

*Mennonitische Rundschau* (1880-1909, 1920-1929). Includes brief obituaries and death notices for Mennonites from all Russian immigrant groups. In German. Other dates are unindexed. Since 1948 this periodical would include mostly Canadian Mennonite Brethren obituaries.

*Der Wahrheitsfreund* (1915-1947). Mostly North American Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. In German.

*Mennonite Weekly Review* (1924-1990). Inter-Mennonite, including many Swiss/South German Mennonites.

*Christlicher Bundesbote* (1882-1947). North American General Conference Mennonite, including some Swiss/South Germans. In German.

*Der Bote* (1924-1963). Canadian General Conference Mennonite. Later volumes are unindexed. In German.

There are additional unindexed obituary sources in the Center. In order to use these effectively, the researcher will need to know the approximate date of death, and either the location of death or conference affiliation of the deceased person. These include the following:

*Christian Witness* (1947-1960). Krimmer Mennonite Brethren.

*The Mennonite* (1886-present). General Conference Mennonite, including many Swiss/South Germans.

*Der Herold* (1910-1941). Mostly General Conference Mennonite. In German.

*Vorwärts* (1908-1940). Published in Hillsboro, Kansas, it included obituaries for various Mennonite groups throughout North America. In German. Continued by the *Hillsboro Star-Journal*.

The Center welcomes all genealogists with an interest in Low German Mennonite family history. Located in Hiebert Library on the campus of Fresno Pacific University and Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, its regular hours are 8:00-12:00 and 1:00-5:00, Mondays through Fridays. Some research materials can be made available at the Hiebert Library front desk for use during evening and weekend hours. Please call 209-453-2225 to make such arrangements or for other information. While appointments are not necessary, researchers should call ahead to make sure that someone will be available to provide reference assistance. The Center operates with a limited staff,

and professional reference assistance is not always available. Additional information about the Center is available on its Internet Website (<http://www.fresno.edu/cmbs>) or through e-mail at [kennsrem@fresno.edu](mailto:kennsrem@fresno.edu).

## The Lure of Genealogy: Some Personal Stories

*Why would anyone want to devote their time to studying family history? For those who have already discovered the fascination of genealogical research, that question needs no answer. For the uninitiated, further explanation may be in order. We asked several local genealogists to explain how they became interested in their own family histories, and why they find interest and value in that pursuit.*

### Alan Peters (Fresno, California)

It all started over a gift copy of Strong's *Concordance*. My "uncle," Henry Hodel, gave it to me when I was a teenager. We kids always called him "uncle," but we knew that he wasn't like our other uncles. We just called him that because it wasn't proper to call adults by their first names, and he was too close a friend to our parents to always call him "Mr. Hodel." So he was "Uncle Henry" to us.

When he gave me the book, however, my mother and he commented that they *were* related, but they weren't exactly sure how. That interested me, and so I took it upon myself to explore just how the Hodels and we were related. That began a process of sitting down with the grandparents—all of whom were still alive—and writing down what they knew of their families. The stories were wonderful, and thereafter each of them regularly took me aside to relate a newly-remembered event, and a long-forgotten relationship.

Instead of hearing only about the Hodel relationship, I began to hear about the unending connections that linked me to so many others who suddenly became relatives rather than just acquaintances and friends. I heard the stories about the great-great grandfather, Elder Abraham Peters, who led his congregation on the "Great Trek" to Central Asia. I heard about my grandmother's great-uncles and step-great grandfather, who were part of the eighteen who established the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860. I even heard, from my Grandfather Kasper, who knew almost nothing about his family, that he remembered "Fatty" Harms, the pastor of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, visiting them when my grandfather was a child, and being told that Mrs. Harms and his mother were first cousins.

All this planted the seeds of interest in me that are still sprouting today, more than forty years later. From the

simple beginning of seeking out a mysterious relationship, and talking to my grandparents about their roots, I have come to the inescapable conclusion that I am linked by history to the spellbinding stories of martyrdom and sacrifice, courage and perseverance. I treasure the realization that my life and heritage are intertwined with the similar stories that all of you have been told about your cultural and spiritual inheritance.

I still have that copy of Strong's *Concordance*, and on one of the blank pages near the front of the book, I have drawn a chart, showing how "Uncle" Henry Hodel and I are both the descendants of Abraham Wiens and Margaretha (Froese) Wiens. He comes out of the family of their daughter, Margaretha, who married Jacob P. Becker. I come from the family of their daughter Anna, who married Bernhard Janzen. Even though "Uncle" Henry and I are really second cousins, twice removed, we have learned through the simple gift of a concordance that we are part of an enormous "family." It is a family related not only by blood, but also by faith, history, and common memories. These are the true riches that have been born in me through searching for the secrets of my heritage.

#### Jay Hubert (San Rafael, California)

When I got started in genealogy some twenty years ago, I think my motivation was about the same as many other people's: curiosity about my own family's history. I probably had a head start because my grandmother, my great aunt, and my mother-in-law were all avid genealogists. It didn't take long before the real puzzles of genealogy began to present themselves: where to find more information, how to organize it, how to share it, and how to interpret it.

Finding more information has become a unifying link between me and other family members, even those who weren't as avid as those above, but who nonetheless shared the interest. For example, in the last decade of my father's life, he and I had the opportunity to take a number of vacations together. Some of these vacations included trips to Kansas and Oklahoma where he was raised and we still have many relatives. My father had a good memory for detail and recorded a number of his personal experiences. Most importantly, it gave me a way to get to know a very quiet and introspective man. I have had the same experience with a number of other relatives. The amount of kinship that often develops with relations I have never met before is amazing.

Other genealogical finds include a third cousin in Brazil. My great-grandfather was the only one of his nine siblings to come to the U.S., but late in life one of his younger brothers immigrated to Brazil. There had not been any contact between the families since before WW II, but with some perseverance I found my Brazilian relatives. My cousin has since shared a lot of family information by

mail. Genealogical archives and Family History Centers are obvious places to find information in the US, but there are similar resources in Europe. I have enjoyed visits to the Prussische Kulturbesitz in Berlin-Dahlem, the Deutsche Zentralstelle für Genealogie in Leipzig, and to some of the archives in Ukraine. Since travel can be hectic and expensive, I have also obtained many useful books and microfilms through inter-library loan.

Organizing the information quickly became a real challenge not only because of the amount but because it was all interconnected in surprising ways. For me, the application of computers to organize and process information has always been compelling. Computer data bases help enormously in collecting, transferring and presenting genealogical information. I have worked on developing computer programs for comparing and analyzing large genealogical databases.

Computers also offer the possibility of distributing and sharing enormous amounts of information easily and at very low cost. Sharing such information with others is often repaid in new information from others. This process of sharing with others is part of the pleasure of genealogy for me. The growth rate of the GRANDMA project is ample testimony to the power of sharing. Two years ago, GRANDMA had about 60,000 names. In September 1996 it had over 135,000 names, and we will soon release another volume with over 250,000 names.

Interpreting family history ultimately means trying to understand people who lived in a different time and (usually) in a different place. This quickly leads to a broader understanding of history and geography. For me another unlooked for benefit of doing genealogy is that much more world history, geography, economics, and religion are now linked to people who are interesting to me.

Genealogy provides a way to see ancestors as more than entries on a family tree. Instead, they become pioneers who faced incredible challenges with courage and faith. In many ways our ancestors have blazed a path for us into the future.

#### Jane Friesen (Dinuba, California)

Many years ago I came across an old bookkeeping ledger that a distant relative had kept for many years. On the first few pages were records of his financial dealings, but as I turned the pages I discovered that he also had kept family records in the same book.

I read with interest the genealogies he had written. The records went farther back than anything I had seen before. I also noticed the notes in the margins. He had recorded bits of information about these relatives who were no longer living. Here were their accomplishments, their ills, the marks they had left on their worlds. I was hooked.

Since then I have gathered many more records of families related to me and to my husband. For me these records form the skeleton for the stories of their lives. I'm hooked on stories. Once I began collecting them, I discovered that they aren't so hard to find as one might suppose. Old newspapers and church records have been a rich source of information for me. Long interviews with our oldest living relatives have also added to my collection of stories.

These stories have given me a real sense of gratitude for the heritage that is mine.

**Evangeline Kroeker (Clovis, California)**

Alan Peters is responsible for my interest in genealogy. I met him in 1975, when I began attending College Community Mennonite Brethren Church in Clovis, California; he was my first Sunday school teacher there. In talking with him, I found that he was a nephew of one of my closest girlhood friends. Then I discovered that his great aunt was the wife of one of my uncles, and that he had information on my maternal grandfather's family. This sparked my interest in researching my mother's people. It took me two-and-a-half years of research and work to complete this book. This was so exciting that I kept on with one project after another; now I'm on my thirteenth book. Two are collections and translations of Low German humor. There are copies of these books all over the United States, Canada and Mexico. Several historical societies have requested copies of my books, so I feel I will have left a mark of some kind in this world after I'm gone. In 1995 I said that book number twelve would be my last, but now here I go again!

## **GRANDMA Volume 1 available; Volume 2 on the way**

September 6 was a red-letter day for the Historical Society's Genealogy Project Committee. That was the release day for volume 1 of the GRANDMA database on CD-ROM. Volume 1 contains detailed genealogical data on 135,482 persons of Low German Mennonite ancestry in 35,715 families. Also on volume 1 are maps of Prussia and South Russia; ship passenger list indexes containing 14,220 names in 2,488 families; scanned images of the Rosenort (Prussia) Mennonite church membership records; DOS and Windows versions of the Brother's Keeper program (which is used to view the contents of the database). The CD sells for \$30.00, plus \$2.00 shipping (Calif. residents add 7.5% sales tax). Please send orders to the address on the back page of this issue.

Though volume 1 has only been available for a few months, the committee already is working on volume 2. This second volume will contain nearly 300,000 names

(including those already on volume 1). We hope to have it ready by the end of 1997.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of volume 2 will be the addition of many Canadian Mennonite families, many of whom migrated to North America during and after the 1920s. Given that most of the family lines in volume 1 migrated from Russia to the United States in the 1870s, the addition of these new families will vastly increase the value of the database.

For more information on the GRANDMA database project, call 209-453-2225 or e-mail to [kennsrem@fresno.edu](mailto:kennsrem@fresno.edu).

## **Helping Grandma: Adding to our knowledge of Mennonite genealogy**

GRANDMA is alive and well! As a Society, we should be pleased with our accomplishments in collecting, organizing, and making available the family records of almost 200,000 individuals of Mennonite ancestry around the world. The data is available at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, the first volume of data has already been issued on CD-ROM, and a second one is on the way. We are seeing our fondest genealogical hopes and dreams being realized!

All of us who have caught the "family tree bug" know, however, that genealogical work is never done. Each discovery multiplies the mysteries, because each ancestor we discover has *two* parents, giving us twice as many new people to hunt for than we had before! Just as important, every day brings new data—the birth of a new child, the celebration of a marriage, the passing of a dear one—and each of these events must be recorded and chronicled. In other words, the work never ends; it only gets a little more complete.

Our effort to enlarge the scope of the GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) project is more than a few people can handle. The pool of information is so immense that only a concentrated and coordinated effort of many people can make the project move toward its goal of being as complete a record as possible. Fortunately, there are a variety of tasks that need to be done, giving almost everyone—with or without computer skills—a role to play in the "perfection" of the GRANDMA project.

Here are just a few of the things that need to be done to help the project grow:

1. Review the available published U.S. and Canadian ship passenger lists to determine the identity of the passengers listed there, see if they are already