



Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast

BULLETIN

No. 13

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MWC—No Longer a One-Man Show!

Heinrich Pauls, a Polish Mennonite pastor, in 1912 proposed a Mennonite gathering to discuss Mennonite history, their missionary calling, and their wide-ranging beliefs and practices. World War I and internal factors among Polish Mennonites stalled Pauls' vision.

In 1913 Christian Neff, a Mennonite pastor from Weierhof, Germany, preached the convention sermon at the first *North American* inter-Mennonite conference in Berne, Indiana. Neff, who served as president of the South German Mennonite Conference, later proposed calling Mennonites together in 1925 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Anabaptism's founding. Mennonite World Conference was born that year in Basel, Switzerland.

The second MWC was a World Relief Conference, held in Danzig, Poland (modern Gdansk), in 1930. Five or six Americans attended. The third conference, held in Amsterdam and on the 400th anniversary of Menno Simons' conversion, focused on Menno's significance to the church. The fourth assembly was postponed due to World War II, but met in 1948 at Goshen, Indiana, and North Newton, Kansas. Subsequent conferences have been held in Basel (1952); Karlsruhe, Germany (1957); Kitchener, Ontario (1962); Amsterdam (1967); Curitiba, Brazil (1972); and Wichita, Kansas (1978).

The Kitchener assembly in 1962 was the first "mass-meeting" experience for the MWC. Over 12,000 people registered. The Amsterdam sessions in 1967 were unique in that a Travel Fund for financing third-world representatives' travel was initiated. During this present six-year interim more than a quarter of a million dollars will have been gathered for the Travel Fund, thus assuring the attendance of people from the developing nations.

The Curitiba meeting in 1972 was the first outside of Europe and North America. The 1300 Latin Americans outnumbered all others combined. Wichita '78

registered almost 10,000 guests, and one meeting gathered 16,000.

The governance of MWC is in the hands of a General Council, composed of about 100 representatives from the respective conferences and countries around the world. Most directly involved is an Executive Committee composed of the president, five continen- (see MWC on page 2)

The 'Kleine Gemeinde' Friesens

When Abraham von Riesen was born in Prussia on September 28, 1756, his parents certainly chose the right name for him. This Abraham, which means "exalted father," has lived up to his name! He is the ancestor of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of current Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, in the United States, Canada, and even to the "utmost parts of the earth."

The surname "von Riesen" was a common one in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, but it seldom occurs today. Shortly after the time of the migration to Russia, most Mennonites with this surname altered it slightly to the surname we know much better: *Friesen*. As a result, many of the "Friesens" around us are really "von Riesens," and, indeed, many of them are directly descended from this notable Abraham von Riesen.

He married a Margaretha Wiebe in January 1779, and together they had nine children: Peter, Abraham, Margaretha, Anna, Helena, Johann, David, Klaas, and Regina. The family migrated to Russia in 1803, where they settled in the village of Ohrloff in the Molotschna Colony. When the Kleine Gemeinde, or (see FRIESENS on page 2)

Annual Dinner Meeting Saturday, May 12, 1984

It is spring and time again for the Annual Meeting of the West Coast M.B. Historical Society. As always, it will be a time for good food, for fellowship and for learning. This year the program will focus on some of the cultural aspects of Mennonite history and experience. (See page 4 for details.)

DATES TO REMEMBER

- May 12, 1984 Historical Society
Annual Meeting
- July 24-29, 1984 Mennonite World
Conference
Eleventh Assembly
Strasbourg, France

ARCHIVES UPDATE

This has been a particularly active and productive year for the Center for M.B. Studies. Contributions were received from 126 donors for a total of 2964 items and 197 feet, 9 inches of archival material, a considerable increase over years past.

Two volumes of the *Zionsbote Index* covering the years 1920-1964 have been completed and are now available for \$60 each.

Thanks have also been expressed for the Velo-bind machine contributed by the Society last year. It is a valuable contribution in the operations of the Center and is being used extensively for the binding of manuscripts, periodicals and theses.

Some specific items of interest include: 1) The John H. Lohrenz collection has come to the Center. The disposition consisted of over 200 books, conference related publications such as constitutions, conference reports, etc., plus some 200 conference year-books which were relevant to our needs. In addition, 100 titles which were not needed in our archives were sent to India at the request of the librarians on the mission field. Among the archival materials were Lohrenz' sermon notebooks and outlines, minutes of India missions, diaries of Mrs. Maria Lohrenz from 1918-1964, plus a variety of publications in the Telugu language. One rare item was a folder belonging to Katherine Lohrenz, missionary to India 1908-1913,

which included letters etc., dating back to 1870.

2) Bethel and Bluffton colleges have been most generous in their donations of large quantities of duplicate materials. Some 1,575 items were added which either fill gaps in our files or establish new runs of titles we have not owned previously.

3) Evangeline Kroeker of Clovis, California has donated "The Harder Letters." This file contains copies of a periodical which was distributed to family members from 1954-1965, edited by Dr. M.S. Harder.

4) From C.F. Plett of Hillsboro, Kansas, the archives have received the original galley proofs of a history of the KMB denomination begun by J.Z. Wiebe before 1952. The paper is incredibly fragile. It needs to be deacidified and restored for preservation.

5) The archives now have a copy of a church record book of the Ebenfeld M.B. Church, which was translated, transcribed and reorganized by S.L. Loewen of Hillsboro, Kansas in 1975. Thanks go to Lucille Barnett of Kingsburg, California who received her copy from Mrs. Ernest Suderman of Dinuba, for giving permission to copy this record.

6) A considerable file of *Witness for Peace*, a periodical published by William Bestvater from 1944-1949 in Bell, California, was received from Mrs. Anna Redekop of Herbert, Saskatchewan.

7) Four carousels of slides from their 25th anniversary celebration were donated by the Butler M.B. Church of Fresno, California.

MWC (from page 1)

tal vice-presidents, two members at-large, a recording secretary, a treasurer, and the executive secretary, presently Paul Kraybill. The Executive Committee meets annually and the General Council once during each interim. Meetings are generally held in third-world countries so that members can itinerate among the national churches.

MWC is essentially a "fellowship" organization. While there are constantly pressures for "program" oriented activities, MWC exists primarily to foster the gathering of Mennonites around the world for fellowship and mutual encouragement.

The Eleventh Assembly in Strasbourg, France this July 24-29 will scarcely resemble that one-man operation in 1925, or even the 1948 meetings in the United States. More than six thousand people from 50 nations are expected. Strasbourg, once a "city of refuge" for fleeing, persecuted Mennonites, will welcome us once again. Choirs from Zaire, Taiwan, France and Germany will sing. Speakers' names will not be Grebel or Manz, nor the usual Friesen or Krehbiel. Conference guests will listen to Christano, Zorrilla, Liau, Tanase, Flores, Ndlovu and Wiedeman. The emphasis on music, testimonies and Bible Study will continue, all centered in the theme: *God's People Serve in Hope*, taken from I Peter.

Strasbourg '84 will climax six years' work. Europeans hosting the conference already give witness to the enrichment their churches have experienced in making preparations. The thousands of Mennonites

of all colors and nationalities gathering in Strasbourg in July will no doubt be enriched as well, as they come for five full days of fellowship and inspiration.

—Marvin Hein

FRIESENS (from page 1)

"Small Church," was established in 1814, members of this family joined that new church. Indeed, the Friesens soon dominated the new group both in terms of leadership and in mere numbers!

For example, the founder of the Kleine Gemeinde was a young preacher from Danzig, Klaas Reimer. He just happened to be married to Helena Friesen, the daughter of our friend Abraham von Riesen. The next leader of the small church was Elder Abraham Friesen, the second son in the family. Carrying on the family tradition, the third elder of the church was Johann Friesen, a son of Margaretha Friesen, the oldest von Riesen daughter!

Indeed, Margaretha was not the only daughter to marry another Friesen. Her youngest sister, Regina, also married a Friesen! Even more confusing is the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde preferred that its young people marry within the church, and so we have many instances of cousins marrying cousins, so that many current Mennonite Friesens are descended several times from that "exalted father," Abraham von Riesen.

Other recurring surnames among the Friesen descendants are: Sawatzky, Thiessen, Reimer, and Neufeld. Consequently, if you have a family tradi-

tion that mentions connections with the Kleine Gemeinde, and you have ancestors with the surname Friesen or one of the others mentioned above, chances are pretty good that Abraham von Riesen might be your "exalted father" too!

A Tribute to Rev. J.J. Gerbrandt

The Scriptures teach us that God gives to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service. John J. Gerbrandt was one of those gifted men whom God chose to be one of His special servants. His ministry began over 50 years ago and continued until shortly before he was called home to rest from his labors on September 22, 1983.

John was born on May 12, 1905, in Rosenfeld, Manitoba, to Jacob and Justina Gerbrandt. He was one of 12 children. He was baptized on May 27, 1923, in Reedley, California, and later ordained to this ministry, a commitment that held highest priority throughout his lifetime. Church planting was a major part of his ministry in which he found much joy. God used him in the planting and early beginnings of numerous churches, including Armona (a Methodist congregation), Navelencia, San Jose, Sacramento, Capitola, and Santa Clara in California; Denver and Burlington in Colorado; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Gerbrandt's contributions to the Center for M.B. Studies and the M.B. Historical Society are too

numerous to list exhaustively. He was at every Society meeting. And he always seemed to bring an historical treasure he had discovered and wished to donate. From his estate came a four-page list of items reflecting his conference interests and involvements. His sermon notes and calendar of activities are an insight into the many churches where he preached. Especially insightful is the calendar from his years at Tabor College in his work of promotion of the college. His church planting ministries are highlighted by papers such as "Establishing Evangelical Churches," and the 164 slide collection which shows the beginnings of the Denver, Fremont and Sacramento M.B. Churches. His interest in music is testified to by the hymnbooks in the collection. Names such as Rodeheaver, Lillenas, Rauschenbusch, Sankey, Towner and Franz, to mention a few, were his resources.

Not least of his contributions is his son John Gerbrandt of Felton, who has served on the Historical Society executive board for many years.

Our thanks are extended to a generous and dedicated churchman.

TABOR ANNUAL?

The Archives at the Center for M.B. Studies is in need of a Tabor College *Blue Jay* from the year 1937 to complete their collection. Tabor has no extra copies available. Do you have one you would donate to the Center? If so, bring it with you to the Annual Meeting, or send it to the Center for M.B. Studies, 1717 S. Chestnut, Fresno, CA 93702.

THE BULLETIN RESPONSE SHEET

- Please reserve _____ places at the Annual Banquet in my name.
- I am unable to attend the meeting this year, but please renew my membership to the Historical Society. Enclosed is my membership fee as follows:
- \$25.00 Family Membership
 - \$12.00 Individual Membership
 - \$ 7.50 Student Membership
- I would like to make a special contribution of \$ _____ to the Society for the purpose of _____.

Send to:
Mennonite Brethren Historical Society
1267 W. Keats Ave.
Fresno, CA 93711

Name _____
Address: _____

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

DATE: May 12, 1984

PLACE: Fresno Pacific College

SCHEDULE:

1:30-3:15 p.m. Workshops

3:15-3:30 p.m. Reception

3:30-5:15 p.m. Workshops

Both of the following workshops will be offered at each session:

1. *"Problem Solving in Mennonite Genealogy"*

Alan Peters and Rachel Hiebert will deal specifically with the problems brought by participants and will guide them through the available helps.

2. *"Mennonite World Conference: A Preview"*

Paul Toews and Peter Klassen will lead this discussion of a major Mennonite historical event of our lifetime.

6:30 p.m. Banquet in Alumni Hall, featuring:

1. Outstanding food—FPC will once again prepare a traditional Low-German meal with all the trimmings.

2. Conversation and Information—Hear about the latest developments in the Historical Society, as well as the Center for M.B. Studies.

3. Program—*"Mennonite Life in Literature and Song"*

Local artists will be featured. Jean Janzen will share her poetry, Wilfred Martens will read stories and other glimpses of Mennonite life and Larry Warkentin will select and direct some Mennonite music.

4. Cost: \$6.50 per person.

Send reservations before May 8. (See page 3 of Bulletin for reservation form.)

For late reservations, call Jane Friesen, (209) 591-4154.

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Historical Society Newsletter Enclosed

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