

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

We are pleased to report that 1999 has been a year of consolidation and growth. We have set records in terms of visitors to our Centre, innovative public events, improved communication with our members, and growing financial support. We are pleased to outline below what has been achieved.

HERITAGE LECTURES

We would like to acknowledge Lillian Toews and David Giesbrecht of our three member sub-committee that planned and presented four events in 1999. Our attendance at these lectures summarized below were very well attended. We thank all board members for assisting with each event and a special thank you to the spouses for providing refreshments.

January 23, 1999 - Walter Bergen

Mennonite Martyrs - Stories of the 20th Century

Our people enjoy stories of faith, Walter Bergen considers story telling part of our faith tradition. Needless to say, he does this so well. He related three stories that testified to God's special leading and intervention in the lives of : "Big Gramma" who suffered and won under the tyranny of communism: David Toews who was the Mennonite negotiator, resulting in the Canadian board of Colonization that paved the way for more immigration: Nichoiai Dueckman who survived 25 years of Communist imprisonment and then committing himself to ministry among Mennonites in Russia.

March 6, 1999 - Ruth Derksen-Siemens

Girls' Homes in Vancouver - A History of Community

Ruth Derksen-Siemens raised the oft asked question at the beginning of her presentation on the "Maedchenheim". Why did so many young Mennonite girls leave the security of their families and rural homes in the 1920's and 30's to seek employment in the larger, distant cities? This movement was driven by the financial needs of the settlement years. Basic survival in a new land, the repayment of the "Reiseschuld", the depression and frequent crop failures had not been part of their experience in the homeland. The conferences soon recognized the need for community for these girls and established homes. These became weekly gathering places, for them to come from the upper-class urban homes where the girls were employed. Ruth concluded with this comment; "these homes were necessary, they became a great blessing for our girls away from home."

May 1, 1999 - Dr. Paul Toews

United States and Canadian Mennonites: Does the 49th Parallel Make a Difference?

Dr. Toews argued that although North American Mennonites tend to have common European origins and common faith roots, they have been significantly influenced by the national contexts in which they live. In terms of demographics, 1998 census data indicates that there are 287,345 Mennonites in the US and 128,633 in Canada. The difference in numbers notwithstanding, Dr. Toews noted that Canadian Mennonites, who tend to be more urbanized, have cultivated a more prominent economic and political niche as well as a different set of cultural ideals.

Further, since Canadian Mennonites derive primarily from a Russian origin and American Mennonites from Swiss roots, they have tended to develop differing social profiles, with the latter more deeply reflecting notions of simplicity and plainness. However, while pointing to some differences between the two groups of Mennonites, Dr. Toews also noted that there is also a discernable "corporate Mennonite personality" which distinguishes them from other Christians. Moreover, as a result of modernizing pressures North American culture exerts on Mennonites, they are experiencing institutional as well as ideological revival resulting in the emergence of an Anabaptist theology with a clear emphasis on "discipleship, biblical, Christian non-conformity, love, service and non-resistance."

As a result of this revitalization, North American Mennonites are poised to make an ever increasing impact on the societies in which they live, and are increasingly being invited to share their unique perspectives.

October 30, 1999 - Dr. Walter Unger

Mennonite Millennial Madness

In the opening remarks Dr. Unger stated that sown through the centuries many have been obsessed with end time events and some in the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition have been no exception. He referred to those who attempted to specify the date of Christ's return as "Calendarizers". His focus was on one of these; a gifted leader among Russian Mennonites - Klaas Epp (1838-1913). Going against the pattern of migration to the Americas, he chose Turkistan and led 600 followers with the assurance of a prophet. This great Trek was fraught with serious logistical problems and their leader Epp became increasingly eccentric as a self-styled prophet - all for naught. Dr. Unger reminded his audience that the scriptures must be interpreted in the historical and cultural context of its time - for us it is important not to get fixated on the calendar or dating specific events, but instead be faithful to one's call.

OTHER EVENTS

October 16, 1999 - Genealogical Workshop

Our first Genealogical Workshop was held October 16, 1999. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Tim Janzen from Portland, Oregon. We opened the workshop with a few words from John Konrad. He spoke on the naming practices of our Mennonite forefathers. Tim Janzen spoke on the many sources available to low-German Mennonite researchers and provided an extensive and comprehensive outline. The 18 participants enjoyed a light lunch and then each used the computers to explore the Genealogical data base known as GRANDMA.

The interest and success shown for the workshop has led us to schedule another this October 21st. Tim Janzen has graciously accepted our invitation to speak at Genealogy Workshop 2000.

November 17, 1999 - Abbotsford's Three Tenors

This benefit concert was a wonderful and meaningful evening of music and song. The Three Abbotsford tenors, Wilmer Neufeld, John Thiessen, and Ray Harris delighted the audience with Gospel songs, Kernlieder, and Hymns, as well as some beautiful operatic pieces. They were accompanied by Helen Nickel and Carissa Neufeld on the piano.

The evening was professionally recorded and a quality CD was produced. The Abbotsford Three Tenors graciously gave us all copyrights to the CD. The production costs were underwritten by a generous donation by Joan Muenschler as a loving tribute to her sister Naomi Reimer Duke. Of the 500 CDs produced, 400 have been sold and continue to sell well. Net profit to date is approximately \$8,400.

MEMORIAL WALL

We now have 28 wall plaques on display at our archive office. This is a lasting and visible tribute to people we have chosen to honour. Please come in to see the "wall" and if you have not yet participated in this project, please consider making this a family project. A tax-deductible donation of \$500.00 will buy one plaque and make a lasting contribution to our Endowment Fund. This project was developed at the initiative of board member Lillian Toews.

ZAPOROSHJE PROJECT

Our Society has been a major contributor to the microfilming of some 120,000 pages of documents in the Zaporoshje Regional Archive and the Zaporoshje Communist Party Archive. This work has been done under the supervision of Dr. Harvey Dyck and has required sensitive negotiations and much persistence over a four year period. We are pleased to report that the microfilming is now complete and copies of this material (109 reels) and an English language inventory and users guide will be available this summer. Taken from the richest archive on Mennonites in the Former Soviet Union, the collection, consisting of key documents culled from more than fifty separate collections and tens of thousands of individual files, is a treasure trove on Mennonitica for the Imperial and Society periods. When studied, it will certainly fill in many of the gaps in the Mennonite story and result in major reinterpretations of our history.

RETIRING BOARD MEMBER

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of **Lillian Toews** to our society while on the board. Lillian, who also served on the Events committee, is retiring from the board effective May of this year. John B. Toews has agreed to become a director.

ARCHIVES REPORT

The Archives continue to function as an excellent place for persons researching genealogy, Mennonite history and information related to churches and other organizations in BC. The resource and library books, documents, computer, together with the study and research area provide a great environment for research. Loretta Krueger is our part-time secretary who keeps the financial and other records in good order.

Volunteers

We are blessed with a group of dedicated volunteers who are working at recording and organizing historical materials plus guiding visitors in their search for their genealogical roots. Jean Neufeld, Mary Ann Quiring, Frank Toews, Duane Goertzen, Tim Olson and Hugo Friesen have been involved on a week by week basis. Mary Ann has also put a good deal of work into developing our web site while Agatha Klassen has given many hours to organizing our library of historical books.

Visitors

The number of visitors has tripled over the last year amounting to at least 1500 during 1999. Of course, many of these are repeat visitors but the interest has certainly grown, and also encouraged by the accessibility of our present location.

Acquisitions

Some important additions during 1999 include the following :

- ❖ John B. Toews Collection now includes over 30 boxes of his personal collection.
- ❖ Church files from West Clearbrook Community Church, Vernon Community Church and First United Church, Vancouver
- ❖ Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute (Yarrow) - Annual reports and by-laws.
- ❖ Listing of those who died in Swift & North Colonies, Mexico 1922-86
Compiled by Jakob J. Friesen
- ❖ Inventory of Mennonite Tombstones in former Prussia by a group of Dutch Mennonites, and a Canadian Edwin Wheeler
- ❖ Fuerstenland Baptism Register - 188501926 (microfilm)
- ❖ Numerous other smaller items

Other Activities

Our secretary and volunteers have also been heavily involved in the production of our newsletter, arranging the Heritage Lecture series evenings, Genealogy Workshop and the Three Tenors Concert.

There is a sense of increased support and interest in the work of the Mennonite Historical Society of BC. We are confident that the goal of informing our people about our spiritual and physical heritage is being met at least in some part.

NEWSLETTER

Our newsletter continues to be one of the primary means of maintaining contact with our members. We seek to inform readers of the work of the Society, to keep readers aware of our upcoming events and lectures, to include information on our archives, and to provide some information on the wider Mennonite world.

In a recent questionnaire in the Newsletter the respondents said they read all or most of the newsletter. Most of the replies indicated they wanted articles in the newsletter similar to those we've carried in the past. Respondents also suggested articles on Mennonites in BC, Canada, Russian Mennonites, and South American Mennonites.

We invite suggestions for articles in the Newsletter; We are particularly interested in accounts of life and faith as experienced by you. Please contact the editor with your suggestions: Henry Neufeld, Mennonite Historical Society of BC, 211-2825 Clearbrook Rd, Abbotsford, BC V2T 6S3. Telephone (604) 853-6177.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We would like to thank our growing membership for contributing to the work of our Society. We believe that our work honours God as well as many leaders who preceded us. We would also like to acknowledge our members who made extraordinary donations last year and designated their gifts to special projects. Finally, we would like to thank board member and treasurer Ed Hildebrand and his family for making a substantial donation of shares to our Society in order to launch our Endowment fund. Income from this fund will cover part of our annual operating budget. We are thankful for this generous and timely act and encourage others to consider making substantial donations or providing for future support through their estates.

FINANCIAL

Details of the financial affairs of the Society for 1999 and a budget for 2000 are shown in the statements attached to this report. Overall they indicate that during the past year we managed to hold inflows and outflows more or less in balance and maintain our members equity at the year earlier level.

This was achieved in part by generous support from our members, but could not have been fully accomplished without some extraordinary help. Special mention and thanks are due to the Abbotsford Three Tenors, Ray Harris, Wilmer Neufeld, and John Thiessen who generously donated their time and talents in concert, and Joan Muenschler for her special donation.

Comments:

- a) The apparent increase in our cash position on the Balance Sheet results from the inclusion of our former endowment fund in our general account.
- b) Leasehold improvement charges were a one time cost and are not budgeted for the next year.
- c) Membership costs include a catch-up for 1999 fees that have not been paid.
- d) At this time no large scale events are budgeted for the year 2000.
- e) Budgeted operating expenses include only nominal increases over 1999.
- f) Subsequent event - In January 2000 the Society received a special donation of securities that should yield about ten thousand dollars annual revenue as shown in the budget.

