

previewed the Mennonite Heritage Tour to Europe that he would be leading later that year.

1981: Church historians have generally focused on the deeds and experiences of men and thereby excluded the equally important deeds and experiences of women. The Society responded to that bias this year by inviting Katie Funk Wiebe to speak on "Mennonite Brethren Women: Images and Realities."

1984: The Mennonite experience in literature and song was the focus of this year's meeting. Jean Janzen and Wilfred Martens read from their writings; Larry Warkentin led a choir in singing hymns from the Mennonite tradition.

1987-1988: During these two years, the Society heard stories from those who had actually participated in events important to West Coast Mennonite history. The 1987

meeting featured Peter A. Enns, Dan Friesen and Bill Neufeld reminiscing about their participation within the Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; the 1988 meeting highlighted stories of Civilian Public Service by Arthur Wiebe, Dan Neufeld and Marvin Hein. The year 1987 was also significant in that the Society concluded many years of meetings in Fresno Pacific College's Alumni Hall. The 1987 dinner took place in the British Columbia Lounge of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, where it has remained since that time.

1990: This year's meeting was the first to focus on a Mennonite-related museum exhibit. The program segment of the meeting took place in the main gallery of the Fresno Metropolitan Museum, where the group viewed the exhibit, "Colorful Quilts and Quiet Lives: Mennonite Textile Arts."

Kevin Enns-Rempel

Families of the Elders: Part III The Family of Johann Claassen

One name stands out whenever the first years of the Mennonite Brethren Church are examined: Johann Claassen. He was one of the eighteen charter members. He was the public spokesperson for the new church. He represented the fledgling congregation before Czarist officials in St. Petersburg. He experienced the direct opposition of both civil and religious leaders. Finally, he left his imprint upon the church—often providing it with stable, sensible structure when other experienced leaders went to unfortunate extremes.

Johann Claassen was a wealthy landowner and merchant in the village of Liebenthal in the Molotschna Colony. He operated a thriving retail business with his brother-in-law, Cornelius Reimer. This Cornelius Reimer, and another brother-in-law, Jacob Reimer of Gnadenfeld, were also important members of the early Mennonite Brethren Church of Molotschna Colony.

Claassen had married Katharina Reimer, the sister of Cornelius and Jacob, on January 31, 1847. She and her brothers were the children of David Reimer, a wealthy landowner whose private estate, Felsenthal, was a renowned garden spot and refuge on the northern border of the Molotschna Colony.

Johann and Katharina had a total of ten children but only three lived to adulthood.

1. **Jacob** was born July 19, 1852, and married Emilie Prachnau on October 17, 1877.

2. **David** was born May 9, 1855, and married Anna Reimer on April 10, 1882. This son was usually known as David Ivanovitch Claassen. He was a prominent leader of the Russian Mennonites during the Revolution, and died around the year 1925. His son Dr. Nicolai Claassen was shot and killed during the revolution.

3. **Aganetha** was born April 1, 1863 and married Johann Berg.

Claassen's wife Katharina died on July 25, 1869 in the Kuban Mennonite Brethren settlement. He married for a second time on March 1, 1870 to Catharina Schmidt, the daughter of Abraham Schmidt of the Chortitza Colony. They had a total of five children, four of whom lived to adulthood, as follows:

4. **Catharina** was born December 6, 1870 at Wohldemfürst, Kuban. Catharina migrated with her mother, step father Peter Thiessen, and sister and brothers to the United States on July 4, 1884. She married Isaac Neufeld, a son of Heinrich Neufeld of Einlage, Chortitza Colony. She died on July 26, 1910 in Fairview, Oklahoma.

5. **Anna** was born February 20, 1872 in the Kuban settlement. She married John Flaming. Anna died on June 3, 1906 in Fairview, Oklahoma.

6. **John** was born November 11, 1873, and married Maria Hiebert of Cooper, Oklahoma on March 21, 1897. He died in Wichita, Kansas, on December 22, 1907.

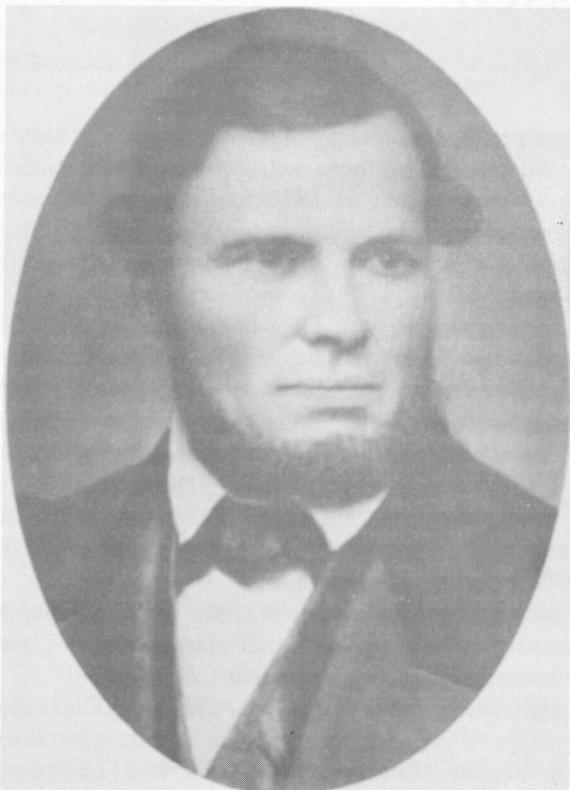
7. **Dietrich J.**, the youngest son of Johann Claassen, was born on April 20, 1877, almost four months after the death of his famous father. He became a well known school teacher and lay church leader. He married August 2, 1901 to Helena Duerksen of Hillsboro, Kansas, the daughter of Jacob and Katharina (Funk) Duerksen.

Johann Claassen died on December 24, 1876, at Wohldemfürst, Kuban at the young age of 56. In spite of his short life, he left behind a legacy reflected in a strong and ever-growing Mennonite Brethren Church. To a large degree that church owed its existence to this capable man who led it through troubled waters in its earliest years.

The youngest son, Dietrich J. Classen, published a brief family history that carried the Claassen family lineage back to a Behrend Claassen born in the year 1598 in the village of Schönsee, West Prussia. According to the published history, Behrend was the father of Hans Claassen, born in 1658 in Petershagen, West Prussia.

Hans Claassen, in turn, is listed as the father of David Claassen, born September 13, 1700 in Schönberg, Prussia, and Ida Claassen, who was born July 11, 1688 in Petershagen. These siblings play a part in Johann Claassen's ancestry, since David Claassen (1700 - 1780) married Anna Andres (1722 - 1784), the daughter of Rev. Cornelius Andres (1680 - 1741) and his wife, the aforementioned Ida Claassen (1688 - 1734). Consequently, this was a marriage between uncle and niece, and they became the parents of David Claassen, the father of Johann Claassen, the church leader.

David Claassen, Johann's father, was born October 21, 1760 at Fürstenwerder, West Prussia. He married Agnetha Penner, the daughter of a Peter Penner, and to them Johann Claassen was born on July 27, 1820 at Orlofffelde, West Prussia. The father, David Claassen, died in Prussia on April



Johann Claassen

9, 1827. According to B.H. Unruh, his widow, Agnetha Penner, migrated with her family to the Molotschna Colony in the year 1830.

This proposed ancestry of Johann Claassen goes back much further than currently available records can verify. Unfortunately, we do not know what sources Dietrich J. Classen used for his family history.

We do have access to Claassen family chronicles, begun by a certain Jacob Claassen, born in 1793, who happened to be a first cousin of Johann Claassen. This chronicle confirms all the data for Andres and Claassen families from 1680. This lends considerable credibility to the lineage given by D. J. Classen and makes us wonder where he secured the information for the years before 1680.

It is tantalizing to see an unconfirmed lineage that stretches all the way to 1598, only a few years after the death of Menno Simons. Perhaps further discoveries will make that kind of family lineage available for more of us. Meanwhile, it is appropriate that such a complete family history is available for one who played such an important role in the beginning of our own church history.

Alan Peters

Book Review

Hope Kauffman Lind, *Apart & Together: Mennonites in Oregon and Neighboring States, 1876-1976*. (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 30). Scottdale: Herald Press, 1990. 415 pages, \$26.95.

Apart & Together tells of the first one hundred years of Mennonite and related groups in Oregon and neighboring states. The book is divided into three major sections. Part I covers the uprooting and planting of new congregations in Oregon. Congregations were established as a result of migration, Sunday schools and other outreach opportunities. The author shares the joys and frustrations of this process with the readers.

Congregational and district histories show the need for strong leadership. The tension between individualism and church community surfaced and recurred in all of Oregon's Mennonite groups. Part of the reason for this tension was the great distance from the larger centers of Mennonite population in the East. As a result, all the Mennonite groups in Oregon made accommodations to their surrounding society, some more than others. Change produced stress and division, but also brought freshness and growth to Mennonites there.

Part II deals more directly with growth and outreach efforts, both successes and failures. The author also treats the question of Mennonite responses to war and their relationship to the larger world. How do Mennonites relate to their surrounding communities? How do they retain their distinctiveness and reach out to others with the gospel? In their attempt to retain their identity Mennonites established educational institutions in Oregon. Western Mennonite High School is a primary example of this phenomenon.

Part III speaks to the issue of Mennonite groups and their relationship to the wider community, both within the larger Mennonite tradition and among other Christian traditions. This is the briefest section of the book. Mennonites seem to have had and still have difficulties relating to other denominations in the Christian faith. They seem very protective of their denominational distinctives.