

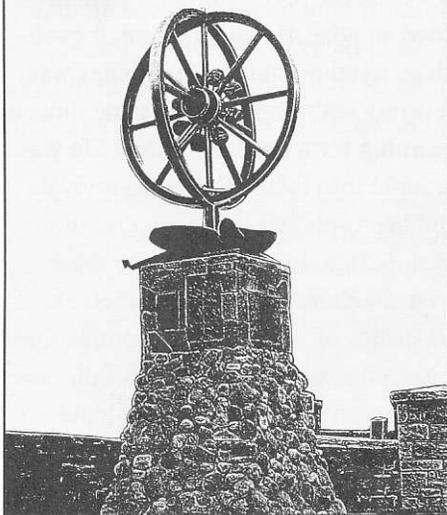
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Mennonite Brethren Beginnings in Ontario 1924-1932

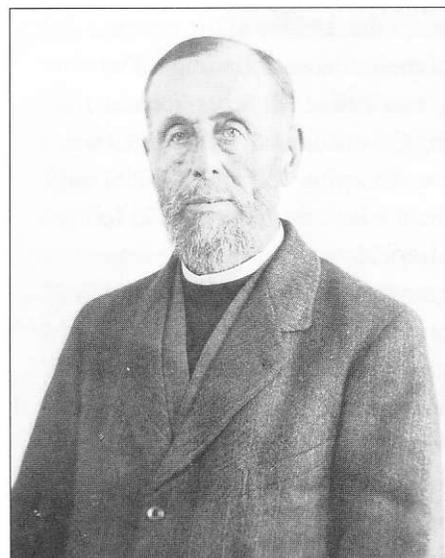
by Anne Wiebe

This article is based on Anne Wiebe's manuscript of the history of the Mennonite Brethren church in Ontario. It is taken from chapter VI, "Early Beginnings" and edited for Ontario Mennonite History by Linda Huebert Hecht and Nancy Riediger Fehderau. See also Anne Wiebe, "The Mennonite Brethren in Ontario: a short history" in Mennogespräch, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 1986), pp.4-8.

On Saturday, July 19, 1924, about 825 Russian Mennonite refugees, immigrants from the Mennonite colonies in the Ukraine, stepped off the train in Waterloo. About 5000 Mennonites immigrants came to Canada that year and the Mennonite communities in the west were stretched to the limit, so this group was assisted by sympathetic Swiss Mennonites. The refugees walked up Erb Street to the Erb Street Mennonite Church, carrying all their worldly possessions with them. The task of allocating the new arrivals before nightfall was not altogether simple since the local committee had arranged for only 600 billets.

Nurse Mariechen Braun described in her diary what happened on that Saturday afternoon in July, 1924: "In the centre of the premises a platform had been erected. From this podium some of the local ministers and members of the reception committee welcomed us. When this ceremony was completed, our names were written on little slips of notepaper, for the...newcomers were to be lodged before nightfall." (Unpublished diary, "*Die Riese von Russland nach Kanada*" p. 22) Due to the generosity of the local Mennonites, this first major task was accomplished successfully in spite of the anxiety that was felt on the part of those involved.

For the Mennonites from Russia, the process of adjusting to Canadian ways was slow and gradual. It began on the



Jakob W. Reimer was an early leader of the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church. (photo courtesy of John Reimer)

farms of their hosts in Waterloo County and environs. All the immigrants had to commit themselves to agricultural labour for at least a year. Long before the newcomers had started the trend of drifting into surrounding urban areas, however, the need for the new arrivals to meet with their own countrymen became increasingly evident. Not only were such meetings desirable for reasons of spiritual edification, but the immigrants needed to socialize with friends and family members who were all too often scattered far and wide across the neighbouring countryside.

Gatherings for Bible studies were convened in the homes at an early

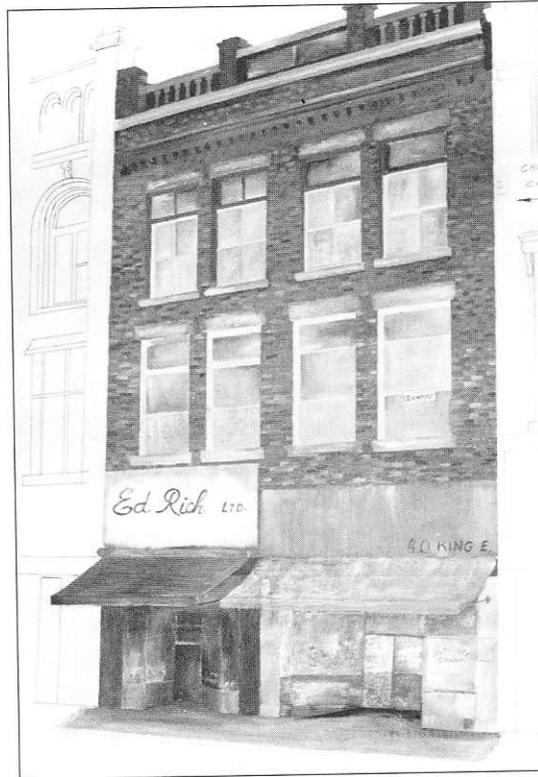
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date. At one such meeting in September, 1924, at the home of Rev. Jakob W. Reimer in New Dundee, the desirability of bringing the immigrants together into a corporate body, a church, was first discussed. Bible studies were conducted during the fall in places such as Baden, St. Jacobs, Breslau and New Dundee.

Wherever the newcomers had been lodged, they attempted to adapt themselves to the customs of their new surroundings. The generosity of the hosts in meeting the needs of their protégés was recognized unequivocally. Not only did the host farmers provide for the physical well-being of the immigrants, but they also attempted to provide them with spiritual nourishment. To this end the newcomers accompanied their hosts to their respective local churches, but a feeling of cohesive unity was not to be attained. The language problem presented an unbridgeable barrier. Although the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect was to some extent intelligible to the newcomers, the adoption of much English terminology prevented the "Russian" Mennonites, who were accustomed to High German, from benefiting from these worship services spiritually.

During the late summer of 1924, the local committee in charge of immigrants decided to arrange for special services for immigrants to be held in High German in various Mennonite churches in the K-W area every second Sunday and conducted by immigrant ministers. This arrangement was much appreciated. All immigrants worshipped together under the leadership of Mennonite Brethren ministers since ministers of the General Conference affiliation had, by coincidence, all gone to western Canada. Most people wished

these services could be conducted with greater regularity, but that was not possible because all immigrants were dependent on their hosts for transportation. A large group of immigrants moved to western Canada in February of 1925, mainly because immigrants in the west had established regular worship services in the mother tongue.



The Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church first met on the third floor of 40 King St. E. in Kitchener. This painting was done by Walter H. Goerz for the 50th anniversary of KMB. (photo courtesy of Elvira Goerz)

This move would have increased their debt, adding to what they owed the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, but they felt that worshipping God with their own people was more important. (Jacob Fast and Herbert Enns, *Jubilee Issue of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church 1924-1974*, p. 8).

As newcomers continued to descend upon Kitchener-Waterloo to seek employment, a nucleus of immigrants coalesced. Members of the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood found that they had

much doctrinal ground in common, a circumstance they had been fully aware of in Russia. Whereas the Mennonite Brethren traced their beginnings to the 1860s, the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood was a younger movement, its roots going back to the early years of the 20th century. For both groups, membership was conditional upon a genuine conversion experience. The Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood baptized by immersion, however, it did not make this form a prerequisite to membership. If a previously baptized candidate was satisfied with the baptism he/she had received, he/she was accepted on the basis of confession of faith, without rebaptism. Concerning such matters as the Lord's Supper and the general attitude toward believers of other denominations, the Brotherhood took a more liberal stance than did the Mennonite Brethren. For that reason, the new movement became known in Russia as *Allianzgemeinde* (Alliance Church). This open and spontaneous attitude of the new church had made it very popular in Molotschna especially, but in other Mennonite colonies in Russia as well. Many from the ranks of the Mennonite Brethren, as well as from the *Kirchliche Churches* (General Conference), had joined the ranks of the *Allianz*.

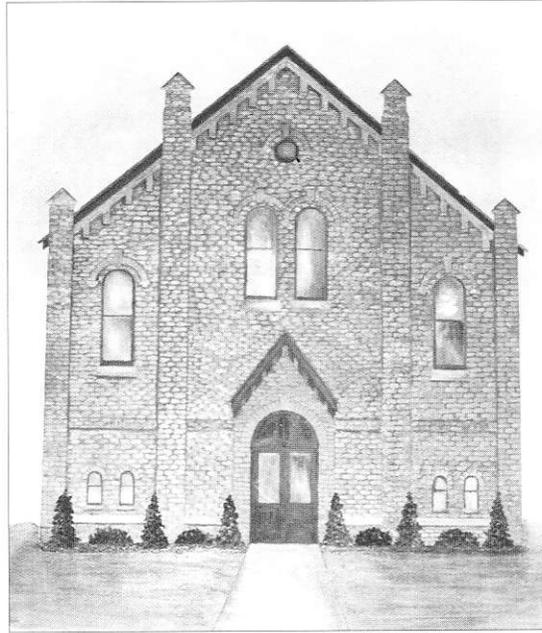
When the revolution in Russia instituted an atheistic government, the religious freedom of the Mennonites was severely restrained. At the same time, a yearning for a deeper spiritual life was brought into focus. Religious revivals had been sparked in the villages of the Molotschna. In villages where there were no church buildings, adherents of all shades of Mennonite denominations gathered to participate in Bible discussions in private homes. Many hands were clasped in a spirit of brotherhood. Such was the spiritual background of

many of those who immigrated to Canada and settled in Ontario in 1924-26.

This spiritual atmosphere of the former "fatherland" had now been transplanted to Ontario, and on May 25, 1925, in the village of St. Jacobs, at the home of Rev. Jacob P. Wiens, the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Ontario took shape. It was placed under the leadership of Rev. Jacob P. Friesen, who in turn was to be assisted by Rev. Jacob W. Reimer, Rev. Jacob P. Wiens and Rev. Peter Goertzen. These men formed the *Ältestenrat* or Church Council. The background of the eighteen signatories to the charter of organization was partially Mennonite Brethren and part Allianz. These two groups decided to amalgamate under the name *Molotschna Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* (Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church). According to Isaac Thiessen, the name Molotschna was to be reminiscent of the liberal stance of the Brethren and Evangelical Brotherhood Churches of the Molotschna Colony during the early decades of the 20th century (Isaac H. Thiessen, "Geschichte der Konferenz der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden in Ontario" in *Er Führet...Geschichte der Ontario M.B. Gemeinden, 1924-1957*, pp. 7-9).

In addition to naming the new church Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church, it was also referred to as Mennonite Brethren Church of Kitchener. The 18 signatories to the articles

of organization included Rev. Jacob P. Friesen, Rev. Jacob P. and Maria Wiens, Rev. Jacob W. Reimer, Gerhard Dueck (Dyck), Gerhard J. Enns, Johann G. Rempel, Isaak Sawatzky, Johann Lorenz, Lena and Anna Dick, Katharina (Dick) Swartz, Mariechen Braun,



The Kitchener MB congregation used this former Lutheran Church at 53 Church Street from 1935 to 1952. This painting was done by Walter H. Goertz for the 50th anniversary of KMB. (photo courtesy of Elvira Goertz)

Maria Fehderau, Mrs. Peter Friesen, Mrs. Henry Braun. Two remaining signatories have been lost. At the organizational meeting a constitution was formulated. Thus was launched the Mennonite Brethren Church in Ontario.

Yet another ten years were to "slip under the bridge," however, before the Kitchener chapter would be able to

claim a church building of its own. In the meantime, worship services were held as heretofore on alternate Sundays in St. Jacobs at 10:30 in the morning, and at Bethany New Mennonite (Missionary) Church in Kitchener at 3:00 in the afternoon. As the concentration of Mennonite immigrants in the Kitchener-Waterloo region increased, so also grew the membership of the fledgling congregation. They also came from Canada's prairie provinces where some found life extremely difficult, particularly those who had no aptitude or inclination to work the soil. There were those who continued to arrive from various spots in Europe. The kind of life these people found on arriving in this area, was portrayed by Katharina (Dyck) Swartz, in a letter written in 1926 to close relatives living in Siberia who were weighing the pros and cons of immigrating to Canada:

"In order to give you an idea of this place I shall describe for you our manner of life. Kitchener is a city of approximately 30,000 inhabitants. It has 170 factories, and is therefore fully regarded as an industrial city. In the morning when we go to work, there hovers over the area where most of the factories are located, a thick, grey cloud of smoke. This is because the chief source of fuel in this area is soft coal, which is cheaper. Some distance removed from the factories are the residential areas with the most beautiful villas...."

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"We live in four rooms on the second floor of a house. We heat our flat with a heater fired by coal, but for cooking we use natural gas. The rent for these quarters is \$20 monthly. For a five-room house one would pay \$25-\$30 or more.

"As I mentioned previously, we all work in factories. Lise works with me in a factory that produces the finest of shirts for men. Both of us are employed in the department where the shirts are ironed and folded. Wages are calculated on piece-work basis, from 8 to 28 cents a dozen. In this type of work, everything depends upon speed. I have been working in this factory for almost two years now and I turn out about 25 dozen shirts a day. Lise began only about four months ago. Manya (Maria), my younger sister, works in another shirt factory. Kolja (Nicholas), who makes rubber boots in a rubber footwear factory, earns up to \$5 a day, but such periods are of short duration only. Generally he makes from \$3.50-\$4....

"At the high school building in Kitchener one can learn anything one wishes to learn, either during the day or at night. In the evenings, for a fee of \$1, one can learn such trades as dress-making, cooking, basket-weaving, bookkeeping, stenography, lathe-operation, carpentry, blacksmith work and many other skills....

"Generally speaking, we Mennonite immigrants have a good reputation in this region. May we live up to that reputation! Last night most of the participating Mennonites received awards at the final program. In Kitchener and environs there are about 250 'Russian Mennonites,' mostly our acquaintances from Halbstadt, Tiege and other villages of the Molotschna. There are also many ministers here such as J. Janzen (Tiege), J. Reimer (Rückenau) J. Wiens



The Bible Class of 1934-35 enjoyed a day at Cressman's Woods on August 24, 1935. Front row: Bernhard B. Boldt, Toly Isaac, Henry Enns, H. H. Janzen. Olga Enns is at far right. (photo from Olga Enns' album)

(Tiege), J. Friesen (Halbstadt), Peter Klassen (Spat) and a few others. We meet on Sundays for worship services; we also meet for Bible study. There is very little socializing. There is no such thing as visiting someone and having a cup of coffee, because everyone is working. Whoever does not work in a factory, goes out on day labour, doing laundry, or cleaning houses. Some of our women who in Russia used to engage three maids, are now working for a daily wage. In this regard western Canada is different. There they don't have the job market that we have down here. In our area it is easy for women to find work, but for men it is often very difficult because women perform the same jobs that men do, such as making rubber footwear or tires for automobiles. One young woman we know makes fifty rubber tires daily, which nets her four dollars....

"You asked about the availability here of dry goods and other consumer products. I chuckled to myself when I thought of the huge stores stocked to overflowing. Naturally, quality goods are expensive. A good dress sells for at least \$10, but I also have some everyday dresses for which I paid 80-90 cents or in the range of some-

where from one to two dollars. These dresses are made of gingham and last a long time.

"Agriculture in this area is mainly of the mixed variety.... Very few of our people take up farming here. The farms are too expensive and life on a farm is very difficult. But there are many Pennsylvania Dutch farmers in the neighbourhood. They are very different from us. Many are very wealthy."

This letter had a positive response and at 6:00 p.m. on July 26, 1926, the Peter Isaak family from Omsk in Siberia, arrived at the Grand River Railway Station on Queen Street in Kitchener. Looking back to this event, daughter Sara recalls, "A week later we attended the worship service at Bethany Church on Lancaster Street, where the Mennonite Brethren congregated under the leadership of Jacob P. Friesen. It was a dull and rainy day when we went to church for the first time in Canada. A mixed quartet, consisting of Lydia Friesen, Liese Huebert, Kolja (N.J.) Fehderau, and Heinz (Henry P.) Reidiger, provided special music while Susie Rempel accompanied the congregational singing on the piano. Rev. Jacob P. Friesen preached. We carried our

hymnals, the *Dreiband*, a book without music, which we had brought from Russia.”

The following week the Isaak family left for Vineland where they worked all summer on the fruit farms. When they returned on October 20, the Mennonite Brethren had moved into new premises at 40 King St. East where they rented a large hall on the third floor of an office building. In these make-shift arrangements the congregation was able to assemble every Sunday morning and evening for worship services, but during the week the premises were out of bounds for it was then the meeting place of a group of spiritualists. The fact that the hall was accessible to the Mennonite Brethren on Sundays only made it very difficult to carry on a weekly calendar of church-related activities. Choir rehearsals had to be conducted in private homes, as was the case of Bible studies and church council meetings.

“Fortunately the spiritualists found our presence in the hall discomfitting,” recalls Sara Isaak, “and after some time of joint-occupancy, to everyone’s relief, they vacated the premises.”

Henceforth the life of the fledgling congregation could unfold and develop without restriction. To be sure, it was no easy matter for the older members to climb two flights of steep stairs every Sunday morning—and perhaps evening—in order to reach the sanctuary. Furthermore, opening windows was unthinkable, for should an electric tram decide to rattle by on King Street, it was sure to drown out whatsoever was being said or sung at that time. Yet, in spite of these handicaps, the congregation had many moments of blessing.

It should not be forgotten at this point, that of the immigrants who arrived in Ontario in 1924, only a nucleus remained in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. The majority settled in areas that held the most promising economic prospects for them, areas such as New Hamburg, Hespeler, Pelee Island, Essex (Leamington), Port Rowan and Vineland. In due time, affiliated church branches, called stations, were organized by those who settled in the various places. The stations were administered and controlled by the mother church in Kitchener until such time as the various stations requested autonomous status.

The focal position that the Kitchener church occupied for some years, placed on it the onus of providing spiritual nurture and Bible teaching for the affiliated stations. Heavy tasks were shouldered during this period by the three ministers, Jacob P. Friesen, Jacob W. Reimer and Jacob P. Wiens. The system of organization gave rise to much travel to and from the various stations, for Kitchener was responsible not only for providing speakers for the affiliates, but on its shoulders also lay the task of bringing together former members of the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood. As Jacob Kutz reported in 1950, common doctrinal ground had to be sought for the newly amalgamated organization and was established within a relatively short period and with a minimum of stress and strain.

The Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church also had a Sunday School which began in the Bethany Church on Lancaster Street. The Bethany Church offered to organize classes taught in German for those unable to speak English and the Mennonite Brethren were encouraged to elect teachers from within their own ranks. Thereupon three classes were formed, one for men, one for women and one for children. Johann G. Rempel, Katharina (Dyck) Swartz and Manya (Maria) Fehderau were put in charge of the respective classes. Seeing that the children were recruited from both Mennonite Brethren and General Conference background, their numbers were large—and increased rapidly. It became necessary to sub-divide the children’s class and the very small ones were instructed by Nurse Mariechen Braun who meanwhile had re-located from New Dundee to Kitchener. Thus the German Sunday School classes were carried on as an integral part of the indigenous organization at Bethany



Sunday School staff, 1941: Helen Rempel, Mr. Abram Dyck, Margaret Fast, Agatha Giesbrecht, Lydia Dick, Mr. Peter Wiens, Elizabeth Martens, Peter Rempel, Mary Brown, Olga Enns, Marie Fehderau. (photo from Olga Enns' album)

Church on Sunday mornings, whereas the German worship services for adults were conducted in the afternoons.

By the fall of 1926, when the Mennonite Brethren began renting a hall in which to meet independently, the number of children enrolled in Sunday School had increased to the extent that new staff had to be recruited. The adult classes, on the other hand, were for some time dissolved. An additional teacher and superintendent was found in H. H. Janzen who had emigrated from Russia late in 1925 with his wife, Katharina and baby son, Rudy. Although the superintendency of the Sunday School was held by Janzen for a short period only, it proved to be the springboard from which he would launch out into a long and fruitful ministry.

The senior clergymen of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church, Friesen, Reimer and Wiens recognized Janzen's ardent desire to plumb the depths of the Scriptures. Beginning in 1927, when he preached his first sermon, Janzen was encouraged to teach and preach whenever and wherever possible. When Janzen laid aside the Sunday School work in the spring of 1928 in order to assist the elder brethren with the preaching ministry, David Quapp took up his duties, followed by Abram J. Dick in September, 1928. As the enrolment increased, and the Sunday School expanded, new teachers stepped into the ranks. In April 1927, Sara Isaak joined the staff and Peter J. Rempel in 1930. The Sunday Schools in the various stations also expanded during this time.

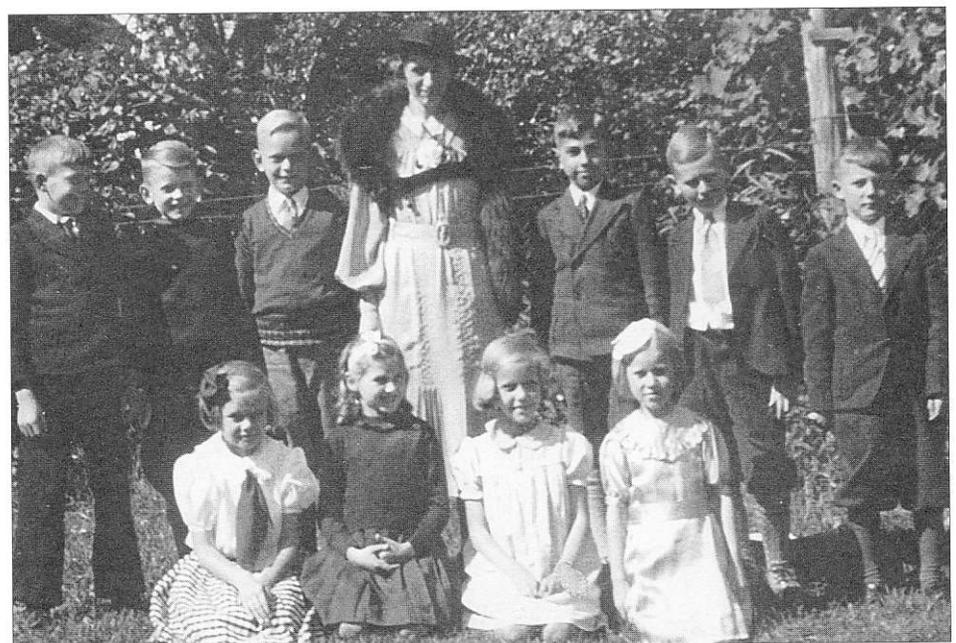
In reminiscing about those early days, Sara Isaak recalls that the Mennonite Brethren Sunday School in Kitchener, and the United Mennonite Sunday School in Waterloo, did many things together and met frequently.

After celebrating the first Christmas festivities in Canada together in 1924 under the joint leadership of Rev. Jacob H. Janzen and Rev. Jacob P. Friesen, the respective Sunday Schools continued a mutual exchange visit before Christmas to view each other's final rehearsals. Rev. Jacob H. and Mrs. Janzen were both keenly interested in the work of the Sunday School, and it is perhaps not surprising that the first initiative to organize a convention for Sunday School teachers came from them. Bringing Sunday School teachers together for instruction and mutual edification became an annual affair.

A few years later, in the fall of 1933, the Mennonite Brethren Church in Kitchener hosted a Sunday School teachers' convention in connection with a short-term Bible course conducted by Rev. Abram H. Unruh, Principal of the Bible School in Winkler, Manitoba. The convention was again a joint effort with the United Mennonite Church of Waterloo. As Sara Isaak relates, the convention was chaired by Henry J. Janzen of the United Mennonite Church of Waterloo,

while the inevitable *Musterlektionen* (model lessons) were provided by Sara Isaak and Manya (Maria) Fehderau. In the wake of the model lessons followed the Sunday worship service, with a sermon preached by the Rev. Jacob H. Janzen of the U.M. Church of Waterloo. Then, at long last, came the inevitable dissection and discussion of the model lessons. Needless to say, the teachers survived the criticism.

If the morning could boast a full program, the afternoon was no less crowded. Lectures were presented on "The Child," by J. H. Janzen and "The Good Sunday School Teacher" by A. H. Unruh. Five tables were set up in the hall of the third floor at 40 King St. East in order to serve a meal to the 34 teachers in attendance. Supper being completed, there followed a business meeting, when suddenly the electric power failed, plunging the hall into darkness. The search for candles in drug stores along King Street netted some positive results. A petroleum lamp was also obtained from a nearby German Club, but electricity was not restored that evening, and the



Miss Marie Fehderau's Sunday School class of 1938. Back Row: Ernie Dick, Ed Boldt, Ed Reimer, Marie (Manya) Fehderau, Art Kutz, Jake Dyck, Jake Reimer Jr. Front row: Nellie Warkentin (Mathies), _____, Esther Reidiger, Frieda Radtke. (photo courtesy of Ed Boldt)



A Bible Class of 1935. Back row: Olga Enns, Wally Isaac, Susa Boldt, Johanna Dick, Helen Penner. Front row: Hedwig Dick, Areka Penner, Agatha Barkman, Marg Friesen. (photo from Olga Enns' album)

convention guests had to grope their way down two flights of steep stairs, somewhat in the style of a torchlight procession. To everyone's relief, no one left with a broken collarbone, however a local resident catapulted down part of the stairway somewhat faster than expected!

The Bible course taught by A. H. Unruh concluded the following week. When it was over, the participants who worked at Forsythe's presented Unruh with a shirt and two ties. The recipient was pleasantly surprised with this token of appreciation. However, the shirt was not the only thing that he took back to Winkler as three of the Sunday School teachers from Kitchener, Abram Dick, Anna Teichroeb and Tina Rempel, followed him. Those who stayed behind gallantly stepped into the breach to close ranks for those who were privileged to enrich their lives, so that they in turn would be enabled to enrich the church upon their return (Sara Isaak letter, Nov. 15, 1933).

Concerning the five-month term that the Kitchenerites spent in Winkler, Anna Dick, wife of Abram J., said, "That was during the depression. My husband was unemployed at the time, but I was able to obtain domestic work

for five dollars a week plus board and room. We could not both afford to go to Winkler, therefore I encouraged my husband to go, knowing how much he craved this opportunity. From Winkler he wrote in glowing terms, commending the spiritual tone of the Bible School. He was so impressed by what he saw and heard that he dubbed Winkler the 'capital' of Canada." Of his work in Sunday School, Anna Dick commented, "He gave it all he had."

Sara Isaak summed up her evaluation of Dick's service in Sunday School thus: "Not only did he do much to establish the Sunday School as a viable organism of the church, but he also nurtured it by always striving to provide manuals and other aids for the teachers that would improve the effectiveness of their instruction, as well as enable them to proceed independently in their lesson preparation and presentation. The enthusiasm he exuded in program preparation and execution, as well as his work with the Sunday School choir, was recognized and appreciated by colleagues beyond his own congregation." (Interview with Sara Isaak, 1983)

At this point it might be of interest to take note of a decision made at a

business meeting on October 8, 1934 of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Kitchener, to send two cars to the Sunday School convention in Leamington—this instead of one car as in 1930.

It was not only the Sunday School that was blessed with dedicated workers. Equally devoted in the service of God and mankind were those in charge of the music program of the church. Singing in four-part harmony was a tradition among Mennonites from Russia. The Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church was fortunate to have within its ranks Gerhard J. Enns, a former choir conductor from Halbstadt. At an early date in the life of the new congregation, Enns was asked to start a choir. Conducting a choir in those days was not easy. Frequently, Enns worked night-shift which prevented him from being present at rehearsals. Furthermore, during the time when the hall was not accessible during the week, choir practices had to be conducted in homes. In spite of these handicaps, the choir carried on and by 1928 when Enns laid down the baton, it had a membership of 18 persons, 6 male and 12 female voices.

During the course of the next few years, the size of the choir increased to 26 and it began to sing at worship services every Sunday morning instead of every second Sunday. The choir sang with enthusiasm and for the sheer love of singing. Subsequent conductors were Henry Wiebe who took over in 1928 and Nicolas J. Fehderau in 1931. At that time Fehderau selected songs from the *Liederperlen*, a book brought from Russia. In this book the melodies were notated in numbers, written on four lines corresponding to the voices required in four-part harmony. The numbers ranged from 1-7, corresponding to the sol-fa syllables. The *Liederperlen* consisted of three volumes,

~ Continued from page 7 ~

containing an excellent repertoire of German songs. As the choir increased in size, there was a shortage of copies and Fehderau began to duplicate music using a hectograph and later a Gestetner. During the 28 years he served as conductor, he duplicated a total of 1,649 songs. He also switched from numbers to notes during that time. (N. J. Fehderau, unpublished essay, p. 6) Under the direction of N. J. Fehderau, the choir presented many concerts and cantatas which were always well received.

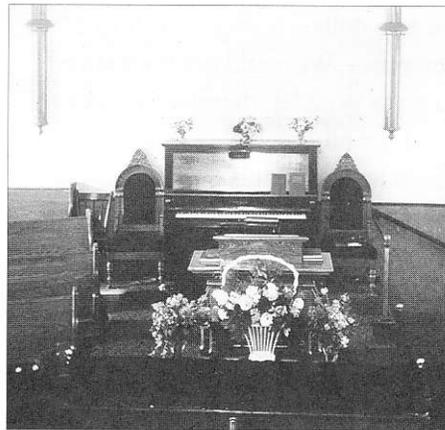
The first of a number of women's organizations, the *Tabea Verein*, was begun in 1930 at the home of Mrs. Elisabeth (Peter) Isaac. Three other women, Mrs. Liese (John) Dyck and her mother, Mrs. Maria (Jacob) Fehderau, and Mrs. Anna (Peter) Hildebrandt collaborated with Elisabeth Isaac to form a *verein*, a club. They trusted the Lord to guide them, and thus began a program that has continued to function to the present day.

When the first women began to meet, they spent their time at various crafts that were raffled from time to time. Growth in numbers was slow at first, but within a year a sizeable group was gathering. Funds for major projects were not available, so the women had to be inventive. They brought little bits of cotton print to the meetings and stitched them into quilt tops and pieces of woollen material from the mills at Hespeler found their way into comforters. These blankets were distributed to needy families. Sometimes for a change of pace, the women enjoyed a cup of coffee with each other when they met. Thus, by giving of their time and what means they had, the women felt richly blessed and rewarded.

From its inception, the M.B. Church of Kitchener was concerned about its youth. The church council was given

the task of drawing up a program that would arouse in the young an interest in the church, in their fellow human beings, but first and foremost in the Lord Jesus Christ. The most commonly used channel to attain such goals appears to have been the generally popular *Jugendverein* (Christian Endeavor).

This organization lent itself admirably for youth participation in dramatic and musical presentations, which offered the younger generation an opportunity and an outlet for self-expression and the much-needed possibility of service. Church rec-



The interior of the Kitchener MB Church at 53 Church Street on June 15, 1946. (photo from Olga Enns' album)

ords make sporadic reference to such church-related service. For example, the church council minutes of February 16, 1931 note that, "The young people of Kitchener are invited to New Hamburg to present the *Deklamatorium: die Endzeit* (Declamation: End Times)." In 1934, Rev. Isaac T. Ewert, and Abram J. Dick were elected as head and deputy of Christian Endeavor respectively.

If the leaders of the church were concerned about drawing the young people into avenues of Christian service, they were also keeping their eyes open for young men in the church who demonstrated preaching potential.

A lay ministry was still the accepted norm in the Mennonite Church, although there were those, like Jacob Friesen, and Jacob Reimer, who had studied at the theological seminary in Hamburg, Germany. Salaried ministers among the Mennonites from Russia were at that time unheard of. Ministers were expected to provide for their own livelihood, besides preaching the Word on Sundays.

H. H. Janzen, who joined the Mennonite Brethren on August 21, 1926, became such a new recruit. Jacob P. Friesen, minister in charge of the M. B. Church in Kitchener, fondly referred to Janzen as his "spiritual son." After a day's work at Fischmann's Spring Company, relates Janzen's widow, he frequently knocked at the door of his spiritual mentor to discuss pressing problems in the church, or to receive clarification in extracting the unsearchable riches of the Bible. In Russia, Janzen had attended *Zentral-schule* in Ohrloff and spent a year at the *Kommerzschule* in Halbstadt, but he lacked formal theological studies. A touching anecdote regarding these two stalwarts of the faith, is the story of Janzen kneeling at the bedside of his dying mentor, receiving his blessing by the laying on of hands.

Since Janzen had arrived as a penniless immigrant in 1925, he was unable to obtain formal Bible training in Canada, and so he began a very intensive private study of the Scriptures. His textbook was the Bible, his study was his workplace at the Fischmann Spring Co. where he stuffed mattresses for eight years. The Bible was always accessible on a nearby windowsill, and whenever there happened to be a lull in the routine of labour, the time was gainfully utilized. Janzen also garnered much biblical knowledge from Jacob W. Reimer, especially from Reimer's expository delineations on the Book of Revelation.

As one after another the older ministers in the church vacated their posts, younger men stepped into the breach. Janzen had already begun his ministry in 1926 as Sunday School Superintendent. By 1927 the church called him to preach and ordained him on April 7, 1929 ("Seine Lebensgeschichte" *Mennonitische Rundschau*, Feb. 2, 1977, p. 10).

A few months prior to Janzen's ordination, the Isaac T. Ewert family arrived from Waldheim, Molotschna. This was another family destined to leave its mark on the M. B. Church of Ontario. Ewert had been called to the ministry by the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia. For some years he served the affiliated stations of Hespeler and New Hamburg on alternate Sundays. On April 16, 1933, he was ordained by Rev. Hermann Konrad of Kitchener and Rev. Abram H. Unruh of Winkler, Manitoba.

The migration movement of Mennonites from Russia to Canada reached its climax in 1924-26, although a trickle of immigrants continued to arrive through 1927-28. A few were fortunately enough to still emigrate in 1930. Dietrich J. Klassen and family were among those who arrived in Kitchener on April 5, 1930. After a period of hard labour on the Clemmer farm north of Waterloo, they moved to Waterloo and Dietrich Klassen also became actively engaged in the life of the local Mennonite Brethren congregation. The visitation program begun by Klassen and Deacon John Dick was extended as Klassen preached in the affiliated stations as an itinerant speaker. D. J. Klassen was ordained to the ministry on April 5, 1931.

A year later, in January 1932, poor health compelled Jacob Friesen to lay down the responsibilities of his office and the church in Kitchener chose H. H. Janzen to succeed Friesen. At

this point in time, Janzen believed that the various M. B. churches of Ontario were ready to unite into a corporate body and he requested the Kitchener church to consider the desirability of forming a provincial conference of the M.B. churches for the purpose of inter-congregational interaction. The church in Kitchener accepted the idea, and delegated Janzen and Henry Penner to act on its behalf.

Negotiations proceeded favourably and by July Janzen reported that the conference would be called "The Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches" and that application had been made for government recognition. On August 28, 1932, at another congregational business meeting, H. H. Janzen reported that the creation of the Ontario Conference of M. B. Churches had been completed. By the granting of Letters Patent on July 8, 1932, this new organization was established. The five brethren who applied for the Letters Patent were: H. H. Janzen, H. Penner, G. J. Enns of Kitchener, A. Teichroeb of New Hamburg and H. Wiens of Hespeler. In view of the fact that membership in the conference was not automatic, the congregation in Kitchener decided to join the "Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches" with all its baptized members and that henceforth it would be known as *Kitchener Mennoniten Brudergemeinde* (Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church). At this time the membership of the Kitchener church stood at 144. The brethren H. H. Janzen, H. Penner, G. J. Enns, A. Teichroeb, and H. Wiens acted as directors on behalf of the conference until such time as election of officers could take place at the next general assembly of the Ontario M. B. churches.

H. H. Janzen was elected the first moderator of the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Conference. In this capacity he was expected to travel frequently

to be in contact with and to visit the various member churches in the province. In order to finance these travel needs, and assist in defraying other expenses arising from conference-related work, the church in Kitchener decided to raise the familiar "head tax" which it had imposed upon its members from the beginning, from 25 cents to 30 cents per member.

Janzen was still working at Fischmann's Spring Co., stuffing mattresses, since the financial support he received from the church was partial and sporadic, not enough to support his growing family. His workload in the congregation and conference increased considerably, and when the monthly stipend that the Kitchener church paid him was raised to \$70, it enabled him to lay down his factory job and to devote himself entirely to his ministerial duties. According to his wife, Katharina, Janzen permanently put aside his job in the mattress factory in 1934 because there was much work to be done for the conference. He carried on a copious correspondence and in his spare time he carried on his private study of the scriptures, staying up many a late hour to this end. She says, "We two were happy in our work. We were conscious of living in a free country, where we were at liberty to live according to our faith" (*Rundschau*, Feb. 16, 1977, p. 10).

Katharina Janzen also speaks about her husband's ministry to Russians living in various parts of Canada and the United States. She says, "While teaching among the Russians, my husband had to buy many a teaching aid which we really could not afford, but he needed the books. But the Lord supported us, partially by the congregation, partially by individual church members and partially by means of the itinerant ministry."

~ Continued from page 9 ~

In the spring of 1934, great sorrow fell upon the M. B. congregation in Kitchener. On March 20, the Lord called home his servant, Jacob P. Friesen, organizer and first minister of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Kitchener. This was the man whom H. H. Janzen regarded as his spiritual father, and whom Dietrich Klassen referred to as “*ein sehr lieber mensch,*” (a very dear person). Funeral services for Rev. Jacob Friesen were held in the Bethany Church on Lancaster Street.

Not only did the Lord call away his servants, he also provided. Recorded in the minutes of a congregational business meeting on August 6, 1934 we find: “The church is happy to welcome Brother Bernhard Boldt, a teacher.” The Boldt family came to Ontario from rural Manitoba. As a minister of the gospel and teacher, B. B. Boldt was soon involved in the Lord’s vineyard. Shortly thereafter H. H. Janzen mentions him in an article to the *Rundschau*: “Again I am deeply involved in the work of our evening Bible School. I am working together with the dear brother B. B. Boldt, who came to us some time ago, I presume by the Lord’s leading, from Kronsgart, Manitoba. The Lord has sent us 44 students. For these people, eager to learn, we are very grateful. We are fully aware that for most of them it is a great achievement to devote their evenings to the school. May we be able to offer them something that will enrich their future lives.” (*Rundschau*, Feb. 23, 1977, p. 10)

An event of great rejoicing occurred in the history of the M. B. Church in Kitchener when it became possible to buy a church building in the fall of 1935. After having spent about nine years in makeshift surroundings, it was exciting news indeed when at a congregational meeting on July 7, 1935, the



Quilting in the basement of the church on Church Street, fall, 1947. (photo from Olga Enns' album)

church was informed of the impending sale of a small church building on 53 Church Street. A commission of five men: Johann G. Rempel, Gerhard Enns, Henry Penner, Jacob Bergen and John J. Rempel was elected to initiate negotiations for the purchase of the building.

A few months later, on October 6, the commission reported its findings. It had offered \$3,500 and at the same time asked for sufficient leverage to raise the offer to \$4,000, should this become imperative. Hesitancy and timidity cautioned to avoid haste. In view of the depressed economic conditions prevailing at the time, and because the congregation was composed of recent immigrants who but a few years ago had lost all their property in Russia, the warning to exercise extreme caution was not surprising.

The majority of church members, however, ardently desired a church building in which to worship. When a secret vote was taken as to whether or not the congregation was willing to pay \$4,000, the resulting decision must have been favourable for this was the price finally accepted by the owner. At a congregational business meeting on October 30, 1935, Johann G. Rempel moved that the trustees handling the transaction be empowered to negoti-

ate a loan from a certain Mr. Cleghorn for the sum of \$3,250. The motion was seconded by Jacob Kutz and passed by the congregation. Shortly thereafter the purchase was completed and the Mennonite Brethren of Kitchener had a home.

The move from 50 King Street East to 53 Church Street in late autumn of 1935 brought to a conclusion an important chapter in the formative period of the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church. From its inception it had served as the focal point for all Mennonite Brethren in Ontario, from Essex County in the south to Reesor in the north, dispatching speakers where required. A great stride forward in its development came with the formation of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in 1932. This brought autonomy to the various stations or churches throughout Ontario. Membership in the provincial corporate body was a matter left to the decision of each local congregation. However H. H. Janzen, who was so instrumental in the formation of the Ontario conference, was already looking to a much wider union with brethren of the faith on a national and international scale, namely the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren in North America.

Archives gets Amish *Martyrs Mirror*



This 1780 Martyrs Mirror was recently acquired by the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario was pleased to be able to purchase (on eBay) a 1780 *Martyrs Mirror* that belonged to Daniel Schrag, an Amish immigrant to Ontario. He was born in April, 1813, in Bavaria, and died in November 1891. His first wife was Elizabeth Güngerich (1825-1854). There were six children to this union. On June 24, 1849 he was ordained as a minister for the East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church. On June 3, 1855 he married Magdalena Steinman (October 1825-Sept. 8, 1878). Nine children were born to the couple.

This edition of the *Martyrs Mirror* was the only German-language edition published in Europe (at Pirmasens, Palatinate). Unlike the earlier (1748/49) Ephrata, Pennsylvania edition, the European edition included the Jan Luiken etchings.

Doors Open Waterloo Region

During Doors Open, buildings of architectural and/or historic significance – many of which are normally not open to the public – will open wide, including some commercial and public buildings, churches, heritage gardens and natural heritage sites.

This year Doors Open events will take place across the province, beginning in April and continuing into October. The 5th annual Doors Open Waterloo Region will take place on Saturday, September 15, 2007 with properties in all seven municipalities. Most sites are open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. A special theme for 2007 is Green Waterloo Region, and will feature buildings that highlight excellence in environmental sustainability. Admission is free.

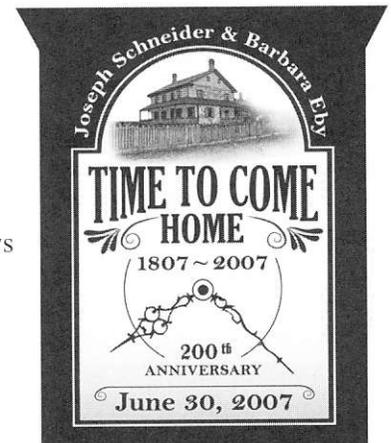
For more information, visit the Doors Open Ontario website at www.doorsopenontario.on.ca. Pick up your copy of the Doors Open Ontario program at museums and tourism offices throughout the Region and watch for the Doors Open Waterloo Region map & guide in July at Waterloo Region museums, libraries and tourism offices.

Joseph and Barbara Schneider Reunion

Since this year marks 200 years since Joseph and Barbara (Eby) Schneider came to the Waterloo area from Pennsylvania, some descendants are planning a reunion for Saturday, June 30, 2007. The morning events will be held at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener and will feature cemetery tours, the video "A Grand Decision" and speakers Sam Steiner, John D. Snyder and rch mills.

In the afternoon everyone is invited to participate in special celebrations at the Joseph Schneider Haus museum at 466 Queen St. in Kitchener where there will be special displays and a cake-cutting ceremony. A photo of all the Schneider descendants gathered that day will be taken and duplicated immediately so that copies will be available.

Pre-registration for the reunion is requested. A sandwich lunch will be available. For more information, visit the web site at www.timetocomehome.ca or contact Vern & Leone Sherk at (519) 893-3075.





Susan Burke, curator of the Schneider Haus Museum, talked about the history of crokinole at the fall meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario on November 18, 2006. This crokinole board is over 100 years old. The afternoon also included a viewing of, "Crokinole: The Movie" made by local film-makers Jonathan and Joshua Steckley.

Conference on Family and Sexuality in Mennonite History

Instead of planning a separate fall meeting for the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, members are encouraged to participate in the Family & Sexuality in Mennonite History: An academic and community education conference to be held at Conrad Grebel University College on Friday, October 12 and Saturday, October 13, 2007. The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario is one of the sponsors for this event. For more information, visit <http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/academic/iams/papers.shtml>.

You will have the opportunity to hear a variety of speakers talk about topics such as family relations within particular Mennonite immigrant or denominational groups; meanings of childhood and adolescence; widows and widowers; family size; domestic violence; gender in Mennonite families; and comparative historical studies of family life.

New Books

Jantzen, Erica. *Sheer Survival: From Brazil to Kyrgyzstan*. Privately published, 2007, 321 pages. Available at jantzen@golden.net.

Born in Brazil, Jantzen traces her personal story including her childhood in wartime Germany and her life in Canada after World War II. Through hard work and perseverance, Jantzen was able to gain a teaching degree and served in many locations. She has travelled to many places, including Kyrgyzstan where her parents originated.

Kasdorf, Hans. *Design of my Journey*. Kindred Productions, 2006, 360 pages.

This autobiography describes Kasdorf's journey from Russia to Brazil to North America.

Kroeger, Arthur. *Hard Passage: A Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada*. University of Alberta Press, 2007.

This is a story of the Kroeger family's struggles in Ukraine and their resettlement in Canada, described within the context of the politics of the time. Kroeger spoke at a book launch at Conrad Grebel on May 15.

Lemke, Helmut. *Crossing Frontiers*. Self-published, 2006, German edition, 2004, 186 pages. Available at hblemke@shaw.ca.

Lemke describes growing up Mennonite in Nazi Germany, serving in the German army and searching for his mother in Russian-occupied Germany.

Mannhardt, H. G., translated by Victor G. Doerksen. *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origins and History from 1569-1919*. Pandora Press, 2007, 286 pages.

This is a new English translation of a book originally published in the German in 1919. This is a history of the Mennonite years in Prussia and bridges the gap from the 16th century Anabaptists to the Mennonite communities in Russia.

Rempel, Alexander and Amalie Enns. *Hope is Our Deliverance*. Privately published, 2005, 321 pages. Available at the Bookshop at Pandora Press.

Alexander Rempel promised his father, Jakob A. Rempel that the story of his imprisonment and torture by Stalin's Russia in the 1930s would not be forgotten. The book chronicles the life of this Mennonite leader and his family.

Schreiber, Ilse, translated by Sarah Dyck. *Many are the Voices of Home*. Privately published, 2006, 360 pages. Available at 514-141 Father David Bauer Dr., Waterloo, ON, N2L 6N9.

This historical novel, set in rural Saskatchewan in the 1930s, describes the struggles of Mennonite refugees from Russia. The story was originally published in German in 1949.