



Every Picture Tells a Story:

Photograph Collections in the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies

by Kevin Enns-Rempel

In addition to large collections of textual material, the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies has tens of thousands of photographic images in its holdings. Most of these photographs are part of large institutional record groups, such as Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services International, Fresno Pacific University or the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary. But many other photographic collections come to us through private donations. These images provide a fascinating glimpse into Mennonite life across a wide span of time and geography. The following collections represent a small sampling of the kinds of photographs that may be found in the Center.

The Henry J. Wiens Papers (Record Group M6)

In 1954, Henry J. Wiens published a book entitled *The Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America: An Illustrated Survey*. The book provides a brief description of each Mennonite Brethren congregation in North America, along with one or more photographs of each.

Wiens traveled across North America during the years 1946-1951 in his role as Field Secretary for the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches Board of Trustees and as Solicitor for the conference mission and educational endowment funds. As he visited each congregation, Wiens took photographs of the buildings in which they worshipped. This collection of 227 color slides was later donated to



H. J. Wiens took this photo of the Fresno (later Bethany) Mennonite Brethren Church during his travels across North America, 1946-1951.

the Center by the Wiens family. It provides a remarkably complete snapshot of mid-twentieth-century Mennonite Brethren architecture. Many of these buildings no longer exist, having been replaced with more modern structures since

the 1940s. The Wiens collection takes us back to a time when the Mennonite Brethren were a predominantly rural people with places of worship built mostly in the styles of the early twentieth century.



The south tower of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church falls during demolition of the building in July, 1965.



John Peters stands beside a pump in the colony of Fairmead, California, in 1913.

Otto B. Reimer Papers (Record Group M130)

Otto Reimer (1894-1990) was a member of the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church for most of his life. His papers, though a small collection, cover a remarkable variety of topics.

Following World War II, Reedley-area Mennonites volunteered to send "raisins for relief" to refugees in Europe. Reimer saved eight photographs depicting the packing and shipping of these raisins.

In December 1955, Yuba City, California, was devastated by widespread flooding. In response

Katharina Schellenberg. Photographs of India (Record Group M292)

Katharina Schellenberg went to India as a Mennonite Brethren missionary and medical doctor in 1907. She served in that country until her death in 1945. This collection of 116 mounted photographs documents the world in which Dr. Schellenberg worked and ministered. Subjects include church buildings, village scenes, groups of Indian believers, schools, medical care and mission station facilities. Though none of the photographs are dated, all

to this disaster, a California branch of Mennonite Disaster Service was established and volunteers sent to Yuba City to aid in the clean-up of the area. Reimer's papers include twenty-three photographs of the flooding and MDS work there, thus helping to document the first Mennonite Disaster Service project on the West Coast.

As an active member of the Reedley MB Church, Reimer took an active interest in events there. His papers include photographs of the current sanctuary under construction in 1950, as well as photographs of the 1919 building being destroyed in 1965 to make room for the dining hall.



Dr. Katharina Schellenberg and co-workers in India during the early twentieth century.

appear to date from the first few decades of the twentieth century.

The Siemens Family Papers (Record Group M239)

Julius Siemens was one of the most prominent Mennonite land developers and real estate agents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He played a key role in the relocation of Mennonites to new communities across the North American West between the 1890s and 1930s. Among those communities was the town of Fairmead, which Siemens established in Madera County in 1912 and named after his birthplace of Schönwiese in the Chortitza Colony of South Russia.

In this collection is a set of prints depicting Fairmead in 1912 and 1913, shortly after its birth. The most striking image is a 30" x 6" print showing a handful of buildings dotting an otherwise empty valley floor. Specific buildings in the shot include Siemens' land office, the Fairmead Inn and the Fairmead Garage.

These photographs are just a sampling from the Center's extensive collections, all of which may be viewed upon request. If you have photographs (or textual records) that might broaden or deepen our coverage of the Mennonite story, please contact Kevin Enns-Rempel at 559-453-2225 or kennsrem@fresno.edu.