

Wüst's preaching.

The communion service at the Cornelsen home in November 1859 was different from the earlier ones in that it was not kept secret. The leaders of the colony, both civil and religious, soon became aware of the untraditional—and therefore unacceptable—observance. The elder of the Gnadenfeld Mennonite Church called the congregation together to confront the small group of his parishioners who had participated in the communion service. With harsh words and threats, he reprimanded the communicants and encouraged them to walk out of the meeting, which they did with fear and apprehension.

In the days that followed, the small group met to chart their future course. Knowing that their privileges as Russia citizens depended on their Mennonite Church membership, they pondered how they could continue as Mennonites but still be faithful to their consciences. Finally, they decided to separate themselves from the larger Mennonite Church in the colony and establish a new Mennonite congregation, to be known as the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Abraham Cornelsen was given the responsibility to draft a document that would notify the authorities of this decision. On January 6, 1860, several interested persons attended a meeting in the home of Cornelius Wiens in Elisabettal to discuss the document. After much prayer and careful consideration, the document was signed by eighteen men present who were willing to risk their reputations and property by identifying themselves as part of the new movement. Abraham Cornelsen was the first to sign.

In the ensuing years, the Cornelsen family was driven from the Molotschna Colony due to the turmoil that surrounded the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church. During his exile in the Don settlement, a region settled by German Lutherans, Abraham Cornelsen was first elected minister, and then elder, of a Mennonite Brethren congregation that he established among the Lutherans there. When the Cornelsen family migrated to the United States in 1879, many of these former Lutherans also migrated, bringing many new family names into the Mennonite Brethren churches at Ebenfeld, Kansas; Harvey, North Dakota, and later Lodi, California.

After several years as the Elder of the Ebenfeld MB Church, Abraham Cornelsen died on September 24, 1884. His wife died on August 14, 1909 at Fairview, Oklahoma. During their years together, the Cornelsens had the following children:

1. **Abraham**, born December 26, 1849. He married Sarah Regier on December 17, 1870. They had twelve children. He died on January 6, 1929 in Hooker, Oklahoma.

2. **John**, born February 3, 1852. He married Anna Peters on March 22, 1854. They were the parents of five children. He died on July 23, 1915 in Main Centre, Saskatchewan.

3. **Gerhard**, born March 13, 1853. He married Maria Duerksen, and they had twelve children. He died on July 24, 1931 in Fairview, Oklahoma.

4. **Heinrich**, born October 29, 1854. He married Regina Willms on February 27, 1881. They had twelve children. He died on May 2, 1922 in Fairview, Oklahoma.

5. **Peter**, born March 10, 1856. He married Mary Patzkowski on November 13, 1880. They had ten children. He died on April 1, 1930 in Fairview, Oklahoma.

6. **Cornelius**, born November 2, 1857. He died at birth.

7. **Jacob**, born July 25, 1859. He married Aganetha Nikkel on October 28, 1883. They had six children. He died on June 4, 1942 in Hillsboro, Kansas.

8. **Isaac**, born August 25, 1861. He married Katharine Nickel on April 17, 1890. He married a second time on August 25, 1895 to Aganetha (surname unknown), and a third time to Anna Boese. He had two children in his first marriage, seven children in his second marriage, and two children in his third. He died on January 19, 1944 in Corn, Oklahoma.

9. **Frank**, born September 25, 1863. He died the same day.

10. **Aganetha**, born May 6, 1866. She died May 8, 1866.

11. **Frank**, born September 17, 1867. He married Anna Ewert on June 4, 1890. They had fifteen children. He died on April 19, 1951 in Saskatchewan.

12. **Cornelius**, born February 28, 1869. He married twice, first to Lena Bartel on November 27, 1890 and second to Mary Kusch on July 8, 1906. He had three children in his first marriage and one child in his second. He died in 1954.

13. **David**, born December 9, 1871. He married Aganetha Nikkel on May 1, 1902. They had eight children. He died on January 14, 1955 in Hillsboro, Kansas.

Alan Peters

Book Review

Peter J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers: An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia*. Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1989, 95 + xi pages. \$15.95.

Reviewed by Richard S. Unruh, Professor of Political Science, Fresno Pacific College.

Peter J. Klassen, a professor of history at California State University, Fresno, is a longtime student of European history. The Mennonite story in that history has been a particular interest of his, an interest that has repeatedly taken him to Europe in search of a fuller understanding of that story.

The Anabaptist/Mennonite story now spans more than four-and-a-half centuries. Its beginnings in Switzerland and the Netherlands have been extensively researched, and the heroism and martyrology associated with those beginnings notably profiled. The subsequent Russian Mennonite story, with its epic quality, has similarly received considerable attention. The intervening Polish/Prussian era of Mennonite history, however, has tended to be a "forgotten era."

A Homeland for Strangers provides the first systematic look at the story of the Mennonites in Poland and Prussia. It begins by setting the historical context for the coming of Mennonites to these lands. Political struggles and religious persecution in the Low Countries during the first half of the sixteenth century led many Anabaptists to seek a more peaceful existence elsewhere. The lands along the Baltic Sea beckoned them, and soon the migration east began. In return for draining the swamps of the Vistula River Delta, Polish kings promised religious toleration to the Mennonites. With time their

settlements spread south and east along the Vistula as far as Warsaw.

Despite the promise of a more peaceful existence, life in Poland and Prussia was periodically fraught with threats the economic well-being and religious freedom of the Mennonites. The central feature of this book is the four hundred-year story of these strangers in what they hoped would be their homeland. We catch glimpses of major movements, themes, and individuals in the story. We learn how a people whose ancestors had fled rather than compromise religious beliefs, sometimes compromised theirs. We also learn how some refused to do so, and became strangers in other homelands—Russia and the United States. We learn as well how World War II tragically ended the Mennonite story in Central Europe.

A Homeland for Strangers is an introduction, as the subtitle suggests. It is to whet the appetite for the more complete story of the Mennonites in Poland and Prussia currently under preparation by Klassen. Yet it is a scholarly and careful interpretation of this little-known part of the larger Mennonite story in its own right. This brief volume integrates these religious people into the larger contexts of Polish and Prussia history, and shows how they were affected by their surroundings. It also suggests some of the remarkable legacies left from

four centuries of Mennonite settlement along the Vistula River that continue to shape the lives of people living there. The book is enhanced by the inclusion of nine original maps, a list of former Mennonite villages with both their German and Polish names, a time line of pertinent dates, 24 black-and-white photographs and eight pages of beautiful color reproductions. It is an unusually attractive volume with a full color cover.

Klassen's book is also an invitation to visit the places where the Polish/Prussian Mennonite story was "written." A chapter entitled "Retracing Mennonite Journeys" is a detailed travel guide to the sites of former Mennonite settlements in present-day Poland. Another chapter entitled "Visiting Poland" provides helpful travel information on getting to the homeland in which so many of our ancestors were once strangers.

A Homeland for Strangers should grace the coffee table or bookshelf of everyone interested in the story of the Mennonites. It may be obtained from the Pacific Bookshop, 1717 S. Chestnut, Fresno, CA 93702 or through the order form below.

The *Bulletin* is an occasional publication of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast, 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, California 93727-5097. Editor: Kevin Enns-Rempel.

Response Sheet

(Send to the MB Historical Society, 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, CA, 93727-5097).

_____ I wish to become a member of the MB Historical Society of the West Coast at the following level:

_____ Regular Member (\$25.00) _____ Patron (\$100.00)

I wish to order the following items:

_____ copies of the Molotschna Colony map (a 15" x 22" reproduction of a pre-World War I map of this Mennonite colony in Russia). Enclosed is \$25.00 per copy plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling.

_____ copies of the Menno Simons portrait by Rodney Harder. Enclosed is \$25.00 per copy plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling.

_____ copies of the book *A Homeland for Strangers* by Peter J. Klassen. Enclosed is \$15.95 per copy plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Non Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
FRESNO, CA
Permit No. 1330

**M.B. Biblical Seminary
4824 E. Butler Ave.
Fresno, CA 93727-5097**