

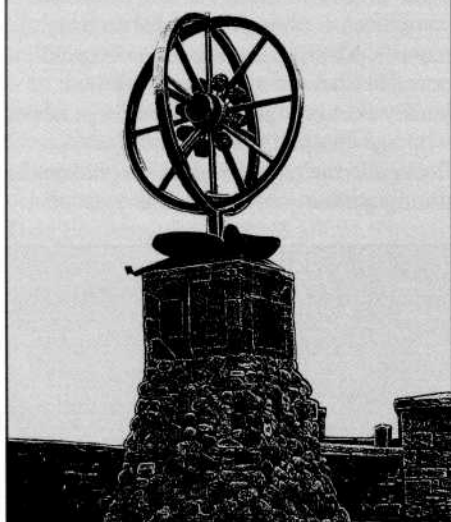
# Ontario Mennonite History

THE  
NEWSLETTER  
OF THE  
MENNONITE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

VOLUME XIV  
NUMBER 1

MARCH 1996

ISSN 1192-5515



## Writing about the "Russian Mennonites": Concerning Peoples, Places and Identities in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union

by JAMES URRY



*The Zaporozhian Sich in the middle of the 18th century (a restored drawing by V. O. Lenchenko).*

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the establishment of new states and the assertion of new identities in the old USSR, the time is perhaps ripe for a reconsideration of the semantics of places, peoples and identities in areas once settled by Mennonites. There is a difference between what might appear correct or expedient in the present volatile atmosphere, and what is appropriate in terms of the historical record. In writing about human subjects in history we are not dealing with natural, but with cultural phenomena, with things open to human manipulation, shifting, plastic and unstable. Names change, identities alter, territories shift, states rise and fall. The coherence we give to things in history is one imposed by our own system of meanings and is as fragile as any other aspect of our culture.

### Russia, New Russia or Ukraine?

Mennonites initially settled in the Russian Empire from the end of the eighteenth century on lands which recently had been incorporated into the expanding Imperial Russian state.<sup>1</sup> These were inhabited by very mixed ethnic populations who for centuries had been associated in one way or another with a number of weakly organised agrarian states. Because of the weakness of these states, and the open nature of the steppe lands they inhabited, many of these people

had maintained a high degree of local independence. These included the descendants of peoples speaking mostly Eastern Slav languages and dialects which later developed into Russian and Ukrainian languages, who had escaped beyond the control of their masters and state officials to settle in frontier, buffer zones. Some of these groups underwent a process of ethnogenesis establishing new cultural identities and social forms. By the eighteenth century these included the Zaporozhian Cossacks with their headquarters in what was to become the Mennonite settlement of Khortitsa, and Tatar tribes inhabiting the open steppe later settled by the Molochnaia Mennonites.<sup>2</sup> Tatars also inhabited the Crimea and small, multi-ethnic trading communities existed in coastal areas. Pastoralism, small-scale cultivation, trading, raiding and slaving, sometimes as mercenaries for the various bordering states, were the main economic activities of the inhabitants of this region before Russian conquest and control at the end of the eighteenth century. These activities over time encouraged considerable mobility, the creation of new and the dissolution of old ethnic identities.

Before the end of the eighteenth century the political situation in this area was complex and fluid. To the south, along the Black Sea littoral, were lands subject to Tatar Khans, mainly based in the Crimea, who were vassals of the

Turkish Ottoman rulers of Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> To the west, the Polish-Lithuanian Republic in the latter quarter of the eighteenth century had been divided between the Hohenzollern Prussia, Hapsburg Austria and Imperial Russia.<sup>4</sup> To the north and east the lands were part of the Russian state originally based on Muscovy, but from the time of Peter the Great its capital was St Petersburg on the Baltic although by this time they also had secured in the south a military foothold on the Sea of Azov and naval access to the Black Sea. It was Russia, as an expanding, imperial state which during the eighteenth century was the major political power in this region.

Since the end of the seventeenth century Russia had begun a southward and westward expansion, incorporating areas and states directly or indirectly into its Empire. Orthodox, Ukrainian-speaking nobles had broken away from the Catholic Polish-Lithuanian Republic in the 1650s and formed a semi-autonomous Hetmanate which recognized the suzerainty of the Russian Tsar.<sup>5</sup> The leaders of the Hetmanate controlled mainly the northern parts of the right (or western) bank of the Dnieper River and formed alliances not only with Russia, but also with the more independent Cossack hordes to the west and south. These hordes at various times were also aligned with Russia but were not averse to serving Tatar Khans if it were to their advantage.

This area was known as *okraina*, meaning border-region, from which is derived the term Ukraine. As a political-territorial term associated with a nation-state, however, the name Ukraine, and the term for its inhabitants, Ukrainian, was widely adopted only during the development of modern nationalist ideologies, predominantly among educated, urban elites, centered on Kiev, during the nineteenth century. Mennonites were settled mainly on the left (or eastern) bank of the Dnieper, on open steppe land in an area largely outside state control until the region was incorporated into the Russian Empire towards the end of the eighteenth century.

It is important to realise that the Russian Empire was not the Empire of

Russia or Russians, but the Empire of All-the-Russias, and its rulers were not Russian Tsars (or Tsarinas), but Tsars or Emperors of All-the-Russias. In the eighteenth century Imperial Russia was conceived of as including far more than the lands and peoples of Great Russia and, in official ideology, included all the lands and descendants of the ancient states of Rus', including Little Russia and White Russia. Imperialist expansion, mainly during the eighteenth century, incorporated Baltic lands with their very mixed, non-Slavic speaking peoples and other non-Slavs living to the south and the east of Great Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The southern steppe lands were to be a "new" Russia and hence South or Southern Russia, as it was occasionally referred to, was more officially known as New Russia, indicating its late incorporation into the Empire as part of All-the-Russias. This term, New Russia, was used throughout the later Tsarist period to refer to the provinces of Kherson, Ekaterinoslav, Taurida and eventually parts of Bessarabia. Situated mainly on the eastern bank of the Dnieper New Russia was viewed, administratively and politically, quite differently from the provinces situated on the right bank. The latter provinces, once part of the Hetmanate, were referred to collectively as Little Russia and were viewed as part of the ancient lands of Rus'. Little Russia was gradually absorbed into the Russian Empire from the middle of the eighteenth century, divided in provinces, and any reference to its separate autonomy dissolved in the 1830s.<sup>7</sup>

Both the right and left banks of the Dnieper, however, contained large populations of agrarian peasants. Those who possessed an identity beyond a sense of being Orthodox or belonging to a localised community, considered themselves Little Russians, different from Great Russians in language and other aspects of culture. They spoke dialects which today are identified with a separate language, Ukrainian. Ukrainian is an Eastern Slav language closely related to Russian. Some modern historians, following a trend begun by Ukrainian nationalists in the nineteenth century,

avoid the use of the term Little Russia(n) in references to territory, people and language and view the term as derogatory. This is part of a nationalist agenda and runs contrary to the historical use of the term. Not only were people, language and territory referred to as Little Russian, but by the nineteenth and into the twentieth century peasants used the term to refer to themselves, unaware of the negative connotations ascribed to it by educated, predominantly urban Ukrainian nationalists.<sup>8</sup> Use of the term Little Russia(n) is thus appropriate in reference to populations in the nineteenth century and to certain classifications of territory. The question of dialect/language is more complex but Ukrainian is the more correct term to use to refer to language as long as it is also recognised that the language contained considerable regional dialect variation and in the eastern provinces was mixed with Russian speech patterns and loan words from Russian and other languages.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of identity, Little Russian peasants were highly localised and culturally diverse. Some peasants on the right bank, closer to Polish influence were Catholic-Orthodox or Uniates (ie. followers of Catholicism but practising the Orthodox rather than the Latin rite). But nearly all peasants in New Russia were Orthodox. It is the existence of these Orthodox, Little Russian, Ukrainian-speaking peasants in the area Mennonites settled, more perhaps than any claim to ancient state territories, that has given rise to assertions that the lands were Ukrainian at the time of Mennonite settlement.

Many Ukrainian historians insist on referring to the area of New Russia as South or Southern Ukraine. Historically, however, it should be realised that this is incorrect. The area was sparsely populated for much of the eighteenth century and, following Russian conquest, many of its inhabitants were removed and relocated sometimes outside the area for security reasons. Massive immigration occurred once Russian control was established; landowners brought in their serfs, peasants who had escaped from central Russia flocked to the region and state-sponsored immigration established settlements of

*Ontario Mennonite History* is published semi-annually by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6, and distributed to all members of the Society. It is distributed free of charge to public libraries and school libraries in Ontario, upon request.

**Editor:** Reg Good

**Editorial Committee:** Linda Huebert Hecht, Lorraine Roth, Herbert Enns

Financial assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture is gratefully acknowledged.

Inquiries, articles, book notices or news items should be directed to the Editor, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario c/o Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6 TEL. (519) 885-0220, FAX (519) 885-0014

state peasants, foreign colonists, such as Mennonites and even non-Orthodox Russian sectarians. Although by the end of the nineteenth century the population of New Russia was predominantly Little Russian, it was more diverse ethnically than the right bank. The population of Taurida Province was especially diverse and except for a large scale emigration to Turkey in the mid-nineteenth century, would have contained a majority of Tatars. It should be recognised moreover, that many Little Russians were also descendants of immigrants to the area. New Russia was potentially an ethnic melting pot had not government policies and economic backwardness tended to reinforce, rather than to dissolve, ethnic differences for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Basically, therefore, it is incorrect to refer to the steppe lands settled by Mennonites from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, and in which a majority of Mennonites lived until 1917, as Ukraine or southern Ukraine either in terms of history, politics or as a reflection of its indigenous population. It is perverse to believe in sleeping nations or even suppressed nations as if they are natural phenomena and it is racist to claim that ethnic identities are fixed or that somehow genetically they constitute the basis for unrealised national consciousness. Therefore it is acceptable to refer to the area settled by Mennonites from the late eighteenth century onwards as Russia or as Russian, as part of the Russian Empire or Imperial Russia, as south or southern Russia. However, probably the most appropriate term to use is New Russia.

The issue of the transliteration of place names should also be mentioned. Where Mennonites adopted local place names it is probably best to adopt their Slavic forms transliterated according to a consistent system and not their Germanised forms. Thus it should be Molochna/Molochnaia not Molotschna and Khortitsa rather than Chortitza. There is an increasing tendency in Ukrainian works, especially those published in the West, to replace the Russian spelling of nineteenth and early twentieth century placenames with Ukrainian spellings. Thus Ekaterinoslav (named after a Russian Tsarina, Catherine the Great) becomes Katerynoslav. I do not think this is appropriate, especially when the names were only assigned after the area was incorporated into the Empire. It is quite appropriate, of course, to point out possible alternative spellings when introducing terms, including Germanised and Ukrainised forms.

After 1917 the situation is quite different. One can accept that the land was briefly, though more in name than in fact, part of a Ukrainian Republic. More importantly, it later became part of the Soviet Ukrainian Republic within the federation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Thus references to the area after 1917 should use the term Ukraine or Soviet Ukraine, at least up to the declaration of independence of the new Ukraine in 1991.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Russian Mennonites?***

Up to 1917 Mennonites were subjects, and to the degree that citizenship existed in Imperial Russia, citizens of Imperial Russia. Hence they were Russian Mennonites.

Due to the administratively integrative nature of the All-Russian state, official policies, at least until the middle of the nineteenth century, encouraged Mennonites to maintain and even to develop a distinctive identity as loyal subjects of Tsar and state.<sup>12</sup> Later, official support for more culturally assimilative Russification challenged, but did not halt, the continued development of a distinctive Mennonite identity. Before 1917 Mennonites could appeal to a number of identities beyond the basic religious identification with a particular congregational-community. They were initially identified by officialdom as "colonists" or "Mennonite colonists" but not as Germans.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, during the first half of the nineteenth century Mennonites were carefully distinguished in official discourse from other foreign colonists, including other colonists who originated from a variety of German states. Although the official colonist status of Mennonites ceased in the 1870s, they were still referred to as colonists, as Mennonites and increasingly as Russian-Mennonites and, due to their past administrative association with "German" colonists, as Russian-Germans, a category which also included a number of other subjects of the Tsar who spoke German, such as the Baltic Germans. With the rise of Great Russian nationalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Mennonites were subjected to chauvinistic attacks in the press and from certain areas of officialdom, as were most non-Great Russians and especially non-Slavs. But, mainly due to the adoption of more modern educational practices, Mennonites developed an appreciation of German culture, especially language and literature, and defended what they now considered their German inheritance. This they did while also developing an appreciation of

Russian culture and emphasising their loyalty to the Russian Tsar and state.

The term "Russian Mennonite" is thus appropriate for describing the distinctive Mennonite sense of being and belonging which emerged in Imperial Russia. More importantly it was, and for many still is, a term of self-reference used by Mennonites to express their identity and "origin". This is an indication of the strong links Mennonites established in Russia with the state, the country, with Russia's past and certain cultural traits they acquired through their long association its peoples and cultures.

The post 1917 situation is more complicated as Imperial Russia was replaced by the Soviet Union dominated by a very different state system centred on the dictatorship of a political party but claiming to recognise the right of its diverse population to assert autonomous identities.<sup>14</sup> In spite of the rapid development of Ukrainian national consciousness after 1917, especially in urban areas, Mennonites in Ukraine were separated from much of its influence.<sup>15</sup> This was due to the Soviet recognition of ethnic minorities as "national" groups with a right to their own language, culture and a degree of local self-administration within the communist system.<sup>16</sup> In Ukraine, but surprisingly not in Russia, Mennonites could no longer be identified officially as Mennonite as this involved a religious definition of personhood, unacceptable to an atheistic regime. While initially accepting the Mennonite claim to "Dutch" identity, a claim promoted by sections of the Mennonite elite during World War One as a defence against anti-German sentiment and government policy, within the Soviet system Mennonites came to be classified as "German". As such they were permitted to teach in German and were assigned German or Austrian communists to assist them integrate into the new social-political system. During the 1920s, Mennonite identity was obviously in flux as the Russia of the Imperial era no longer existed and most Mennonites experienced difficulties in identifying with the new nationalist and official communist identities. In many ways Mennonites remained centralists, looking to the Russian heartland for leadership and recognition of their own distinctive rights and identity.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1930s, as the autonomy of national groups, especially in the Soviet Ukraine, were suppressed and subjected to central party discipline from Moscow. A general Sovietisation of life began. This Sovietisation was achieved through propaganda, collectivization in rural areas,



urban industrialization, social engineering, education, deportation and terror. Mennonites became Soviet citizens, but not as Mennonite-Soviets but as German-Soviets.<sup>18</sup> The important thing here is less the German and more the Soviet. However, referring to Mennonites from the 1930s onwards as Soviet Mennonites, rather than as Russian Mennonites, certainly makes sense. Before, during and especially after World War II, a new Russification began, a process assisted by the massive movements of populations during the War and the need to reconstruct after the War. This was most marked in the growth of Russian as the primary language of not just Mennonites, but of many ethnic groups in the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

### Other places, other identities

So far I have assumed we are only talking about the southern areas of the old Imperial Empire, New Russia, later Ukraine and part of the Soviet Union. As the nineteenth century progressed Mennonites lived elsewhere in Russia and in the twentieth century many were banned to other areas of the Soviet Union. In Imperial Russia Mennonites settled on the Polish borderlands which had been incorporated into the Empire; on the Volga, in Russia proper (later for a time part of the Soviet Volga German Republic); in other provinces of Great Russia; in the Kuban and in Central Asia, and of course Siberia. During the Soviet period more were moved to Siberia and the Central Asian republics. Sometimes it is useful to identify the emergent new regional identities of Mennonites developed in these locations. The term Siberian Mennonites may be used in spite of their late migration beyond the Urals as an appropriate reflection of the strong sense of regional identity which developed in Siberia and in which Mennonites shared, even before 1917. In the Soviet period, identities shifted again, including the "Mennonite" sense of a religious peoplehood, often enhanced by closer association with Russians and others as well as religious links with Baptists.<sup>20</sup> There were also marked shifts in social identities as many Mennonites lost their earlier social standing in the larger society and became peasants or proletariats; others however managed to maintain good positions in society often through education, securing good jobs and denying their earlier social origins.

*James Urry is Reader in Anthropology at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.*

1. On the settlement and development of Mennonites in Imperial Russia see David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth: a Sketch of its Founding and Endurance 1789-1914," *MQR*, XLVII (1973), 259-308; XLVIII, (1974), 5-54 and James Urry, *None but Saints: the Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989).
2. Interestingly, these Cossacks have become a focus of recent assertions of Ukrainian nationalism in eastern Ukraine, see Frank Sysyn, "The Reemergence of the Ukrainian Nation and Cossack Mythology," *Social Research*, 58 (1991), 845-65.
3. Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978).
4. Norman Davies, *God's Playground: a History of Poland*, Volume 1: the Origins to 1795 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
5. For a general overview of Ukrainian history see Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: a history* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); on the question of identity see the survey by David Saunders, "What makes a Nation a Nation? Ukrainians since 1600," *Ethnic Studies*, 10 (1993), 101-24 and on Russian opposition to the changing nationalist situation in Ukraine in the latter half of the nineteenth, David Saunders, "Russia's Ukrainian Policy (1847-1905): a Demographic Approach," *European History Quarterly*, 25, (1995), 181-208.
6. On the semantics of political structures in Imperial Russia see Ladis K.D. Kristof, "The Russian Image of Russia: an Applied Study in Geopolitical Methodology" In Charles A. Fisher ed., *Essays in Political Geography* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 345-87.
7. Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate 1760s-1830s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
8. Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (London: Macmillan, 1985).
9. On languages see Bernard Comrie, *The Languages of the Soviet Union*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145-46; the language issue, like those of ethnicity and territory, is heavily politicized, see Roman Solchanyk, "Language Politics in Ukraine". In Isabelle T. Kreindler ed., *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages*. (Berlin: Mouton, 1985), 57-105.
10. On the development of New Russia and its peoples, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, see Leonard G. Friesen, "New Russia and the Fissuring of Rural society 1855-1907" (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Toronto, 1988).
11. Recent political events in Ukraine have revealed marked regional differences which, although accentuated by socio-economic changes in the Soviet period, have their foundations in much earlier periods. While the western parts of Ukraine continue to support Ukrainian nationalism, the eastern regions, with their larger Russian and Russian-speaking populations often associated with extensive industrial development, have increasingly asserted claims to separate identities and closer links with Russia. One group based in Odessa has even claimed that a "New Russia" consisting largely of the areas once so-named in pre-revolutionary times, should form a separate entity based upon its distinctive historical and cultural identity. See Roman Solchanyk, "The Politics of State Building: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 46 (1994), 47-68.
12. On this and related matters see James Urry, "The Russian Mennonites, Nationalism and the State 1789-1917". In Abe J. Dueck ed. *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), 21-670.
13. Modern German accounts tend to be rather uncritical in their identification of "Germans" in Russia; see for example the otherwise excellent account by Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich: zwei Jahrhunderte deutsch-russische Kulturgemeinschaft*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986).
14. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *The Great Challenge: Nationalities and the Bolshevik State, 1917-1930* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1991).
15. George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR 1923-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1992.
16. Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or how a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review*, 52(2), (1994), 414-52.

17. James Urry, "After the Rooster Crowed: Some Issues Concerning the Interpretation of Mennonite/Bolshevik Relations During the Early Soviet period." *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 13, (1995), 26-50.
18. Walter Sawatsky, "What makes Russian Mennonites Mennonite?" *MQR*, LIII (1973), 5-20; Walter Sawatsky, "From Russian to Soviet Mennonites, 1941-1988." In John Friesen ed., *Mennonites in Russia: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 299-337;
19. Walter Sawatsky, "From Russian to Soviet Mennonites" and Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, "Demographic Consequences of World War II on the Non-Russian Nationalities of the USSR." In Susan J. Linz ed., *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union* (Totawa: Rowan & Allanhead, 1985), 207-42.
20. Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1981).

## People and Projects

Gratuitous unbound copies of *Hannes Schneider and wife Catharine Haus Schneider: Their Descendants and Times, 1534-1939*, compiled by **Joseph Meyer Snyder**, are offered to public libraries and school libraries through the generosity of Miriam (Snyder) Sokvitne. The book, printed in 1937, is an indispensable source of primary information on Mennonites in the Waterloo Region. All the original photos and documents reproduced in the book are part of the Joseph Meyer Snyder Fonds at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel College. For further information contact the editor, Reg Good, at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6.

On 6 May 1996, the Center for Brethren in Christ Studies is sponsoring two presentations on Pietism by **Dale Brown**, Church of the Brethren theologian-historian. The event will be held at Messiah College. The first presentation at 3 P.M. is entitled "Piety, Pietism and Pedagogy." The second presentation at 7 P.M. is on "The Theology of Love in Pietism, Anabaptism, and the Brethren in Christ." Brown's revised edition of *Understanding Pietism* (reprinted by Evangel Press) will be released at this conference. For further information write to E. Morris Sider, The Center for Brethren in Christ Studies, Messiah College, Grantham, PA 17027.

On Saturday, June 15, the **descendants of the River Brethren** – the Brethren in Christ, the United Zion Church, and the Old Order River Brethren – will meet for fellowship, in similar fashion to an earlier meeting in 1993. The meeting is sponsored by the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. The program includes a tour in the afternoon of the historic sites of the three groups, followed by a

fellowship meal and evening program at the farm of Old Order River Brethren member Samuel Conley near Salunga, Pennsylvania. For more information write to the Brethren in Christ Historical Society, Messiah College, Grantham, PA 17027.

The **Mennonite Historical Society of Canada** board and executive met on Saturday, December 3, 1995, at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg for its annual meeting. The society discussed marketing and distribution of the third and final volume in the Mennonites in Canada history series, which deals with the period 1945-1970. It is to be released by the University of Toronto Press in Spring 1996. Pre-publication sales of volume 3, at a discounted rate of \$24.95, will be handled by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. After April 30, 1996, Mennonite Books will distribute volume 3 in Canada at the regular retail rate of \$29.95. Discussions are underway with a potential United States distributor. Plans are underway for Dr. T.D. Regehr, the author of volume 3 in the Mennonites in Canada history series, to tour Canada in Fall 1996, promoting the book. The author's tour will begin with a book-launching in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

A major North American Mennonite history conference, **"One People, Many Stories,"** is planned to celebrate the completion of the Mennonites in Canada history series and the United States Mennonite Experience in America history series. It will be held at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, British Columbia, in October 1997. The conference will focus on what is common as well as distinct between Mennonite experiences in Canada and the United States and examine possible integrative or collaborative ideas and agenda. Mennonite Historical Society

of Canada members on the planning committee are Roy Loewen and Reg Good (co-chair).

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada has created a **Central Registry** of microfilmed or copied Mennonite archival records in Eastern Europe and states of the former Soviet Union in order to facilitate communication between scholars and researchers so that the interests of the scholarly community as a whole can best be served. All individuals doing archival research on Russia Mennonites in Eastern Europe and states of the former Soviet Union are strongly encouraged to submit reports with as much detail as possible to Abe Dueck and Bert Friesen, Archives Committee, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5, who will send out an annual or semi-annual Newsletter which summarizes the information received.

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario has contracted **Lucille Marr**, assistant professor of history at Augustana University College in Camrose, Alberta, to research and write its history. Marr is a native of Ontario, of Brethren in Christ background, and received her Ph.D. from the University of Waterloo. Her research to date is in women's history and gender issues.

**Linda Huebert Hecht** and **Lucille Marr** co-compiled *Women's Concerns Report No. 124* (January-February 1996) on the "Quiet in the Land?" conference held at Millersville University on 8-11 June 1995. Contributors to that issue included Melanie Cameron, youth worker at Stirling Ave. Mennonite church in Kitchener, Ontario and Katie Funk Wiebe, professor emeritus of Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas.

# Reinterpreting The Old Mennonite/Rußländer Encounter in 1924

by Krista Taves



*Sixtieth anniversary re-enactment of the arrival of Rußländer in Waterloo, July 20, 1924. Gary Snider, centre, dressed in garb worn by his grandfather on this occasion.*

## Introduction

In 1923, the first of approximately 20,000 Mennonites left the newly formed Soviet Union for Canada. The initial arrivals made their way to Western Canada where they encountered, for the first time in 40 years, those Mennonites who had left Russia in the 1870s. Many of the new arrivals lived in the homes of, and worked for, 1870s Mennonites. This arrangement fulfilled the terms of the agreement made with the Government of Canada, that the immigrants would be agricultural labourers and that they would not require any public funds for their resettlement. The relations between between 1870s Mennonites, or Kanadier, and 1920s Mennonites, or Rußländer, proceeded within a stressed environment, mainly for historical reasons. The Kanadier had left Russia both in reaction to threats from the Czarist government to end their immunity from military service and because of growing land shortages within the Mennonite colonies. They also perceived a weakening of traditional values amongst their coreligionists, rooted in continued economic stratification and in the adoption of the Forestry Service in replacement of complete immunity from state service. For that and other reasons, the relationship between the Kanadier and Rußländer on the Canadian prairies was strained and has been documented as such.<sup>1</sup>

The strains between these two groups had historical circumstances; there was a previous relationship to contend with. The

situation differed considerably in Ontario. By 1924, the Kanadier had exhausted their financial ability to aid the new immigrants and invited the Old Mennonites of Ontario to begin assuming some of the responsibility for the continuing arrival of Rußländer immigrants. So, in 1924, Old Mennonites in the Waterloo region opened up their homes to the Rußländer. Many Rußländer remained with their hosts for months, possibly years, before acquiring their own homes and livelihoods. Unlike the Kanadier, though, the Old Mennonites had no prior relationship with the Rußländer. The two groups knew virtually nothing about the other before this time.

Mennonite historian Frank H. Epp has written one of the most comprehensive accounts of the relationship between the Rußländer and the Old Mennonites. He maintains that the relationship was cordial, not strained. Misunderstandings emerged for several reasons. Differences in dialect made communication difficult. The Rußländer had become very cosmopolitan, urban-oriented and modernized in the previous decades whereas the Old Mennonites continued to maintain a stricter separation from the world. These were fundamental differences and undoubtedly accounted for the fact that these two groups did not form any kind of formal congregational union. However, Epp is not satisfied to let such facts simply stand for themselves. He writes, "The question arises, why did the longevity of association in the families not lead to an

even minimal acceptance by the Rußländer of Swiss congregational life?"<sup>2</sup> suggesting some sort of lost opportunity in the encounter. Epp projects a very particular form of Mennonite identity in his history. He presents the Mennonites in Canada as a totality, as a single group, and discusses the differences between the two in a way that pronounces judgement, no matter how minimal. He fails to account for the strong influence of environment on issues of identity. He overemphasizes the influence of culture on identity.

I find this approach unsatisfactory. To pronounce judgement on the inability of the Rußländer to pursue active relations with their Ontario coreligionists is to lose sight of the significance of the encounter in the context of an ongoing debate about Mennonite identity.

I propose to reinterpret the Old Mennonite/Rußländer encounter to gain clarity about the extent to which Mennonite identity is rooted historical and the environmental contexts.

What issues were the Old Mennonites facing in the 1920s? What did they know of the Rußländer before their arrival? What was the state of the Russian Mennonite immigrants upon their arrival?

## The Old Mennonite World in 1924

At the turn of the century, Old Mennonites in North America found themselves influenced by a trend that was affecting all North American Protestant churches. Modernism, a term used to denote the liberalization of theology, had arisen in response the mammoth changes brought to North American society through rapid industrialization and urbanization. Generally speaking, modernism prompted a move away from a theology based on Biblical literalism, personal salvation and rewards in the afterlife, to an interpretation of the Bible as the Spirit, not necessarily the Word, of God, and a focus on betterment in this life through social reform. While the Old Mennonite churches never fully accepted modernism, they, like most Protestant denominations around the turn of the century, witnessed a steady exodus from their memberships and were looking for ways of countering the flow. It is important to emphasize the continental scope of this movement. Old Mennonites in Ontario maintained strong connections with their American coreligionists, and the



Canadian story cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the American dimension.

Frank H. Epp has deemed the years 1786 to 1920 an era of awakening, as North American Mennonites began implementing limited liberal structural changes. The "awakening" depended on the adoption of select evangelical Protestant models such as the Sunday School, promotion of missions, more organized works of charity, the establishment of church publications and Bible colleges, and revivalist meetings.<sup>3</sup> At a local level, the Sunday School issue proved the most explosive and precipitated a series of schisms as more conservative facets resisted change. Despite the tension, though, there was considerable optimism about the future of the Mennonite church.

Optimism was to see a severe decline after World War I. In the spirit of post-World War I cynicism, theologians faced a split along Fundamentalist/Modernist lines. In broad terms, Fundamentalism was a reactionary movement responding to a sense that Modernism had gone too far: there needed to be a return to more conservative values, often manifested in rampant reactionism and anti-intellectualism. What resulted was a vicious debate between Modern and Fundamentalist camps. For the most part, the North American Mennonite church placed itself in the Fundamentalist camp and the debate as it surfaced internally can be represented by one situation: the closing of Goshen College in Northern Indiana. By the 1920s, a growing number of Mennonites began to fear that the church was endangering its unique Anabaptist heritage by becoming too closely aligned with the outside world. Several prominent church leaders began actively searching through Mennonite institutions for instances of "modernism." What ensued was more than a decade of institutional house cleaning and a strong reassertion of traditionalism. Historian James C. Juhnke characterizes this period as a time when Old Mennonites

set limits to acceptable theological discourses as well as social behaviour in a process of defining and enforcing group boundaries.<sup>4</sup>



John Horsch.

One such church leader was John Horsch, an American Mennonite originally from Bavaria, who heavily involved himself in Mennonite educational institutions and spear-headed the return to more traditional values. In 1924, the very year Russian Mennonites came to Waterloo, Horsch published "The Mennonite Church and Modernism," in which he ruthlessly characterized modernism as anti-Christian and unapologetically identified institutions

and individuals deemed perpetrators of its tenets. In the Foreword he wrote:

The Mennonite Church of today finds itself face to face with the most insidious foe of the old Bible faith. Modernism is a perversion and denial of the fundamentals of the faith yet, but an obvious distortion of church history, it claims to be true Mennonitism, the faith of the Fathers. It is safe to say that never before in her history has the Church faced such a crisis.<sup>5</sup>

Horsch found the modernist threat he was looking for in Goshen College, which closed in 1923 as a result of charges of modernism, only to reopen one year later upon selection of a board deemed theologically suitable.

Church newspapers reverberated with the spirit of the times. It becomes evident even from cursory scans of the *Gospel Herald*, an American Mennonite weekly and the chief proponent of traditionalism, that the Modernist/Fundamentalist scare had penetrated through the entire membership. The paper was punctuated not only with diatribes against modernism written by leaders, but also with concerned letters received from the lay membership. The issue and responses to it fall into two categories: the theological and the socio-cultural. However, it would be a mistake to study one to the exclusion of the other because socio-cultural conformity became a strong indicator of fidelity to Anabaptist theological principles. In fact, Juhnke suggests that it was because Mennonites were beginning to leave things, like the plain dress, behind that it seemed to represent a lapse in faith. "The social and cultural implications of "liberalism" was

probably more important for most MC Mennonites in this context than were theological questions."<sup>6</sup>

A closer look at the *Gospel Herald* and the *Christian Monitor*, another Mennonite newspaper, seem to bear this out. The most significant articles are those that use a fundamentalist argument to explore practical applications, a reflection, again, of the preoccupation with the socio-cultural manifestation of religious belief so common in Old Mennonite issues of identity. Interestingly enough, the preferred topic of choice was women, or more specifically, women's attire. One is reminded of Francis Swyripa's book *Wedded to the Cause* where she explores the importance of women in reflecting Ukrainian Canadian group identity.<sup>7</sup> Much the same happened in the Mennonite community.<sup>8</sup> The image of their women is one that the Mennonite community perceived as having great significance for group unity. Consider, for instance, this article in the *Gospel Herald* in which W.O. Hobbs of Fort Wayne, Indiana, admonished women to wear the devotional covering as their duty as Christians and as a symbol of their rightful place in the church. By not doing so, they brought shame upon the entire community:

This may seem only for the sisters, but it becomes a duty of the church at large to see that these things are observed and followed as closely as possible. Fathers and husbands, it is your personal duty to encourage and strengthen the sisters, and to be in line with the Word.<sup>9</sup>

Not only men joined the crusade for female modesty. Women added their voices as well.

To carry this issue into a Canadian context, the head covering debate proved explosive in the Waterloo area. The First Mennonite Church in Kitchener experienced tension between Bishop Jones Snider and U.K. Weber. Snider was attempting to reinforce the traditional bishop-centred authority over its membership, a move that would increase the ability of church leadership to discipline wayward members (i.e. refusing them communion). The more progressive Weber refused to comply and allowed women not wearing the head covering to participate in communion. Snider revoked Weber's ministerial authority. On August 19, 1924, a scant two months after the Rußländer arrived in Waterloo, 133 First Mennonite members established Stirling Mennonite Church a few blocks away.<sup>10</sup>

How ironic that the arrival of Rußländer is rarely discussed in light of the changes happening in their host community. Those changes are aptly documented in Mennonite historical annals. However, the Old Mennonite character is interpreted as being strangely static and monolithic in comparison the Rußländer character, whereas it becomes clear from the above account that the Old Mennonites were dealing with issues of modernization as much as the Rußländer were. Therefore, ready characterizations of simple versus cosmopolitan, while not untrue, leave a shallow finish on a story that could prove to be quite complex.



*James Urry.*

the Commonwealth was and who the people leaving it were has been the subject of considerable revisionism beginning in the 1980s.

Revisionist works have served to temper the utopian aspects usually associated with the Commonwealth, largely a product of the immigrants themselves seeking to comprehend and make sense of their traumatic experiences.<sup>12</sup>

James Urry, a non-Mennonite historian, places the issue of class at the forefront of his studies. He reveals in depth the growing stratification of the Russian Mennonite community as it involved itself at increasing levels in the

capitalist market. The classes consisted of large land owners, colony farmers, industrialists, merchants and labourers. By 1914, 2.8% of the Mennonite population owned 34% of Mennonite capital. Colony farmers, representing 71.2% of the population, owned most of the remaining capital, leaving 25% of the Mennonite population with little or no capital.<sup>13</sup> Stratification lead to a diminished sense of community as people identified with their class more than with their people<sup>14</sup> and kinship ties diminished as wealth, status and occupation became the dominant factor in choosing suitable marriage partners.<sup>15</sup> Urry does not presume to explore the implications of wealth on Mennonite religious life, but questions the effect of "aggressive" involvement with the outside business world on the traditional emphasis of separation. He suggests that the events of 1917, in which young Mennonites were forced to serve in various wartime voluntary agencies, may have been the impetus needed to deal with issues of wealth, but the Red Civil War prevented the opportunity.<sup>16</sup>

Harry Loewen explores the development of an intelligentsia in the Russian Mennonite Community from 1880-1917. He presents the intelligentsia as a significant indicator that Russian Mennonites were becoming increasingly progressive and more in tune with the non-Mennonite world. A growing number of young Mennonites, mostly from the wealthier classes, were leaving home to

study abroad, and returned with ideas new to the community. These ideas found a good reception within the sectors most involved with the Russian business community. Loewen perceived in the new elite a growing political consciousness, a new openness to art and literature, and a softening of conservatism. He credits the intelligentsia with:

helping to transform Russian Mennonitism from a predominately agricultural-ethnico-religious group to a society more urban, industrial and secular in orientation.<sup>17</sup>

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the pre-war Russian and North American Mennonite communities. At the same time that Old Mennonites opened up their community to select modernist ideas, the Russian Mennonites became more open to outside influences. As Old Mennonites split on issues of separation, Russian Mennonites split into economic classes. After World War I, Old Mennonites began reasserting traditional values on a mass scale. Both Urry and Loewen perceive in 1917 the ability of the Russian Mennonite community to grapple with its disunity. However, this parallel can only be taken so far. Old Mennonites were, by far, more rural, conservative, isolationist, and communally-minded than their counterparts.

Studies such as Urry's and Loewen's have served to considerably alter how historians characterize the Russian Mennonites who arrived in Ontario in the 1920s. Henry Paetkau carries the implications of revisionist history into the Ontario context. Gone is the assumption of an agrarian-based people, or the assumption of social solidarity. Paetkau portrays a group that is not so much concerned with separation from Canadian society, as with actively proving their loyalty to Canada.<sup>18</sup> He challenges the presumption of a rural and agrarian "Weltanschauung" (world view) among the Russian Mennonites. They came to Canada knowing they were supposed to be farmers, but many were determined to settle in urban centres.<sup>19</sup> Paetkau questions assumptions of group solidarity by pointing out that they soon dispersed into approximately 16 groups throughout the province.<sup>20</sup> Paetkau leaves his reader with the impression that the new arrivals are predominantly urban-minded, more assimilationist than separatist, and in possession of a strong sense of individualism.

This brings to the forefront the obvious question: How did the Old Mennonites,

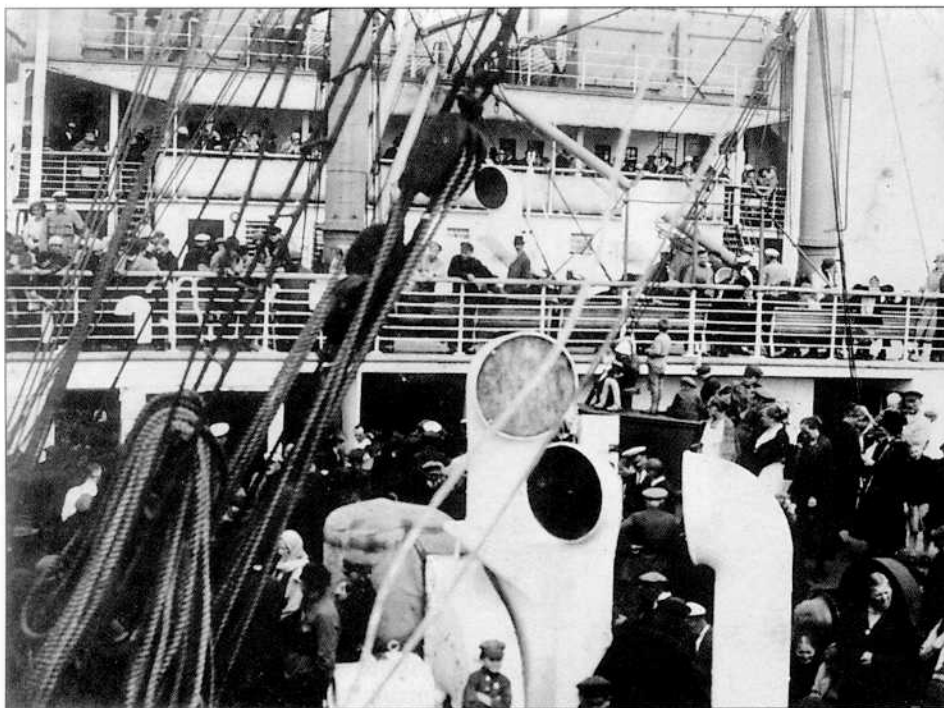
### **The Rußländer Mennonite World in 1924**

"Complex" is certainly a word that rests easily beside the history of the Russian Mennonites, largely because dramatic events within it are much more recent in memory, and it is easier to see in their history an important aspect of Mennonite self-identity: the act of suffering for one's faith. The Russian Mennonite Commonwealth was brutally destroyed during the Red Civil War, largely because Communist and Anarchist revolutionaries associated it with the bourgeois stronghold and demanded its liquidation. A victim mentality has since become a strong element of the Rußländer story, and even remains in some way, shape, or form, within modern historical accounts. Take, for example, a characterization offered by Henry Paetkau in his 1984 article, "Russian Mennonite Immigrants in the 1920s: A Reappraisal":

They were, by all indicators, a broken people, broken in body and spirit. A part of them reached back into the past ... Another part strained forward ... A part, perhaps, was broken and shattered beyond repair.<sup>11</sup>

That the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth was destroyed during the Civil War is an indisputable fact. Just what





*Russian Mennonite Refugees, 1924.*

who, although dealing with the same forces of modernization, maintained a simpler, more agrarian lifestyle, respond to their Russian Mennonite guests?

### Responses to Rußländer Immigration

In the July 1922 session of the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, David Toews, an 1870s Mennonite, outlined the details of a contract arranged with the Canadian government and the Soviet Union to bring Russian Mennonites to Canada. Frank H. Epp's account describes the delegates' response:

His (Toews') question was greeted by nervous silence. Three times he repeated his request and three times the delegates did not respond.<sup>21</sup>

The delegates Epp speaks of were Russian Mennonites who had immigrated to Canada in the 1870s. He explains their reluctance in a historical context. These Mennonites had left Russia partly in rejection of what they saw as the loss of fundamental Mennonite values in the Colonies, and they still looked back at Russia with bitterness. As well, they questioned the religious purity of their counterparts.<sup>22</sup>

Epp says little about the attitudes of Ontario Mennonites except to say that they also had their doubts. He does not elaborate any further.<sup>23</sup> Issues of the

*Gospel Herald* in the early 1920s reveal few opinion pieces about the Russian Mennonites. Information about them surfaces only in relief reports. However, *The Christian Monitor*, from January 1924 to July of that same year, presented a series of articles by Arthur Slagel entitled "Russia Today." Perhaps a cursory examination of these articles can help us gain a sense of Old Mennonite attitudes concerning their Russian coreligionists.

Slagel's series did not concern itself solely with the Russian Mennonites but rather with Russia as a whole, and the Russian Mennonites as they fit into it. Thus, while Slagel devoted two articles to Russian Mennonite institutions, he devoted a comparable amount of space discussing Russia's land problems, the state of the Ukrainian peasant, and examining the relationship of the Russian Mennonites with their neighbours. He bemoaned them the loss of control over the colonies, but responded that they must accept their new life and make the best of their situation. Slagel wrote with none of the dramatic flair so characteristic of Russian Mennonite accounts. He clearly believed the Russian Mennonites to be superior to the Russian peasants.<sup>24</sup> But, he explained matter-of-factly that the Russian Mennonites should have expected repercussions from the Russian peasants following the Bolshevik takeover because they had always been wealthier than their Russian neighbours.<sup>25</sup> Given North American Mennonite attitudes to wealth, there would no doubt have been some negative reaction to Slagel's "non-critical"

discussion of "Mennonite Land Barons." To his credit, Slagel did, in his April article, reassure his readership that the Russian Mennonites celebrated Easter as their American counterparts did, "with the emphasis on the spiritual significance of the Easter season."<sup>26</sup> But, that he would feel the need to relate such a minute detail is significant for an appreciation of just how little North American Mennonites knew of these people. In his article on schools, he included a telling statement that provides a fitting context for the remainder of the essay:

The clouds are slowly lifting from Russia ... in the meantime, our people over there need every encouragement we can give them, and above all, need our sympathy, and fairmindedness in looking at their problems and criticizing their actions of the past!<sup>27</sup>

Slagel's statement reflects an ambivalence towards the Russian Mennonites. On the one hand, they were viewed as "our people". On the other hand, something about them that did not fit well with the Old Mennonite perception of Mennonite identity.

### The Ontario Context

The primary sources are varied. Sources reflecting the Old Mennonite experience are limited to a series of interviews conducted by Richard Neff in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the Waterloo area. Russian Mennonite sources are even more limited. Two are published personal experiences, and one is a handwritten account.

It becomes very clear upon listening to Neff's interviews that the interviewees often had difficulty saying very much at all about their Russian guests. Responses are often punctuated with long silences, very carefully worded sentences, and vague generalities. One man, for instance, spoke briefly about the language issue and abruptly finished his answer with, "I think that's all. (long pause) I think that's all I have to say."<sup>28</sup> Some of their woodenness may have had to do with Neff's interview style. Questions concerning the Russian Mennonites were the first on his list, so there had been little opportunity to develop a good rapport between interviewer and interviewee. Nonetheless, considering the length of time some of these people sheltered their guests, one has to wonder that they would have so little to say. For instance, Neff asks one man if there were problems, and received the following answer:

There would have been some, I suppose. There were some things quite different. Our way and their way of life were very different. He was ready to adjust and she was too. So they got along quite well.<sup>29</sup>

Some respondents said that they had struck up and still maintained meaningful friendships with their guests,<sup>30</sup> but these responses were few and far between.

Women were quick to note the differences in dress. Several commented on the black bows worn by Russian Mennonite married women, and mentioned the stylish clothes preferred by both sexes.<sup>31</sup> Given the general emphasis on dress, and the specific tension over the head covering, that women in particular would mention dress comes as no surprise.

Language differences were not given much priority. Some volunteered humorous anecdotes of misunderstandings arising through language difficulties.<sup>32</sup> Although respondents affirmed some differences in dialect, most emphasized that because the Russian Mennonites could speak High German, communication was not much of a problem.<sup>33</sup>

Very little was said about religious differences. Several mentioned how well the Russian Mennonites sang. Some commented on their piety. Others related how they would drive their guests to church on Sunday afternoons. (Several Old Mennonite congregations provided their facilities for Sunday afternoon Russian Mennonite services.) But, all agreed that these Mennonites were Christians. "They were good Christian people. Very Christian people," said one man.<sup>34</sup>

Several respondents commented on the Russian Mennonite work ethic. Considering that most Old Mennonites farmed, and many hired the new arrivals as farm labourers, their concern over job performance reflected both the concerns of an employer and the high value placed in the community on a good work ethic. Questions concerning the adjustment of Russian Mennonites to their new environment often met with comments on the ability of their guests to work.<sup>35</sup>

The issues of class and wealth definitely make their appearance. One respondent simply said, "They were quite well-to-do at one time."<sup>36</sup> However, three of Neff's interviewees discussed in considerable detail differences in behaviour and work ethic based on class.

One interviewee related an incident



*Abner and Maryann (Randall) Good.*

involving the young man who stayed with her family:

We had one man at our place. He had never worked. He was one of those who drove around a horse and told people what to do. It was very hard for him to work but he did pretty good, though ...

(Neff: Was his lifestyle much different? His standard of living?)

I don't know ... He was one of the rich men. He had a tall hat and a long black coat. He brought those along. And there was a couple that I think ... they had worked for him. We had church one Sunday afternoon for all these people that had just come in and he sat beside them in church and when they stood up ... (long pause)<sup>37</sup>

She never finished her story, but one is left deeply curious. Why did the couple stand up? How did they greet the young man? Why does she begin but never complete the story?

Another woman described the couple who stayed with them. The wife came

from the "aristocratic" group and the husband did not. He worked well and fit in with the family. His wife was more difficult. She kept to herself, refused to learn Pennsylvania German or English, and clung to her culture. "She really felt herself more than we were." Later on, the interviewee and her husband sponsored the wife's brother and his spouse. "He was really not very nice. He didn't go out of his way to try at all to get on with us." This woman leaves the impression that there was a marked difference between the attitudes of the wealthy and not-so-wealthy Russian Mennonites. However, in the case of her guests, she presents the horrors they experienced in Russia as a partial explanation for their behaviour in Canada. Another interviewee, Abner Good, provides no such qualification. Of Neff's respondents, he directs the harshest criticism towards the once-wealthy Russian Mennonites, mainly in connection with their inability to work:

Those that came were in two classes especially. Those were the common class, and there was of course the higher class and some of them were in charge of the politics. They made their own laws and had things their own way and to their own advantage. But these were the upper classes, you see, and they were worth up to \$10 million and these were not very helpful because, as far as I saw, they were not able to work. They just didn't know how to work. They couldn't even pick up wood. They were rather severe in dealing with their employers. They would disrupt some of those people who were in the ordinary category ... But most of them that came were well able to take care of themselves because they got along in life and they got along well here. And many of them helped along in the farms where they were and soon were worth more than their employers. They just knew how to make money and get along and how to handle men and most of them were a good calibre and a good influence ...

The rich people were just as poor as everyone else when they came. They just had nothing. Everything was taken away from them.

(Neff: Everyone knew which class they belonged to.)

Oh yeah. I don't know any rich people that got along well. They just had to be kicked along because they couldn't handle it themselves. They had no experience.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the relative importance of the Russian Mennonite arrival can be measured against what Neff's interviewees did talk about. Issues such as Mennonite identity and separation from the world, in which plain dress and relationships with non-Mennonites figured prominently, formed crucial components of their discussion. Several respondents related in vast detail the various schisms which they had witnessed and perhaps taken part in. Women discussed their reasons for choosing whether or not to wear the head covering. Many spoke warmly of revivalist meetings. There was a general feeling that the bishop-centred system more effectively maintained unity within the community through strict moral regulation. Discussion concerning the Russian Mennonite arrival in 1924 formed a small part of these interviews, leaving the impression that their arrival does not bear the significance of a major event in Old Mennonite life. Rather, it marked a temporary break in day-to-day life that did not affect the major issues faced in the church, issues that were dividing Old Mennonites as Russian Mennonites moved into their homes. Discussion of Russian Mennonites reflects: firstly, how little they knew of their guests; and secondly, their preoccupation with a strong work ethic and separation from the world through simple living. Very few actually criticized the Russian Mennonites, but their statements belie the strong cultural differences between Old Mennonites and Russian Mennonites.

Russian Mennonite accounts are notably more dramatic. After all, these immigrants had left a destroyed world and were entering a new one about which they knew very little. Unfortunately, however, two of the sources, the articles, used in this article provide little insight

into the actual opinions held by the authors about their hosts. Of the three accounts that I found, two describe only what they saw and what they did, with little interpretation as to the significance of their stay. These accounts, written by people who arrived as children, were published by the Ontario Mennonite Historical society.

Annie Dick Konrad's account is overwhelmingly positive. She, along with her family, lived for six months with a progressive Mennonite family (denoted by the mention of their car). Konrad provides scant detail about their stay, but emphatically writes that "never once did we feel that we had overstayed our welcome. We were loved, fed, sheltered and clothed."<sup>39</sup> Henry B. Tiessen's story contains more detail. His family stayed with a slightly more conservative family (they used horses for transportation but had up-to-date farm implements). He describes their welcome into the hosts' home, outlines his family's participation in farmwork, and provides information about Old Mennonite church life and social life. Thiessen relates how Mr. Burkhardt, his host, explains to Tiessen's father the minute differences among Old Mennonites in Waterloo



Nicholas Fehderau, passport photo, 1924.

levels. This in itself is significant. These accounts present the Old Mennonites almost as quaint peoples and indicate a lack of understanding about the very different forms of identity maintenance practiced by the two groups.

The third Russian Mennonite source is a hand-written autobiographical account written in German. Its author, Nicholas J. Fehderau, twenty years old upon arrival, spent his first summer working for

an Old Mennonite farmer. His account is considerably different from the other two in the criticism it directs at his hosts. Fehderau's unpublished autobiography provides the most in-depth and critical account of an encounter with an Old Mennonite family. His emotions run loud and clear through his story as he recounts in detail the fears, hopes, disappointments, and joys experienced in his first months in Canada. Because of his sex and age, Fehderau, a young man of twenty, was highly valued as a labourer. Fehderau tells of being questioned about his work experience upon his arrival in Waterloo. Did he have experience with horses? Fehderau replies:

Oh yes. I have dealt in horses before. In Russia we had over 100 horses ... and every year we would sell a dozen or so to the Russian cavalry. When I was ten my father bought me a pony and I rode it every day. (translation)<sup>41</sup>

One has to wonder about the reaction of the farmer to Fehderau's past wealth and business dealings with the army, given the Old Mennonite ambivalence to wealth and strong assertions of pacifism. A farmer asks if he has ever milked a cow. Fehderau replies in the negative, but quickly states that he learned about it in school. What impression would this leave in an anti-intellectual environment?

Fehderau's opinion of his employer varies. While admitting that he was a hard worker and fairly just employer, Fehderau makes several comments about his character. Upon his arrival, Fehderau was greeted "distrustfully" and asked nothing about his trip or his first impressions of Canada. He was shown his room without comment and left there.<sup>42</sup>



Henry B. Tiessen (left) with a buddy, late 1920s.

concerning separation, differences such as dress, attitudes to government, modes of transportation, and the use of farm technology. Thiessen presents his hosts in positive, yet unemotional terms.<sup>40</sup> The neutral tone of these accounts speaks, I think, of the fact that they were published in a periodical serving Old and Russian Mennonite readers. These articles were not intended to be interesting and informative, not political. They give issues of cultural difference surface coverage without exposing the deeper



Fehderau clearly feel treated below his status:

I was now a Proletariat and dared not demand anything. My landlords did not treat me as an equal, as a fellow Mennonite, as a brother of the faith. They treated me like a worker from the street. In the time I worked there, they treated me only as a worker and made no attempts to strike up an acquaintance with me. (translation)<sup>43</sup>

Given that the Red Civil War was waged in part against the Mennonite "bourgeoisie" by the revolutionary "proletariat", and that Fehderau, as a member of the upper class, would probably have personally suffered repercussions, it is easy to see why he resents his new "proletariat" status in Canada.

Fehderau is surprised to learn that his employer is a preacher:

I would never have taken him for a minister ... His brother across the street was much friendlier and often talked with me, but this man has never made the effort to speak with me ...

My landlord himself worked hard, and then to prepare a sermon yet! I often saw him Sunday afternoons with his Bible and books in the dining room, and often he had fallen asleep by the time I went upstairs to my room. I cannot understand how he would be able to bring his congregation a moving and meaningful message. (translation)<sup>44</sup>



Russian Mennonites eating watermelon and rollkuchen with their Amish Mennonite hosts.

Unlike the Old Mennonite interviews, this account often mentions language difficulties. Fehderau tells of an error made because he had misunderstood instructions. "Don't you understand German?" asked the farmer. Fehderau replies, "I would understand fine if you spoke German."<sup>45</sup>

Fehderau feels unappreciated, undervalued and misunderstood. When the farmer says he can not afford to pay him for the winter but offers him lodging, Fehderau, concerned about his travel debts, finds a job in the local Sanatorium, charging the farmer with assuming he had a free worker for the winter. "At that time," he writes, "I did not hold it against him, but upon writing this (46 years later), it amazes me how heartless people can be." (translation)<sup>46</sup>

Putting Fehderau's account into perspective, he did spend his first months

in the new world alone, with a strange family in a strange culture. He was also only twenty and had, at a young age, watched as his world was destroyed by war. Much of his tension is a normal part of the immigration experience. However, he reveals a highly-tuned sense of class indicative of his past stature in Russia, both as the son of a wealthy man and as a Mennonite. He definitely felt that he deserved to be treated better than he was in light of that past.

Neither Fehderau, Thiessen or Konrad join Old Mennonite congregations. Another Russian Mennonite, Herbert P. Enns, commits to paper the story of the Russian Mennonite's arrival in 1924. His account is part of the booklet prepared in celebration of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church's 50th anniversary. He reiterates Fehderau's mention of language difficulties<sup>47</sup> and relates it to the desire among the Russian Mennonites to be with their own:

At first they worshipped in the churches of their hosts. However the new language, even the Pennsylvania-Dutch dialect, presented great difficulties to them. A longing to listen again to a German sermon and to have an opportunity to share one's experiences became more and more evident, whenever several members of the new group were gathered.<sup>48</sup>

Enns states the choice of some families to move to Manitoba was primarily fuelled by their overarching desire to "worship God with one's own people"<sup>49</sup> He does not consider economic reasons for doing so. Enns assumes that Russian Mennonites expressed solidarity through their faith, an assumption severely questioned by



Russian Mennonite baptismal photo at East Zorra Amish Mennonite Church, 1924.

historian Henry Paetkau. Although it would be wrong to dismiss language and religion, one must take into account the Russian Mennonites' strong sense of individualism. Their desire to economically re-establish themselves formed part of the decision to leave the Old and their churches behind.

The Russian Mennonite impatience to move on is readily found in Mennonite history textbooks such as Frank H. Epp's. Epp, like Enns, connects their impatience to religious factors. Paetkau reflects instead on the fragmentation that started in Russia. Russian Mennonites did seek out other out and preferred to work and worship together. However, to separate religion and economics is to falsely compartmentalize these domains. The Russian Mennonite identity reflected a strong individualism. Thus, religion reflected socio-economic rationalizations:

... religion became ... more deeply individualistic and personal and much less social or communal, a process hastened if not begun by the persecution and destruction under Bolshevik rule. While a few leaders strove valiantly and eloquently to rebuild a people, therefore, individuals sought primarily to rebuild their lives and their families.<sup>50</sup>

For the Rußländer to have joined Old Mennonite congregations would have meant moving into a system that did not correspond to their historical experiences or contemporary social circumstances. Those circumstances centered on personal and familial survival. For the Old Mennonites survival was not an issue. They had established themselves economically years earlier.

## Conclusion

This essay has been structured to demonstrate the differences between the Rußländer and the Old Mennonites in a way that emphasizes the changes happening within both communities. Conventional histories have often failed to convey the extent to which the Old Mennonite community, even though more agrarian minded and conservative, was responding to changes in its midst. This essay has emphasized that each group lived within an ever-changing community and had to grapple with the challenges handed it by that community. Those challenges did not overlap to any great degree.

There seems to be, in Canadian Mennonite history, an assumption that

some sort of union should have taken place between the Old and Russian Mennonites. That assumption colours the way historians have approached the topic. Frank H. Epp is the prime example. He has turned the encounter between the Rußländer and the Old Mennonites into a tragedy of lost opportunity. The story is only tragic if told from a teleological perspective. Epp's approach in itself is significant in demonstrating how profoundly our personal opinions and religious views affect our interpretation of history and provides an excellent example of a specific interpretation of Mennonite identity. This paper has attempted to distance itself from a teleological interpretation but showing that the encounter between the Rußländer and the Old Mennonites in the early 1920s reveals the strong causation inherent in environment.

The Old Mennonites and Rußländer lived under one roof for a short time commencing in 1924. This experience was viewed as necessary for the admission of Russian Mennonites into Canada. However, both groups realized that, given their cultural differences, their time together would soon end. The Old Mennonites continued reformulating Mennonite identity based on separation. Russian Mennonites began rebuilding their lives.

Krista Taves is a Ph.D. student in history at York University.

## Endnotes

- 1 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival*, (Macmillan of Canada, 1982), pp. 243-44.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.
- 4 James C. Juhnke, "Mennonite Church Theological and Social Boundaries, 1920-1930 - Loyalists, Liberals and Laxitarians," *Mennonite Life*, v. 38 n. 2 (June 1983), p. 18.
- 5 John Horsch, *The Mennonite Church and Modernism*, (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1924) p. 3.
- 6 Juhnke, p. 18.
- 7 Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991*, (University of Toronto, 1993).
- 8 See, for example, James M. Gray, "If a woman have long hair it is a glory to her," *Christian Monitor*, (April 1926), pp. 119-120.
- 9 W.O. Hobbs, "The Devotional Covering," *Gospel Herald*, (March 26, 1925), p. 1011.
- 10 Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), pp. 78-79.
- 11 Henry Paetkau, "Russian Mennonite Immigrants of the 1920's: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* v.2 (1984), p.82.
- 12 see, for example, Al Reimer, "The Russian Mennonite Experience in Fiction," *Mennonite Images: Historical, Cultural and Literary Essays*, ed. H. Loewen (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1980), in which he discusses the implications of their history on Canadian Russian Mennonite 20th-century writing.
- 13 James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, v. 3 (1985), p. 13.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 15 James Urry, "Prolegomena to the Study of Mennonite Society in Russia 1880-1914," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, v. 8 (1990), p. 69.
- 16 Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle", p. 29.
- 17 Harry Loewen, "Intellectual Developments Among the Mennonites of Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, v. 8 (1990), p. 103.
- 18 Paetkau, p. 74.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 21 Epp, p. 161.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 24 Arthur Slagel, "Russia Today: Mennonite Schools in the Ukraine," *Christian Monitor*, (March 1924), p. 468.
- 25 Arthur Slagel, "Russia Today: II. The Land Problem in Russia and its Effect," *Christian Monitor*, (February 1924), p. 435.
- 26 Arthur Slagel, "Russia Today: Easter Time in Russia," *Christian Monitor*, (April 1924), p. 498.
- 27 Arthur Slagel, "Russia Today: Mennonite Schools in the Ukraine," *Christian Monitor*, (March 1924), p. 469.
- 28 John Cressman interviewed by R. Neff, July 12, 1979.
- 29 Oscar Baer interviewed by R. Neff, June 8, 1980.
- 30 Mary Hunsberger interviewed by R. Neff, June 18, 1980.
- 31 Leah Hallman interviewed by R. Neff, August 28, 1979.  
Annie Gimbel interviewed by R. Neff, June 4, 1980.

- Gladys Ramseyer interviewed by R. Neff, July 3, 1980.  
 32 For example, John Cressman interview.  
 33 For example, Leah Hallman interview.  
 34 Joseph Cressman interviewed by R. Neff, July 5, 1979.  
 35 For example, Gladys Ramseyer interview.  
 36 Ida Cressman interviewed by R. Neff, July 5, 1979.  
 37 Miss B. Cressman interviewed by R. Neff, May 22, 1980.  
 38 Abner Good interviewed by R. Neff, July 25, 1979.  
 39 Annie Dick Konrad, "Finding Refuge Among Mennonites in Waterloo",

- Mennogespräch*, 10(September 1992)2, p. 12.  
 40 Henry B. Tiessen, "Henry B. Tiessen's Experiences as a Russian Mennonite Immigrant," trans. Herbert P. Enns, (reprinted from the 1973 German original), *Ontario Mennonite History*, 12(September 1994)2, pp. 13-15.  
 41 Nicholas J. Fehderau, "Aufzeichnungen ueber meine Auswanderung aus Russland im Jahre 1924 und meine erste Eindrücke und Erlebnisse in meiner neuen Heimat - Canada" (Conrad Grebel Archives XIII-2.15.2.1), p. 23.

- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 25-26.  
 43 *Ibid.*, p. 27.  
 44 *Ibid.*, p. 29.  
 45 *Ibid.*, p. 29a.  
 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 31a-32a.  
 47 Herbert P. Enns, "The History of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church," *Jubilee Issue of the Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church*, (Waterloo: 1974), pp. 7-8.  
 48 *Ibid.*, p. 8.  
 49 *Ibid.*, p. 8.  
 50 Paetkau, p. 83.

## My First Days In America

by Gerhard Wiens

We had never seen anything so green as the lawns which flashed by our train windows as we were travelling up the Saint Lawrence Valley on that brilliant morning of July 18, 1924. We were a trainload of Mennonites from Soviet Russia, a happy, exhilarated trainload. For we had, quite miraculously, been allowed to leave the Red Paradise and were, at long last, actually entering our Promised Land, the land of "decadent capitalism." No capitalists we – the liquidators had made sure of that. I arrived in America with seven dollars and a British twopence in my pocket, and twenty-eight dollars for my passage. But we would have been glad to repay them tenfold for helping us out of Russia, for giving us a new life in which there was hope and liberty once more. No wonder the grass looked greener to us than we had seen it for many a year. We had forgotten how beautiful the world can be when there is joy in the heart instead of grief and never-ending fear.

I was nineteen, but we were all young, exuberantly young. During those first days and months we drank American life in tremendous drafts and opened our eyes wide to encompass all that we possibly could of the broad, astounding American panorama. Impressions crowded in upon us in overwhelming profusion. There is nothing like coming to America as a nineteen-year-old newborn babe.

### My First Mistake

At one of the stations where we had stopped, a reporter was running alongside the train, calling, "Anybody speak English?" I was glad that his only response from windows was a shaking of heads, and as soon as I could, without appearing too forward for an immigrant

boy, I shouted to him shyly, "I speak English!" And now I had my first conversation with a native! I was proud enough to burst, I was thrilled beyond English words that the man understood me and that I was able to piece his meaning together. The train was starting when he fired a last question at me, "When did you leave Russia?" – "We leaved on June twenty-third," I shot back. But as he was waving me a receding goodbye, something horrible dawned on me. I waved and called to him to come back. He dashed up alongside and I cried, "We *left* Russia on June twenty-third!" He stopped in his tracks. He looked puzzled. Perhaps he was angry. It grieved me to think that I might have offended the first native I talked to, yet surely he would understand that I could not let a mistake go uncorrected which I knew was a mistake. I smiled my broadest and shouted, "Bad English. We *left* Russia." Whether he heard me or not, he smiled back. But when I sank back in my seat I had a lot of explaining to do to my fellow-immigrants – why all that shouting? And I blushed when I had to admit that I had made a mistake in English.

I went on making mistakes, and not only in English. You natives do not realize how hard most of us immigrants try to please you and how embarrassed we are when we become aware of our monumental awkwardness. You may think that anybody can learn your simple, natural ways in a few months, but you do not know how intricate they are and how slow and arduous the task of adaptation is.

### A Man Milks A Cow!

I arrived at Waterloo, Ontario, the next day and went to work for a Pennsylvania-

Dutch Mennonite farmer. My boss and his wife, a handsome, well-dressed young couple, brought me home in their shining, black Model-T coupe. I could hardly believe it. How could a farmer afford a distinguished vehicle like that? My boss must be richer than the average farmer. At twenty-five miles per hour we flew through the beautiful countryside, on magnificent gravel roads. I had ridden in a car only once in Russia, on a dirt road. It seemed mighty decent of my boss to let me, his laborer, ride in his car right beside him and his wife. In Russia he might have arranged to have another laborer fetch me in the farm wagon. This was but the first of countless situations in which I have seen American democracy in all its decency and vitality. And though I have also seen it abused and twisted into caricature, to me it is still the rock foundation of life in America.

After we arrived at the farm and I had unpacked my few belongings I went outside to explore the yard. I saw no laborers, no maids, and wondered where they might be this evening. I strolled into the barn and there, beside a long row of Holsteins, I saw a man milking. I was startled. I had never seen a man milk. At home, milking was a woman's job and a disgrace to a man. Perhaps there was a shortage of maids here this evening and this kindhearted laborer had swallowed his pride and jumped in to help. I was about to ask him where the boss might be, when this man addressed me by my name and I recognized my boss. That smartly dressed gentleman of the Model-T sat there on a dirty stool in soiled overalls and a battered straw hat, *milking!* Something must be seriously wrong with him. Or with America? No, no, that could not be! He



asked me if I knew how to milk, and I laughed. The next evening he was laughing – at a desperate greenhorn and a puzzled bossy.

Coming in from the barn that first evening I asked my farmer how in the world he kept all that beautiful grass around the house so nice and even. He showed me the lawn mower beside the garage and demonstrated it on the walk. I was fascinated and asked him to let me push it. Then I completely lost my senses. I pushed the whirling marvel onto the grass and before he could stop me I had cut a wondrously even, velvety path half-way across his lawn. I thought he was going to have a fit, and you can't imagine how a young immigrant feels when he faces his first fit in the new country. But when he saw my apologetic bewilderment he gave a hearty laugh and told me that now I'd have to mow the whole lawn tomorrow. Nothing could have pleased me better. I loved that lawn mower.

These ingenious Americans! One of the few things we had all known about the Americans was that they were tops in practical ingenuity! How the evidence was borne in upon us those first days! I was amazed to learn that my boss had been working his 160-acre farm mostly by himself. In Russia we would have needed three good men to do it. I was fascinated by all the machines and laborsaving devices. The first day we used a contrivance which hoisted half a load of hay away up under the roof of the barn. The windmill (for me to this day a very dear symbol of America) pumped water into a tank and gave him running water in house and barn. He handled team and binder alone from a seat on the binder whereas we had always needed two men for this job. His hayrack was constructed so that the pitcher could build the load himself, while we had always had somebody on top to build it. He even had a kind of elevated gondola to cart the manure out of the stable.

### Beautiful Ontario

The farm was beautiful. Those fields! All this Ontario country had formerly been primeval forest and some of the mightiest trees had been left standing in the fields. Coming from the Steppes of Russia where every tree was planted, and at a spot where it would not be in the way, I thought this one of the oddest yet most beautiful things about the American landscape: a broad, majestic maple in the middle of a field.

The cows looked so contented resting in the cool shade of those trees. We never rested there. I was overwhelmed by the

pace of work in America. We had worked hard in Russia too, but we had always had time for a nap in the middle of the day and frequent short rests between work. We had heard that in America time was money and we soon concluded that time was too much money here. I still think it is. When a man sees silver dollars slipping through his fingers every time he folds his hands in his lap he has voluntarily surrendered part of his sacred liberty. Because in America time is worth so much money, many Americans rarely take time to live. It puzzles me that Thoreau is so popular when nobody gives any serious thought to following his teaching. Is Walden Pond a dream to which we escape from inwardly admitted slavery? There is slavery everywhere in the world, to be sure, but in America so much of it seems self-imposed.

But work is joy, too. In America any work can be joy because all work is respected. In the old country work with his hands put a man in a lower class, and if it got his hands dirty it degraded him. In America a white-collar worker can don overalls and not lose caste. A professor gains respect if he knows how to do things around house and yard. In Europe he is not supposed to know which end of the spade is pushed into the ground; at least it makes him more professional if he doesn't.

Overalls, an American invention and institution! With overalls enveloping your body smoothly yet roomily, with no coat-tails to flap about, you slip into work, lithe as a lizard. Overalls always made me feel I could tackle any man's job. And the sturdiness of them, and of all work clothes! Work shoes and boots may not be quite as brutally tough as they look in the mail order catalogs, but they are nearly so. When they are on your feet they are a positive challenge to seek out the rockiest, thorniest, muddiest parts in the country.

### Mail Order Catalogs

Those mail-order catalogs – we gaped at them in disbelief. You can get all *that*, for *money*? And that is when the American mania for work first took hold of us. We had never seen so many things we wanted. Now we must make money! Let's see now, I'm getting twenty dollars a month, room and board free. Of course, first there's that debt to pay off. Maybe I could go somewhere else, find a job and twenty-five dollars a month. Oh boy!

With all these marvelous goods to tempt the customer from catalog page and store window, we could not understand why manufacturers and merchants kept urging, begging, imploring people to buy

them. We had seen merchants in Russia going after trade in a reserved sort of way, but we had never been sufficiently aware of advertising even to give it a name. Advertising hit us as a perplexing oddity of American behavior. I was quite proud when I reasoned out that the calendars in every room were not just gifts of friendship from the merchants, but a sly way to keep their names and products constantly before our eyes. My farmer had a hard time making me comprehend what a "sale" was, and why there might be sense even in a "sacrifice sale."

Time being money and advertisers telling me in thinly veiled terms that I was a fool not to buy, I also began to understand why Americans did not spend much time patching worn overalls, but rather threw them away. I was aghast at American wastefulness. "It doesn't pay" – I had never heard such words at home. In America, I soon learned, those words are often undeniably true. But out of habit you all too often waste a thing which would be well worth saving even at your price on time. Having suffered great want in the old country I still go through agonies of indecision whenever the time comes to throw something away that could still be used or might come in handy some year. You may guess that whenever I meet a native pack rat I salute him warmly. I began hoarding usable things even before I landed. I saved the orange wrappers on board ship and wrote my first letters home on them. If you had been starved for paper for years the way I was you would also understand why to this day my heart leaps up when I behold a clean sheet of your magnificent, rag-content bond paper; and also why I never use a new sheet of it unless circumstances beyond my control require it. I write all my first drafts on scrap paper.

The abundance of goods may explain in part why there is so little stealing in this country, but general integrity, I believe, is the main reason. My boss had to keep at me to break me of my habit of putting every hoe and fork in the shed for the night. I thought him irresponsible for not locking the barn overnight. When we all went away one day we even left the house unlocked! Once when I ran out of postage stamps he told me to put a quarter in the mailbox and the mailman would stamp my letters and leave the change in stamps. I told him I might be green, but I wasn't a fool.

*Reprinted from Mennonite Life, April 1960, pp. 68-70*

## Book Notes

The Publications Committee of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, in *Those Enterprising Pennsylvania Germans: Vol. XIII Canadian German Folklore* (Waterloo, Ontario: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario, 1995), 253 pp. narrates the stories of Pennsylvania-German entrepreneurs in Ontario, many of whom were Mennonite.

Hildi Froese Tiessen and Paul Gerard Tiessen, editors of *Ephraim Weber's Letters Home 1902-1955* (Waterloo, Ontario: mlr editions Canada in collaboration with Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 1996), 234 pp. have transcribed and annotated letters written from Ephraim Weber to Leslie Staebler. Most of the introductory chapter, although corrected, somewhat altered, and enlarged is taken from the article written by the editors, "Lucy Maud Montgomery's Ephraim Weber (1870-1956): 'a slight degree of literary recognition,'" published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 11 (1993), 43-54.

Barbara Smucker, author of *Selina and the Bear Paw Quilt* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Ltd., 1995), n.p. tells the fictional story of a Mennonite family who emigrated from the United States to

Canada during the American Civil War. The story is inspired by Lorna Shantz Bergey who owns the Bear Paw quilt upon which the story is based.

Lorraine Roth, editor of *Joseph Jutzi and Marie Bender Family History and Genealogy* (Waterloo, Ontario: the Joseph Jutzi Family Book Committee, 1995), 184 pp. with addenda taped inside back cover, traces the descendants of Joseph and Maria (Bender) Jutzi. Besides stories, photographs and genealogy, it also includes some Jutzi and Bender family background with maps and photographs of European sites. There is an index of descendants and spouses.

Lorraine Roth et al., compilers of *Joseph and Catherine (Kennel) Leis Genealogy* (Unpublished manuscript, 1994), 149 pp. traces the descendants of Joseph and Catherine (Kennel) Leis. The material was gathered by Katie (Leis) Moser (1894-1983) of Castorland, New York, and typed and added to by Lorraine Roth in 1994.

Robert Kreider and Ronald J.R. Mathies, compilers of *Unity Amidst Diversity: Mennonite Central Committee at 75* (Akron, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central Committee, 1996), 181 pp.

reproduce papers presented to Mennonite Central Committee on the occasion of its 75th anniversary at a symposium in Fresno, California on 9-12 March 1995.

Gloria Neufeld Redekop, author of *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 144 pp. explores the church societies within which women could speak, pray and creatively give expression to their own understanding of the biblical message. She also shows how changes in those societies, including declining membership and a shift in their primary focus from sewing and baking to one of spiritual fellowship, reflect the changing roles of women within the church, the home and the wider society.

Donald B. Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan, editors of *The Amish Struggle with Modernity* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), 304 pp. explore how the Amish negotiate change and continuity with the dominant society. Contributors include Donald Kraybill, Gertrude Huntington, Diane Zimmerman Umble, David Luthy, Marc Olshan, Steven Nolt, Thomas Meyers and Kimberly Schmidt.

## Book Review

by Lorraine Roth

Hermann Guth, compiler of *Amish Mennonites in Germany; Their Congregations, The Estates Where They Lived, Their Families* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 1995) documents the church and family history of Amish Mennonites in Germany. This English translation from the 1993 German edition, *Amische Mennoniten in Deutschland*, was sponsored by the Illinois Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society, Metamora, Illinois and published by Masthof Press, Morgantown, Pennsylvania, 1995.

Genealogists of Amish Mennonite families are indebted to Hermann Guth for making available his research of Amish Mennonite families in all parts of

Germany, except Bavaria, although it includes references to families going to Bavaria. Where congregations straddled the boundary, references to Alsace and Lorraine are also found. In addition to genealogical information, Guth also shares his wealth of knowledge about the cultural, historical, and religious ethos of the times.

The editor and translators have done an excellent job of translating and adding notes, glossary of names and terms, bibliography, maps and photographs which help the reader to interpret the European scene.

The reader, however, should be aware that there are also many gaps. Most of Guth's research was done before 1985 and

may not include later findings. He did not always have access to research done on the American Continent in order to make helpful connections, or his resources were old and out-dated. Besides Guth's own cautions concerning errors, one also needs to take into account his concise style of writing. For example, he may say that Michael Schwartzentruber was married at Lehrbach in 1820. That can mean that Schwartzentruber entered the state of matrimony at Lehrbach on a certain date in 1820. It can also mean that in 1820, Michael Schwartzentruber was living at Lehrbach in a married state. If one interprets it to mean the former, and looks for Schwartzentruber's marriage record at Lehrbach, he will be disappointed – Guth means the latter.