of parents; and later they also grieved with each other as they both became widows.

Three years ago Nancy passed away suddenly, and now Helena suffers from terminal cancer (she died April 21, 2000). Although they were born half a world apart, the tragedies of this world brought them together, and for seven decades their friendship lasted through all the joys and trials that life had to offer.

Their life long friendship is but one result of the kindness shown to strangers a three quarter century ago.

*Brent Bauman
Drayton, Ontario*

I want to end with Barbara Smucker's concluding words in her article for the 50th anniversary (**They Found a Home in Canada**, in *Waterloo Historical Society* Vol. 62, 1974, pp. 16-25.), where she says:

"Many more dramas remain in the photograph albums, family histories, and memories of people living in the Kitchener-Waterloo area today. They are treasures which their families should retain and pass on to succeeding generations." (P.25)

*Linda Huebert Hecht
Waterloo, Ontario*

Our Legacy: The Melding of Two Cultures

By Sam Steiner

After the 1924 immigration, it was not long before most of our people went separate ways. The cultural differences were too great. Today we can look back with nostalgia and good humour about the many wayward assumptions and misunderstandings that took place 75 years ago. But some of the misunderstandings were hurtful, i.e. S.F. Coffman wedding — (no wedding ring or veil allowed), and sometimes we were not kind in talking about one another. It was clear that for a number of years, with some exceptions, we could not easily live together or worship together.

The event that started the change - that began to bring cohesion to us was imposed from the political world. World War II made it clear to Mennonites in Canada that we needed a unified voice in speaking to government. We actually weren't able to achieve total unity in this, especially between Ontario Mennonites and those in the West, but within Ontario we did pretty well.

Elven Shantz, who was long time secretary of the Conference of Historic Peace Churches, later recalled that initially the Ontario Swiss Mennonites weren't interested in a program of alternative service. They were still mostly farmers and assumed, as in World War I, that they would be deferred for agricultural work, or that their historic exemption from military service would be honored. The folks who came from Russia in 1924 cautioned this should not be assumed. They had served in a kind of alternative service in World War I in Russia and wanted to be pro-active in approaching the government for this sort of arrangement. I believe the leadership of persons like Jacob H. Janzen were crucial in developing a unified position, as much as was possible, with Mennonites across Canada.

Another factor that helped our two cultures to meld were the men who actually served in the alternative service work camps. Particularly those who served in Northern Ontario were unified in their belief that the work itself was of little consequence, and all were frustrated by the experience. But the experience of men from various backgrounds and religious assumptions working together was to have long term effect. Some 40 years

later Andrew Steckly, who came from a more conservative Amish Mennonite background, expressed appreciation for getting to know the Russian Mennonites in the camps. He felt they were more "worldly-wise" because of their experiences; and found these relationships to be enriching.

After the war, many of the Swiss Mennonites continued to work together with all branches of Mennonites in the post-war relief efforts. C. J. Rempel, a widely known and very "ecumenical" Mennonite Brethren layperson headed up the MCC office in Kitchener. His energy and vision was yet another factor that helped us work together. Some of our young people traveled to Europe to help with relief work. In those roles they became familiar with leaders like C.F. Klassen or Peter & Elfrieda Dyck, or Harold Bender. That "other" Mennonite culture was becoming less "strange" and part of our own story as well. Harvey Taves, who followed C.J. Rempel in the MCC position in Ontario, also had a strong inter-Mennonite outlook, and worked well in all our communities.

Finally, I'd like to suggest there were three other factors that were important for our increasing comfort with one another and each other's cultures and history. These I would call urbanization, education and missions.

Many Swiss Mennonites, but not all, became more interested in high school education after World War II. They were taking jobs in the city, moving to the city, and preparing for professional jobs that demanded more education. All of us started Mennonite high schools after the war. Often because of distance we attended each other's schools. For a time in the 1950s and early 1960s a significant percentage of the students at Rockway Mennonite School, for example, came from the Mennonite Brethren community. Life long friendships were formed in those relationships.

As the Swiss Mennonites were moving to town, they were also leaving behind some of the distinctives that had marked their distinctive nonconformity. The acculturated Swiss Mennonites no longer dressed plain, and many women stopped wearing the prayer veiling. At the same time the new generation of Russian

Mennonites, many of whom already lived in the city, were becoming more "English" and less German. The cultural and language markers that had helped to divide us in 1924 were becoming less important.

And we took some tentative steps in broadening our cooperative efforts in the church. For some of us this finally resulted in the creation of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada, the first Mennonite area conference in North America that brought together our cultural streams (together with Mennonites who don't share these streams). Even in the old Inter-Mennonite Conference days, the Mennonite Brethren missions committee was always represented in discussions about new home mission ventures.

Our differences are not all erased; indeed we celebrate our different histories and memories. But our shared experiences here in Ontario since 1924 have strengthened each of us in our pilgrimage in God's kingdom.

Sam Steiner
Conrad Grebel College

Resources Available at Mennonite Archives at Conrad Grebel College

There are over seventy oral histories on file including; *Herbert Enns*, *Nicholas Fehderau* and *Henry Hiebert*.

Past Issues of *Ontario Mennonite History* with Articles on This Topic:
Volume X, Number 2, September 1992
Volume XII, Number 2, September 1994
Volume XIV, Number 1, March 1996
Volume XVI, Number 2, October 1998
Volume XVII, Number 2, October 1999

Book Review

From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929

edited by Royden Loewen.

(Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999)
350 pages, Paper \$24.95.

Reviewed by Sam Steiner

Among the most fascinating and personal items that come into a Mennonite archive are diaries. Aside from personal correspondence, few documents reflect so well the life and thought of "average" members of the community. But of course the problem with correspondence is that the donor usually has only the letters received from a variety of family members and acquaintances, so that only half of the "conversation" is available to the researcher.

The diary, however, is a conversation with oneself — intended to preserve thoughts, encounters and events for later personal reflection. In that sense diaries are "complete." With the exception of some literary diaries, they were not written with public exposure in mind, so on occasion they are very candid and reflect the immediate, daily rhythm of life and events.

Royden Loewen holds the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, edits the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and currently serves as president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. His own family background as well as his research interest has been in the *Kleine Gemeinde* community of Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Canada and the United States in the 1870s.

In the course of his research in Manitoba and in later post-doctoral studies on "Pennsylvania German" Mennonites in Waterloo County, Ontario he was amazed at the number of diaries that survived into the late 20th century. This volume contains

twenty-one excerpts from Mennonite diaries of late 19th and early 20th century Manitoba and Ontario (with a few exceptions) and is illuminated by a lengthy introduction together with background biographical information at the beginning of each diary excerpt. Both the Manitoba *Kleine Gemeinde* and Ontario Pennsylvania German diarists remained part of primarily rural communities during the years referred to in these diaries.

Seven diary excerpts in the book come from Ontario Pennsylvania German Mennonite diaries. These include Ezra Burkholder (1876), Moses Weber (1865), Moses S. Bowman (1890), Elias Eby (1874), Ephraim Cressman (1890), Laura Shantz (1918) and Ishmael Martin (1929). Another Ontario-related diary is that of Pennsylvanian Levi Jung who in 1863 visited Ontario representing the Evangelical Mennonites who were in fellowship with the "New Mennonites" led by Daniel Hoch in the Vineland area. The final Ontario diary is that of Margaretha Jansen (1874), whose family lived with the family of Mennonite businessman Jacob Y. Shantz in Berlin, Ontario in parts of 1873/74. Some of the twelve *Kleine Gemeinde* diaries make reference to Ontario as part of their migration narratives.

For the 21st century reader these diary excerpts reveal, in Loewen's words, "the nature of social relationships in rural society... They mirror the preoccupation of household members with work routines, food procurement, crop selection, marketing procedures, weather patterns, and seasonal change. [They] also outline the social boundaries of the rural community, defined by kinship ties, village and district politics, and congregational life."

This observation is true, and indicates both the strengths and weaknesses of this collection. Loewen writes in an engaging

style and extracts as much from this disparate collection of diaries as can be drained. The Manitoba and Ontario Mennonite communities had similarities, yet were very diverse. The Manitoba community of first or second-generation immigrants was homogeneous, German and very rural. Second, third or fourth generation Waterloo County, Ontario Mennonites were further along the path to assimilation with the larger English community around them. This makes some comparisons difficult. In addition, Loewen deliberately chose a diverse collection of diarists from within each community - thus an individual diarist must serve as a snapshot for a larger whole. The overall unity of the diary texts occasionally feels weakened as a result.

The second strength/limitation is the "average-ness" of the writers. The readability of the diaries varies considerably. Each reader will have his/her personal favorites that will make you wish you could read the whole diary from which the excerpt was taken. My personal favorites were the diaries of Margaretha Jansen, Elias Eby, Klaas Reimer, Levi Jung and Peter Dueck. These especially reflected on church life, and tended to have somewhat longer entries.

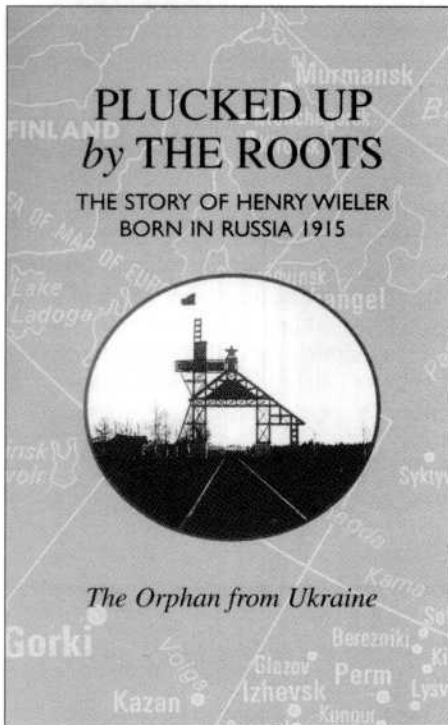
Royden Loewen undertook an ambitious task that hasn't often been tried by Mennonite academics - examining the commonalities of two very different Mennonite cultures that did not extensively interact until well into the 20th century. He has broken some new ground here; hopefully his work in this area will continue.

Sam Steiner is the Librarian and Archivist at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo.

Book Review

Plucked up by the Roots: The Story of Henry Wieler, born in Russia, 1915 - The Orphan from Ukraine.

by Leonard Freeman



Privately published,
Elmira ON, 1998.
120 pages, \$9.95.

Reviewed by Barbara Draper

Henry Wieler was a child during the days of the Russian Revolution and the political turmoil and famine which followed it. He was born into a well-to-do family which lost almost everything when the Bolsheviks gained power. His mother died during a typhoid epidemic and his father was killed later that same year so Henry and his sister were cared for by the extended family. In 1924, nine-year-old Henry travelled with his uncle's family to Waterloo, Ontario where they were taken into the homes of "Swiss" Mennonites. Henry went to live with Menno and Amelia Sauder.

After about a year in Canada, Henry's uncle and family began homesteading in the community of Reesor, near Hearst, Ontario. Henry joined them for a while, but after a miserable winter he returned to the Sauders farm in southern Ontario. Although Henry was never adopted, he was raised as the son of Menno and Amelia Sauder and became a part of their faith community. He was baptized and joined the Waterloo-Markham Conference Mennonites. Henry lived with the Sauders until their death when he took over their farm east of Elmira. He never married, but considers himself the grandfather of his housekeepers' grandchildren.

Many of Henry's relatives who remained in Russia died of starvation or were deported to concentration camps. Henry's sister and her family suffered dreadfully during the Stalin years and afterward. Henry tried to help them as best he could. More information has become available since the break-up of the Soviet Union and some of Henry's relatives have moved to Germany.

This is a sad story; Freeman describes Henry as a boy who was "plucked up by the roots" and who never finds a true home again. I believe that the torn roots refer to a loss of family connection, but the implication is that Henry never truly fit into the "Swiss" Mennonite community where he was transplanted. Freeman emphasizes that Henry has always been lonely and far from his relatives. It may be that Henry always felt himself an outsider because he didn't have the family connections of the Mennonites around him and because he was raised by the eccentric Menno Sauder, but his "Swiss" faith community has always considered Henry a part of themselves. As an old man, no longer able to do everything for himself, Henry is cared for by the children of his

former housekeeper and people from the church keep in touch. The story would not be so sad if Freeman had emphasized how Henry grew and prospered after he was transplanted.

For those not accustomed to detailed family histories, *Plucked Up by the Roots* may be difficult to follow at times. "Swiss" Mennonites have tended to do their history genealogically and Freeman follows this pattern by giving so many details about Henry's cousins that it can be confusing. He does provide a good list of these people in the appendix. The map in the appendix is also very helpful.

The story of Henry Wieler is important because it connects two very different Mennonite traditions. Freeman has written this book about the experiences of Mennonites in Russia for the "Swiss" Mennonites of the Elmira area. Those of us who have known Henry Wieler only as a very tall man with an unusual last name, now can connect someone we know with the history of Mennonites in Russia. Hopefully this story can promote understanding and empathy for Mennonites from a different tradition.

Barbara Draper is Assistant Moderator of the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada. She lives with her family in Elmira, Ontario.

People and Projects

AMISH HISTORY PROJECT

Orland Gingerich has been asked by the Institute for Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies at Conrad Grebel College to "rescue" stories and information on the Amish of Ontario for the Amish Mennonite Oral History Project. Gingerich will tape interviews and summarize them in writing for the project. He was the last ordained bishop in the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference and is the author of a history book on the Amish. - *from Grebel release*

SHERK FAMILY REUNION

A reunion of the descendants of Joseph Sherk, one of the first immigrants to Canada from Pennsylvania in 1800, will be held at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate on August 18 - 20. Planned by the Sherk Family Association of North America it will include seminars on Sherk genealogy, bus trips to local landmarks and an auction. A Sunday worship service and picnic is planned for the Doon Pioneer Tower. Registration is available from:

Margaret Sherk, R.R. #1,
Elora, Ontario. N0B 1S0;
phone: (519) 846-5197;
email: mrsherk@sympatico.ca
Deadline for registration is July 20.

FAMILY HERITAGE WORKSHOPS

Photographic Memory Historical Perspectives of Waterloo is presenting a series of one day workshops to show people how to preserve their family history. Topics include: uncovering your family's heritage, caring for heirlooms, how to conduct interviews, how to do archival research, writing and presenting family histories. Dates are October 21 and November 18 in Kitchener/Waterloo, October 28 in Cambridge and November 25 in Guelph. Register by calling (519) 747-5139. The cost is \$15.00 which includes GST and a reference book.

NEW BOOK STORE OPENS

Arnold Snyder of *Pandora Press* has opened a new book store called

The Bookshop at Pandora Press. Located at 33 Kent Avenue in Kitchener near the MCC offices, it specializes in books relating to the Mennonite and Anabaptist community. *Pandora Press* which publishes several new books on Anabaptist Mennonite history and theology each year has also moved into the same building. - *from The Record*

HAWKESVILLE CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY

Hawkesville Mennonite Church celebrated its 50th anniversary on May 7, 2000. Current pastor Don Penner was joined by three former pastors - Paul Martin, David Garber and Simeon Hurst - in sharing messages about Hawkesville's journey from being a daughter congregation of the St. Jacobs and Elmira churches to becoming a distinct mature congregation of their own. The building was full to capacity for the morning service and the afternoon service of celebration and rededication. - *from Elmira Independent*

Book Notes

- Peter Rempel. *Mennonite Migration to Russia, 1788-1828*, edited by Alfred H. Redekopp and Richard D. Thiessen (Winnipeg, Man.: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2000), xviii, 249 pp. \$35.00 + \$5.00 postage & handling. This volume is a recent publication of the Genealogy Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and is the first in their Russian Mennonite Genealogy Series. The author, Peter Rempel, lives in Moscow, Russia and is a researcher who has worked through a number of documents related to Mennonite history. Many of these documents, including those published in the above mentioned publication, are held in the St. Petersburg Historical Library. The documents in Rempel's book pertain to the first four decades of the immigration of Mennonites from Prussia to Russia, and include census lists, settlement lists and visa applications. The documents in this publication are similar to those published in the appendix of B.H. Unruh's book, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der*

Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen in 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert, and will be a much used source for those interested in Russian Mennonite genealogy.

- Marlene Epp. *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 275 pp. \$55.00 cloth, \$ 21.95 paper. This book does an indepth study of Mennonite women's experiences during World War II as they fled the wartorn Soviet Union. The author uses interviews and research to tell previously untold stories, such as the widespread experience of rape and the church's handling of female refugees.
- Isaac R. Horst. *A Separate People: An Insider's View of Old Order Mennonite Customs and Traditions*. (Kitchener: Herald Press, 2000), 272 pp., \$20.79. This well known local writer has compiled many of his columns from the Mennonite Reporter to form the foundation of this new book. As a member of the Old Order

Mennonite community he is able to present an unique view of of Old Order history, daily life and religious beliefs.

- Ted Regehr. *Peace Order and Good Government: Mennonites and Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2000), 130 pp. \$10.00. This book studies the history of Mennonites in politics and evaluates their contributions to Canada. This book is from the transcripts of the 1999 J.J. Thiessen Lectures at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. The author is a professor of Canadian history at the University of Saskatchewan and is the author of *Mennonites in Canada*, Volume 3.
- Carl Hiebert. *Us Little People: Mennonite Children* (Boston Mills Press, 1999), 120 pp. \$29.95. This is a volume of Heibert's photographs of Old Order and David Martin Mennonite children. It is supplemented by brief essays by these children to reveal their particular views of life and the world around them.