



# Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast

## BULLETIN

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### JOHN B. TOEWS ADDRESSES AREA MEETINGS

Kern County. On October 24 at 6:30 p.m. Mennonite history enthusiasts from Bakersfield, Shafter, Wasco and vicinity gathered at Hodel's Restaurant for an evening of good food and historical reflection. John B. Toews, professor of history at the University of Calgary in Alberta, addressed the group on the topic of Mennonite martyr theology as it was experienced in the cruel years between 1914 and 1950.

There we sat, sufficiently warm, friends and family around us, over-fed, just as our parents and grandparents had been in Russia prior to 1914. But Dr. Toews warned, "It need not always be this way." Russian Mennonites were cultured, educated and prosperous people, but in the two decades following World War I they experienced the holocaust of revolution which "destroyed every vintage and every vestige of traditional Mennonite life."

Whole families and entire villages were wiped out, churches were closed. By 1935 there was not one minister left in the villages. Farms were confiscated. Not even honest hard work brought its natural reward of a day's bread. The women, children, aged and infirm were all who were left to carry on the spiritual heritage of the church, a task performed well.

In this situation, the Mennonites were renewed in their vision of the city of God. Toews read a crushing letter from young Katya from a work camp in the far north, an example of the suffering church at its best.

Katya accounts the agony of slow starvation and then concludes, "I am now going to God's school where I have already

learned a lot and am daily learning. I no longer worry about the next day. If I have eaten something today, I am happy and content and give the coming day over to God. He knows what I need and where it will come from."

San Jose. On November 14 the San Jose area of the Historical Society sponsored an old-fashioned German supper at the Lincoln Glen M.B. Church in San Jose. John B. Toews brought his expertise in Russian Mennonite history to this group as well. That evening he took a look at Mennonite life in Russia through the eyes of Jacob Epp as he recorded it in his diary between 1860 and 1880.

Jacob Epp was a minister in the Chortitza district during the second half of the nineteenth century. As a minister in the Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonite tradition, Epp held a great deal of authority in a broad range of concerns. Toews gave us four portraits of Epp, the minister at work.

First, Epp was arbitrator and peacemaker. As such he settled everything from family disputes to property damage complaints to use of song books in church. His severest vintictives were consistently heard in cases involving problems of alcoholism.

Jacob Epp was also a school administrator. He reminded the villages to pay their teachers, taking the teachers' side in a society which paid teachers about half of what it paid hired farm hands. But he also scolded teachers for their laxity, reminding them of 2 Tim. 3:15,16 when the children's math was not adequate.

## THE MOLOTCHNA MAP STORY

In March of 1966 John Reimer of Reedley, California purchased a house at 975 Church Street in Reedley from Mrs. Suzanna Nickel. In the basement of the house among a pile of debris he discovered an old roll of paper which proved to be a map of the Molotchna colony in Russia. When he located the village of Wernersdorf, he penciled beneath it, "My dad was born here." For the rest of his life he treasured that map and proudly showed it to family and friends.

The map attracted its first attention from historians in May of 1979 when John Reimer's son, Wilbur, borrowed the map to display at a meeting of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society in Bakersfield. Historian, Peter Klassen requested permission to borrow the map for further study. Accordingly it was placed temporarily in the archives in Fresno where it would be accessible.

The map was unknown to local historians and was evidently very rare. It dates to sometime between 1910, when the railroad indicated on the map was built, and 1914, when Russia went to war with Germany. The map was printed in Germany which would have been impossible after the outbreak of war.

The Historical Society decided to try to make prints of the map for interested collectors. When the cost of restoring the map for printing was discovered, a search was made of archival collections nation-wide to find a copy in better condition for printing. No copies were found.

So the task of restoration was undertaken. The map had suffered through the years. It was water-stained and tattered. In some places masking tape had repaired the breaches. A good portion of the title corner was missing altogether. The map's cloth backing was disintegrating and damaging the face.

The services of Patricia Allison Morris of San Francisco, a specialist in restoring works on paper, were secured. Heat and the tedious work of a tiny spatula removed the tape. Then the map was soaked in water so that the cloth backing could be peeled away, a delicate process if the map, already suffering from age, was to remain intact. The water stains were soaked out to the extent that was possible, and the holes were patched with paper of similar color and texture to the map. Then the whole map was lined with long-lasting Japanese rice paper.

John Reimer died in July of 1979, shortly after his map was loaned to the archives. The Reimer family, realizing that they could not each keep the treasured memento, decided that the map should be placed in a permanent home. On May 2, 1981, at the Historical Society annual meeting, Wilbur Reimer, in behalf of the Reimer family, officially presented the Molotchna map to the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast in memory of his father, John Reimer.

The original now hangs in the reading room of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in the Hiebert Library at Fresno Pacific College. Three hundred limited edition prints have been made and may be purchased from the Historical Society. Monies collected will cover the costs of restoration, printing and beyond that, to the translation of the appendices of Benjamin Heinrich Unruh's, Die Niederländisch-Niederdeutschen Hintergründe der Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert, documents containing data of considerable interest to the Mennonite geneologist and historian.

One of Epp's usually joyful tasks was to be the "cause-pleader" for young men to their intendeds. As soon as the affirmative response was given, he circulated a letter through the village announcing the engagement. The wedding, which was simply performed often after a Sunday morning worship service, Epp performed within the next two weeks.

But the minister's tasks drew him all too frequently to the place of sickness and death. He was regularly consulted with health problems and was at times the one who administered small pox immunizations. His greatest anxiety was at childbirth, for he complained that the midwives were poorly trained and he saw many a woman or child fail to survive the process. But the love and commitment of the community brought hope, sometimes healing and regularly support for the grieving.

#### ANNUALS NEEDED FOR ARCHIVES

The historical collection at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies is missing several issues of the conference schools' annuals. The years 1930, 1936, and 1937 of the Tabor Blue Jay and the years 1940-41, 1941-42, 1942-43, 1974 1978 and 1980 of the Immanuel Torchbearer would complete the collection to date. If you would be able to supply one or more of these, or know someone else who could, your help would be greatly appreciated.

#### DINUBA AREA MEETING PLANNED FOR MARCH 5

Hermann Hartfeld will be the special guest of the Historical Society at its Dinuba area meetin in March. He was a youth leader in an unregistered Baptist church in Russia. Three times he was imprisoned in labor camps, totaling seven years of his life. Finally he was allowed to leave Russia for West Germany among the Umsiedler. He has authored two books about his experiences in Russia, Faith Despite the KGB and Irina. Currently he is studying at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in order to prepare for further ministry in Europe.

The meeting will be held in the Zion Church social hall beginning at 6:30 p.m. on March 5, Friday. A borscht supper will be served.

#### MOLOTCHNA MAP INFORMATION

There have been a number of requests for the story behind the Molotchna map which the Historical Society has acquired from the John Reimer family. On the facing page you will find that story. You may wish to clip it and keep it with the map for your interest and information.

There are still maps available for purchase. You can order a copy (or copies) by indicating that on the response form attached. The cost is \$25 each plus \$5 for postage and handling with each order of one or more copies.