



Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast

BULLETIN

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Hermann Hartfeld to Speak in San Jose

Hermann Hartfeld will be the speaker at the San Jose area meeting of the Historical Society on January 29 at the Lincoln Glen Mennonite Brethren Church. A Mennonite dinner will be served. Tickets may be ordered from Wilbur Reimer at (408) 265-6211.

Born and raised in Siberia, Hermann Hartfeld learned that living the life of a Christian can be a hard lot. From his childhood he remembers the screams and barking dogs which told him that the secret police (KGB) had come to take away his neighbors. When his cousin invited him to attend a worship service with him, it was a daring step he took. Christianity was not spoken of openly. But young Hartfeld was the first to stand that night in commitment to this new faith.

Bibles were hard to come by, so the Christians searched communist writings for Bible quotations -- verses quoted by these writers in their attempt to discredit Christianity. Hartfeld was denied his college degree, though he finished at the top of his class, because he would not join the communist party.

Dinuba-Reedley Area Meeting to Highlight Hispanic Mennonites

The Dinuba-Reedley area meeting of the Historical Society will be held on Sunday, March 6 at 2:45 at the Parlier Mennonite Brethren Church. The meeting will focus on the history of the Hispanic Mennonites in the Central Valley. Refreshments of Mexican food will be served. Set aside this date. More information will be forthcoming.

Three times Hartfeld was arrested for his faith and he spent a total of six and a half years in Soviet prisons. But these years are not for him a tale of defeat. In prison he met other Christians with whom he prayed and shared knowledge of Scripture. Prisoners became Christians through Hartfeld's witness, so the officers kept transferring him from one camp to another to diminish his influence.

Finally a West German relative of Hermann's wife, Maria, offered to sponsor their move to West Germany. It was difficult to leave Russia, a land with so few pastors, but they did decide to go. Their entrance into the free world was a mixed blessing, however. Yes, worship was free, but Christianity was treated with indifference. Through a hard life the Hartfeld's have learned the value of their faith.

Hartfeld has written two books about his experience, Faith Despite the KGB and Irina, both published by Christian Herald Books. Currently, the Hartfeld's are studying at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, in preparation to return to West Germany and a ministry among the Umsiedler (recent immigrants from Russia).

SOCIETY HONORS THREE

At the 1982 annual dinner-meeting of the Historical Society, three scholars were given special recognition. Otto B. Reimer of Reedley, J.C. Penner of Shafter, and R.C. Seibel of Lodi, all in their eighties, have provided invaluable assistance to the Center and the Society by translating thousands of pages of handwritten German records and documents into English. These records are now available in the archives for the English-speaking student of history.

NEWS NOTES FROM THE CENTER FOR M.B.
STUDIES

In June, Otto Reimer of Reedley made a significant contribution to our holdings. He has deposited the minutes of the Advisory Committee of the Mennonite Disaster Service of the California area. The first meeting of this organization took place on Dec. 29, 1955 in the Reedley M.B. Church. O.B. Reimer, who was a member of this Committee from its inception has done a superb job of preserving its records. We feel most fortunate to receive this file.

Willy Janz, alumnus of our Seminary, on sabbatical from his ministry in Brazil, South America, spent several weeks this summer in the Center for M.B. Studies. He is keenly interested in pursuing the archival development for our Mennonite Brethren in Brazil. His time here was spent primarily in learning and observing archival techniques. He was also most helpful in giving direction to the revision of our classification scheme for South America. His expertise in the organization and patterns of operation there, made his input extremely valuable.

Kevin Rempel's paper of 149 pages submitted to Dr. Paul Toews at Fresno Pacific College entitled The EMB - In Search of Religious Identity is possibly the most exhaustive work done on the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren denomination to this point. It is well written and deserves our commendation. Because much of the research was done in the Center, a copy of this document has been deposited here.

A NOTE FROM THE BOARD

Since the death of Bill Siemens, the Society is searching for someone to serve as area representative for Kern County. Kern County members may send their suggestions to Mennonite Brethren Historical Society, 1717 S. Chestnut Ave., Fresno, CA 93702. You may want to include your suggestions on the response form attached.

RECENT BOOKS

The second printing of J.A. Toews' A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church is now available. One section, on Latin America, has been rewritten and typographical errors have been corrected throughout, but otherwise this is a reprint of the original book. Rod Harder, a Fresno artist, redesigned the cover with original artwork. Paper, \$14.95.

Czars Soviets, and Mennonites, by John B. Toews, who teaches at the University of Calgary, focuses on the broader aspects of the Russian Mennonite experience. This experience is analyzed and interpreted in terms of the wider social and political shifts of twentieth-century Russian history. Paper, \$10.95.

These books are available from the Pacific Bookshop, 1717 S. Chestnut Ave, Fresno, Ca., 93702. Include \$1.00 for postage; California residents add 6% sales tax.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION PUBLISHED BY THE
CENTER

A Wilderness Journey, by Gerhard and Heinrich Woelk, has just come off the press. It is the story of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia from 1925-1980. The book was published by the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies and edited by the Center's Editorial Committee. It should be required reading for all who want to acquire greater insights into the persecuted church behind the iron curtain. The English edition has been expanded to include a chapter by Peter Klassen outlining the historical background of the Russian M.B. Church.

A limited number of copies is still available through the M.B. Seminary for a donation of \$10 per copy. Proceeds from the book sales will go toward a scholarship fund for students from behind the iron curtain. Orders can be addressed to: M.B. Biblical Seminary
4824 E. Butler
Fresno, Ca 93727

SOCIETY GIFT TO THE CENTER

At the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society Annual Meeting, the Society presented its annual gift to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies. This year the gift was a check for \$1500 which will be used to assist the Center in securing records from the Prussian period of Mennonite history.

Immediately after World War II, MCC sent Pax teams into northern Poland to distribute relief supplies and to assist in the reconstruction of that war-torn land. These MCC workers were also instructed to seek out the existing Mennonite churches and bring back any church records they could find. The Danzig area Mennonites were completely dispersed during the war and so, their records were in danger of being lost or destroyed. The Pax teams were able to gather 3300 pages of church records which they brought back to the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College.

These records properly belong back in the hands of the European Mennonites whose history they document. A return of the records in the near future is foreseen, thus the urgency of the Center's project. The Society's gift will make possible the xeroxing, transfer and cataloging of these Prussian records while they are still readily accessible.

The church records will augment the collection of Prussian materials already among the Fresno archival collection which Peter Klassen obtained from Polish State Archives in Danzig and other areas. The records that Dr. Klassen has collected are mostly civil and commercial, so the church records will be a valuable complement.

Society funds will also be used to acquire additional Prussian records from the Bethel College Archives and from the Weierhof in Germany.

The new materials will be of interest to genealogists and historians. They will be helpful in reconstructing family relationships and church life during parts of the 400-year stay of the Mennonites in Northern Poland.

NEW GENEALOGICAL RESOURCE PUBLISHED

A new quarterly journal, Mennonite Family History, is now being published. The magazine, which provides genealogical ideas and information for Mennonites of all varieties, is edited by Lemar and Lois Ann Mast of Elverson, Pennsylvania. Alan Peters, Secretary-Treasurer of our Society, is a member of the Advisory Council assisting in the production of this new magazine.

The first issue of the quarterly appeared in January, 1982, and included an informative article entitled "Russian-Prussian Mennonite Research," by John F. Schmidt, Archivist at the Mennonite Historical Library at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. This article, and indeed the journal as a whole, will be of considerable interest to the many members of our Society who are conducting family research.

In addition to the interesting articles contained in each issue, the quarterly also features a listing of persons conducting research on specific families, advertisements for books and other available genealogical aids, and a large "Query" section, where persons can request help from other genealogists in solving the difficult problems that confront every person doing family research.

Interested persons are invited to contact the editors for further information. The magazine's address is Mennonite Family History, P.O. Box 171, Elverson, PA 19520. Individual copies are \$3.00 each, with subscriptions being \$12.50 for one year and \$23.50 for two years.

SOCIETY BOARD MEMBER DIES

Bill Siemens, Kern County representative to the Historical Society Board, passed away on October 2, 1982. Memorial Services were held on Tuesday, October 5 in the Shafter M.B. Church.

He had been a board member for a number of years. We will miss him very much. His sunny disposition and practical solutions to problems were much appreciated.

Surviving him are his wife, Rose, two sons and several step children.