

The Southern District regretfully accepted this petition, noting that while they would like to share a district conference with the western churches, they understood that the work of the conference could better be carried out in this new way, and wished them God's blessing. The Oregon churches, since they were part of the Middle District, were not included in this arrangement, but planned to raise the same issue with their own conference.⁷

On November 19 and 20, 1911, a few weeks after receiving approval for their new undertaking, members from several California MB churches gathered together at the Rosedale church for an informal first session of the Pacific District Conference. From the report in *Zionsbote*,⁸ it appears that little if any actual conference business was conducted at these meetings, though several sermons on various topics were presented to those gathered there. J.H. Lohrenz asserts that officers were elected at these meetings: Abraham Schellenberg of Escondido (Chairman), Abraham Buhler of Reedley (Vice-Chairman), and Heinrich Kohfeld of Rosedale (Secretary).⁹ Lohrenz considers this meeting to have been the first Pacific District Conference session, though the conference itself counts 1912 as the first official conference.¹⁰

Many things have changed in the 75 years since those first delegates crowded into the Reedley MB Church. The conference is no longer small and isolated—today it is the largest Mennonite Brethren district conference in the United States, with 43 churches spread across Washington, Oregon, California and Arizona. A great number of institutions and programs have been created and sustained by the conference, each helping to advance the work of God's kingdom in their own way. Yet all of these developments owe their existence in part to that small group of people who gathered in 1912. It is fitting that we gather this November to remember and celebrate the work they began.

—Kevin Enns-Rempel

Why Join the Society?

Time races by so quickly. Every day some of the history that we should save is lost. Part of our job as an Historical Society is to save as much as we can for future generations. The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies also plays an important role in this task, but its funds and resources are limited.

Over the years our Society has helped in various ways to increase the effectiveness of the Center and the availability of materials there. We have bound over 70 years worth of the periodical *Zionsbote*. We have purchased binding equipment. We have restored a valuable Russian Mennonite map. We have purchased copies of Prussian Mennonite documents. We have published a newsletter to help keep you informed of these and other activities. And this year we will present a very special and unusual gift to the Center at our annual dinner. The Society is an organization worthy of your support.

We want to continue our efforts, but we can do this only as we all work together. Without your support, these projects cannot be continued. A single issue of the newsletter alone requires the financial support of 25 family memberships. Won't you join this year? Mail your membership check today or sign up at the annual dinner. Our fees are still the same: \$25.00 for a family; \$12.50 for an individual; and \$7.50 for a full-time student. We look forward to hearing from you.

Book Review

My Harp Has Turned to Mourning

by Al Reimer

This sweeping historical novel unveils the crucial years of 1905 to 1924 in the Mennonite colonies of central Ukraine. The facts many of us have heard and read about come alive in this excellently written novel. They come alive and then brand themselves into the memory to stay.

The story centers around Wilhelm Fast, a Mennonite farmer's son, who dreams of becoming an artist, but whose studies are interrupted by war. He falls in love with Clara Bock, daughter of wealthy Mennonite industrialists. Wilhelm's brother, unlike Wilhelm who does noncombative service, joins the army and finally aids Mahkno, the evil anarchist leader, in his ravages against the Mennonites.

Threaded throughout the narrative are the actions and memories of two church leaders, Eerdman Lepp, an itinerant preacher, and Daniel Fast, who longs for the pure church.

Reimer not only sears our hearts with the terrors and sufferings of our people as he tells and tells, he also puts our own faces to the mirror as he asks the basic questions of what it means to be a follower of Christ. What about material progress? What about church purity? What does it mean to be separated from the world? What is required?

Reimer does not answer the painful questions, but he states them through characters and plot in such a way that we find ourselves seeing and hearing the questions with a bell-ringing clarity.

This is a novel for everyone interested in our story, the Mennonite Brethren story, as well as the broader telling of the revolutionary times in Russia. It is also a novel for everyone because it is art—superb storytelling that reaches into the deep waters of joy and sorrow which connect us to all humans of all time.

—Jean Janzen

¹ Dallas and Portland, Oregon did not join the Pacific District until 1913.

² Pacific District Conference (hereafter PDC) minutes, Reedley, California, October 14-15, 1912, p. 54.

³ General Conference minutes, October 26-28, 1903, Hamilton County, Nebraska, pp. 8-9.

⁴ General Conference minutes, Ebenfeld Church, Hillsboro, Kansas, November 13-15, 1905, pp. 15-16.

⁵ General Conference minutes, November 22-24, 1909, Henderson, Nebraska, p. 10. All California congregations chose to join the Southern District.

⁶ Southern District Conference minutes, Corn, Oklahoma, November 6-7, 1911, p. 16.

⁷ No documentation of a discussion concerning the Oregon churches' relationship to the new Pacific District Conference is to be found in the yearbooks of the Middle District Conference. However, by 1913 the Oregon churches had become a part of the new conference.

⁸ *Zionsbote* XXVII (December 13, 1911), p. 2.

⁹ John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1950), p. 166.

¹⁰ The minutes of the Pacific District Conferences, 1912-1914, are numbered 2-4, indicating that 1911 was the first conference. In 1915, however, the numbering was readjusted to indicate that 1912 was actually the first conference.