



Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast

4949 E. Heaton Avenue, Fresno, California 93727

(209) 251-2391

BULLETIN

VOLUME II NUMBER 3

JULY 1980

ANNUAL MEETING FEATURES DR. JOHN B. TOEWS

The 20th annual meeting of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast was held in Alumni Hall on the campus of Fresno Pacific College May 3. Featured speaker for the banquet was Dr. John B. Toews, professor at the University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada. Dr. Toews talk, The Suffering Church - Mennonites During the 1930's, was the capstone talk in a three-day lectureship on The Russian Experience in the Twentieth Century, sponsored by the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The audience of over two hundred members and friends of the Society were rewarded with a detail-filled, sometimes emotional recasting of the difficult days our forefathers experienced under harsh Communist leadership.

Banquet music was provided by Mennonite folk musician Connie Wiebe Isaac, who sang, several German hymns.

Society president Jane Friesen made special note that the preceeding year was one of unprecedented growth for the Society. Regional meetings in Bakersfield, San Jose, Reedley, Dinuba, and Shafter have helped bring many new Mennonites into closer contact with other Society members. She noted that both treasury funds as well as those receiving the Bulletin are at an all time high.

Friesen made several special presentations to the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies. These consisted of a fire-proof filing cabinet for housing microfilm costing \$690, \$250 to cover the binding costs of the Zionsbote, \$150 contribution for copying costs of archival materials in the Danzig Library, and a contribution of \$100 toward the Russian History Project, a project to write the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia from 1928 to 1978. Dr. J.B. Toews gratefully accepted the equipment and monetary contributions for the Center.

As usual, the College kitchen staff had prepared an excellent banquet of verenika, sausage, ham, pluma mouse, and chocolate cake (with many second helpings).

SPECIAL NOTICE!

FRESNO REGIONAL MEETING

O'Niell Park, on the campus of Cal State University Fresno, will be the location for the first Fresno regional meeting of the Society. The picnic-style meeting will be held Saturday, August 23, beginning at 4:00 p.m. A program featuring Mennonite humor with special guest speaker, JOEL WIEBE, will begin at 7:00 p.m. All persons living in or near Fresno are invited to come. Each person is asked to bring a picnic meal, including service. The Society will provide drinks and deserts.

Come for the good Mennonite fellowship, food, and the opportunity to laugh and have fun with Joel as we recall those funny times in our past.

O'Niell Park is located on the eastern boundary of the campus. Turn east on Barstow from Cedar Avenue and drive past CSUF until you reach O'Niell Park on your left.

GENEOLOGICAL WORKSHOP

A special geneological workshop was hosted during the afternoon by Alan Peters and Jeff Wall. Alan and Jeff, well known experts on Mennonite family history development and geneology, hosted the workshop. The audience of over 50 persons learned about sources of information, forms to use in filling out family data, bibliographies on where to find information and books. As always, there were many opportunities for Alan to provide answers to questions from the audience about their own families. Many asked that the workshop be repeated in the coming years.

HERITAGE TOUR PRESENTATION

A special showing of the slide-tape presentation of the Mennonite Heritage Tour to Europe and Russia was given both before and after the banquet. The media presentation, narrated by tour leader Peter Klassen, continues to receive favorable comments from viewers. It chronicles the movements of the Mennonites from Switzerland through Europe to Russia and finally to North America.

PETERS ADDRESSES MIDWEST SOCIETY

Alan Peters, Secretary of the Society, was the guest speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, held in Hillsboro, Kansas on April 5. His topic was "Family and History: The Impact of the Family on the Church". Peters also conducted several workshops on Mennonite genealogy at a seminar entitled, "Climbing The Family Tree", also on April 5 in Hillsboro. The seminar, sponsored by the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies at Tabor College, also featured Katie Funk Wiebe who conducted a workshop on "Writing a Family or Personal History". Jeff Wall, an attorney from Fresno and an active genealogist in his own right assisted Peters in the workshops.

REEDLEY-DINUBA REGIONAL MEETING

The Reedley-Dinuba Area meeting of the Society was held on March 1 at the Dinuba Mennonite Brethren Church was the occasion for the premier of Fresno Pacific College writer Wilfred Martens' novel, RIVER OF GLASS. In the church he attended as a youth, Martens told of his experiences in writing the book and

related incidents that took place along the way. Enthusiastic members and friends of the Society were offered the opportunity for the first time to purchase the book.

Preceding Martens, Art and Dan Neufeld related the history of the beginnings of the Dinuba church. Past and present members, among the more than 100 persons in attendance, followed the narrative with a great deal of interest.

READING ABOUT THE RUSSIAN MENNONITE EXPERIENCE

The following books, with a short synopsis of each, are recommended by Fresno Pacific College Bookshop Manager, Richard Wiebe:

RIVER OF GLASS by Wilfred Martens (Herald Press, 1980, paper, \$6.95). The novel is set in the post-revolution years, 1928-29, when Stalin's influence was pressing the Mennonite villages of southern Russia. A group of about 250 made a furtive winter trek eastward, crossing the frozen Amur River, and settling in Harbin, China for a time. The harrowing experience is told from the point of view of a fifteen-year old boy who belongs to one of the affluent families of the village. Just published.

TRAILBLAZER FOR THE BRETHREN by Elizabeth Suderman Klassen (Herald Press, 1978, paper, \$6.95). A popular retelling of the life of Johann Claasen, one of the founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia. This narrative is set in Russia during the last half of the nineteenth century. Here is a story of deep faith and great hardships.

NO STRANGERS IN EXILE by Hans Harder translated by Al Reimer (Herald Press, 1979, paper, \$7.95). Originally written in the 1930's by a survivor of the Russian Revolution, here is a firsthand view of what occurred in the slave/labor camps in Siberia under Stalin's rule. The result is a GULAG ARCHIPELAGO from Mennonite perspective.

A RUSSIAN DANCE OF DEATH by Dietrich Neufeld edited and translated by A'

Reimer (herald Press, 1977, paper, \$7.95). An incredible, firsthand story of terror and brutality, of murder, plunder, and suffering. This is a personal narrative arising out of the author's experiences of civil war in the Ukraine and the terror of the celebrated anarchist Nestor Makhno.

These and other Mennonite History books are available from Pacific Bookshop/Fresno Pacific College 1717 South Chestnut, Fresno, California 93702.

GENEALOGICAL FOUNDATION BEING ESTABLISHED

A special organization to spearhead the collection, organization and dissemination of Mennonite genealogical materials is being established in Fresno, California. The organization is called "The Mennonite Genealogical Research Foundation".

The Foundation is beginning with the collection of family information which Alan Peters, a Mennonite genealogist, has collected over the past twenty years, and will expand and broaden his work in a effort to collect and organize the family records of all Low-German Mennonite families throughout the world. The scope of this effort is demonstrated by the fact that Peters has been able to collect family records for over 200,000 persons, but this represents only a small percentage of the total number of persons that the Foundation will attempt to include in its collection.

The Foundation is seeking tax-exempt status as a non-profit organization from state and federal governments, so that contributions can be accepted from the

many hundreds of persons throughout the Mennonite constituency who wish to see Mennonite family records preserved and organized. The major goals of the Foundation are to collect all available Mennonite family information, establish a comprehensive index of persons of Mennonite background, and to make this information available to scholars and Mennonites around the world. A special hope of the Foundation is to utilize computer technology in this effort.

The board of Trustees of the Foundation consists of Alan Peters, Donald Isaac, Peter J. Klassen, Paul Toews, and Jeff Wall. The address of the Foundation is, 64 East Weldon Avenue, Fresno, California 93704.

This Foundation will be a sister organization to the Society and the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, and will work very closely with those organizations.

ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTER

PUBLISHING. A third publication in the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies series was prepared for the 25th anniversary celebration of the Seminary. The volume edited by David Ewert of the Seminary is a theological, and practical interpretation of the Seminary's teaching role in the life of the church. It is entitled "Able to Teach", and will be available from the College Bookshop.

The two books in the series published earlier are No. 1, "Pilgrims and Strangers", edited by Paul Toews of the College, 1977; and No. 2, "P. M. Friesen and his History", edited by Abraham Friesen of Santa Barbara, Calif., 1979.

(detach and return by mail)

THE BULLETIN RESPONSE SHEET

I wish to become a member of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the West Coast. Enclosed please find my membership fee as follows:

\$25.00 Family Membership
\$12.50 Individual Membership
\$ 7.50 Student Membership
\$ _____ Special Contribution

I would like to designate that my special contribution indicated above be used for the following purpose: _____

Other comments: _____

Send to: THE MBHS BULLETIN
1717 SOUTH CHESTNUT
FRESNO, CALIF. 93702

Signed _____
Address _____

ACQUISITIONS. Some very unique materials which update us considerably on Mennonite Brethren in Russia are items J.B. Toews brought with him from a recent trip to Europe. These consist of:

a. Minutes of the M.B. Church in Russia from 1968-1976, hand written by Heinrich Woelk, now residing in Germany.

b. Gemeinde. The periodical of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Karaganda, Russia for the year 1977. It is completely hand written with beautiful lettering, and many hand sketched illustrations. Since printing of this type of materials is not permitted in Russia, the church passed this manuscript from family to family, much as the letters of Paul in New Testament days were circulated.

c. A large collection of sermons in manuscript form preached in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Karaganda, Russia from 1968-1977 by Heinrich J. Woelk.

d. Three volumes of Elder David Duerksen's sermons in German script. David Duerksen (1850-1910) was an elder of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Crimea. He preached in nearly all of the Mennonite Churches in both European and Asiatic Russia, in many M.B. Churches in America, and also in West Prussia. These sermons were obtained through the efforts of I. G. Neufeld who knew one of Elder Duerksen's grandsons and was able to encourage him to make copies from the originals which are now in the possession of several grandchildren.

e. A book entitled Sammlung Georg Leibbrandt Band 4 "Quellen zur Erforschung des Duetschtums in Osteuropa" (Die Gemeinde Berichte von 1848 der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer) printed in Leipzig

Germany in 1941. Received as a gift from Dr. David G. Rempel of Menlo Park, California, formerly professor at Stanford University.

MICROFILMING PROJECT. The major part of the microfilming of M.B. local congregations' records has been completed. The Center has over one hundred 16mm reels of microfilm at this writing. Remaining to be completed are some U.S. Churches, the majority of which are in the Pacific District and some Canadian churches.

NEEDED. The Center needs to complete its files of various periodicals. The following are some needed items:

Zionsbote--any issues before 1894.

This periodical began publication in 1884.

Christian Leader--volume 1, No. 5 for August 1937.

Der Bote--1924, Vol 1 through 1926, Vol. 3; 1943, Vol. 20; 1944, Vol. 21; 1946, Vol. 23.

Also miscellaneous issues through 1954. Please check with the Center if you know where any of these can be located.

If you have any old MB Sunday school quarterlys or teacher manuals please phone Rachel Hiebert at the archives (251-7194) or bring them in to the archives.

CENTER FACILITY. Due to the library building project, the Center is located in the former Seminary Reading Room. The facility is exceedingly crowded, but work continues in spite of conditions. The new location in the library with adequate vault space, student study carrels and work areas are being anticipated for the fall of 1980.