

CALIFORNIA MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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The California Mennonite Historical Society, 1965-1990: Celebrating 25 Years

This issue commemorates the 25th anniversary of the founding of the California Mennonite Historical Society. Organized in 1965 as the "Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Pacific Coast," the Society has played an important role in the development and maintenance of a Mennonite historical identity on the West Coast and particularly in California.

Two feature articles in this issue will reflect on that role and the larger context in which it arose. Peter Klassen, the Society's first president, offers his recollections of the origins and early years of the Society. Paul Toews, Director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, places the Society into the context of a larger recovery of Mennonite historical identity that took place within the Mennonite Brethren Church beginning in the 1960s.

The Society has accomplished many important tasks in its 25-year history. Annual meetings have brought together members and other persons interested in Mennonite history for a variety of stimulating presentations. Lectures, drama, audio-visual presentations, personal stories, readings, music and museum exhibits, though different in form, have all served to remind us of our past and its connection to our present. Genealogists have benefited from the regular presentations on Mennonite family research sponsored by the Society. The *Bulletin*, begun in 1978, has developed from an informal newsletter into a vehicle for original historical research on the Mennonite story in California and the West Coast. The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno traces its origins to the vision and efforts of the Historical Society. The Society deserves much of the credit for what is today the most comprehensive collection of Mennonite research material west of the Rocky Mountains. Though no longer formally linked together, the Society and the Center still work closely with each other on many projects. The ongoing tradition of the Society presenting a gift to the Center at the annual meeting is an example of how the Center still benefits from the Society's support.

The Historical Society has done a good work in its first 25 years. With the continued support of its members, we can

all look forward to many more years of further contributions to Mennonite historical studies on the West Coast.

Kevin Enns-Rempel

Society Adopts New Name

At their annual meeting held April 28, 1990 the members of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast voted unanimously to change the organization's name to the California Mennonite Historical Society. This issue of the Society's *Bulletin* is the first to reflect the new name.

The Society Executive Committee has identified four reasons for changing the name.

—*Geographical accuracy.* Since its beginning in 1965, the society has drawn most of its paying membership from California. In membership, it has been more a "California" society than a "West Coast" society.

—*Other Mennonite historical societies on the west coast.* A few years ago Mennonites in Oregon established the Oregon Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society. The Executive felt that our name was no longer appropriate given the existence of this fellow organization.

—*Interests beyond the Mennonite Brethren Church.* The majority of our membership is drawn from the Mennonite Brethren Church, and thus it is no surprise that much of the Society's programming has and will continue to focus on that branch of the Mennonite people. The Executive, however, also recognized that the society has always expressed interest in topics beyond the Mennonite Brethren Church. Annual meeting speakers such as Cornelius Krahn, John Howard Yoder and Jan Gleysteen have spoken to us from their own Mennonite traditions. *Bulletin* articles about Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee have also moved beyond