

THE MENNONITES ON THE WASHITA RIVER: THE
CULMINATION OF FOUR CENTURIES
OF MIGRATIONS

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PREFACE

History has always held a special fascination for me. Possibly this fascination was nurtured until it turned into a love affair, when as a child I listened to my grandparents tell stories of their youth in Russia, and the hardships and trials they endured when they became a part of the Great Migration of 1874. Words such as 'Droschky', 'Ruble', and 'kopeka' were part of their everyday Low German, making their stories sound mysterious and exciting. After entering college, it seemed natural that I pursue this interest by investigating different facets of the lives of my ancestors and forbears. Further study in Russian history has contributed to my understanding of the political and military events that surrounded the Mennonite people in their old home, and thus the reasons for the decisions that were made by them to migrate to America.

Several questions have often been asked concerning the Mennonites. Among them are these: Are they still living by the doctrines and beliefs that motivated their forefathers, and, if it came to a showdown, would they have the courage and spiritual stamina to migrate again, as generations before them have done. In this dissertation I have tried to explore these questions, trying to prove them if possible, or disprove them if that point of view seemed logical. Therefore the history of the Mennonites has been developed from the Anabaptist viewpoint of Menno Simons, and was traced from their very beginnings, through their many migrations, and finally to the way in which they are now living. Since

the time of Menno Simons, the Mennonites have migrated to a different country on an average of once every century. They have now been living in America for exactly a century, and this fact presented the questions asked in this paragraph.

In addition to the questions stated, it seemed good to preserve the memories of those who had experienced at least a part of the hardships and the heartaches of the Migrations by interviewing some of the aged persons who had been a part in the pioneer life on the Washita. Indeed, there are still a few--a very few--who have come directly from the old country. Within a few years these people, with their memories, will have passed from the scene, and their first-hand accounts of experiences will be forever lost to succeeding generations. Interviews with a number of these older persons formed a vital and integral part of several of the chapters of this dissertation.

It is also noteworthy that a number of those interviewed have already been called by death since they graciously volunteered information of the early days and gave their recollections of the ways and hardships of living as pioneers in a new and raw land. This was part of the purpose of writing this manuscript, that these recollections should not be lost to posterity, but preserved in readable form so that others may know and profit by their experiences.

It may be well to point out that this is the story of the Mennonite community as a whole. Thus it concerns many churches, all of them Mennonite, since they have a common background and ancestry, with doctrines and beliefs that are Anabaptist in origin. Some of these doctrines may have changed somewhat during the four centuries that have elapsed, but essentially they are unchanged, and it is not my purpose to explore the

theological implications or differences, if there be any. That I will leave to the theologians and historians of the separate denominations involved. For the present all are regarded as one, even as they work together in the Mennonite Central Committee, in the Mennonite Disaster Service, and in the many other ways in which they work together in mutual cooperation in carrying out their traditional doctrine of doing good to their fellow man.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the help and patience of Dr. Odie Faulk, the chairman of my advisory committee, who has so graciously given me his time and the benefit of his experience in advising and directing the writing of this dissertation. Others who have been of an immeasurable help to me, both in the courses taken, and in personal assistance, are: Dr. Bernard W. Eissenstat, whose incisive comments on previous papers have helped me immensely in the planning and writing of this dissertation, and his vast knowledge of Russian history has been inspirational; Dr. Michael M. Smith, who has given much encouragement, as well as direction in critical writing and thinking, in several seminars; and Dr. William E. Segall, representing the department of Education, who was always available for advice and comment whenever needed. There were many other instructors in the University whose help were invaluable. In Southwestern State College, now Southwestern Oklahoma State University, I owe special thanks to Dr. Harold Massey, dean of the graduate school, whose encouragement led me to continue working towards a doctoral degree, Dr. Melvin Fiegel, my advisor in History, and Dr. Morris Robertson, in the field of Education.

I am also grateful for the curators of the Mennonite archives in Tabor and Bethel Colleges, who gave much-needed help in locating

valuable material, and to those who contributed in other ways, especially in the interviews with the older persons here locally. They gave of their own experiences, really of their lives, and it helped immensely.

Finally, without the help and encouragement of my wife, Helen Siebert Penner, this dissertation might not have been written. She has been a constant help and inspiration, with unfailing loyalty and devotion. All of this has contributed much more than can be imagined, to the successful completion of a work that saw tables and entire rooms filled with papers and books and other materials, yet cheerfully accepting this as necessary for the work that was being done.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Mennonites are a unique people. A people that have kept their identity through four and a half centuries of wandering, through settling in four major areas of the world. That identity consists of social and cultural aspects, in customs and language, but above all, their distinct religious identity. This religious identity, embodied in the original Anabaptist beliefs, has been more or less closely adhered to through the centuries, and today is manifest in a fundamental, literalistic interpretation of the Bible that forms the foundation and cornerstone not only of their religion, but also is carried over into every aspect and facet of their everyday life.

This study is particularly fitting in view of the fact that 1974 is the centennial year of the Mennonites' arrival in America. This event is being celebrated in many Mennonite churches and communities, especially in the Midwest and Western United States and Canada. It was the year 1874 that witnessed the first great wave of emigration from Russia, when in consequence of an imperial ukase ending the special privileges of the German speaking Mennonites, some 18,000 migrated to America.¹ This came about because of the growing stress on Russification and the antagonism towards those who, while living in Russia, enjoyed the liberties of language, religion, education, and cultural advantages of other nations.²

The object of this dissertation is to trace not the history of the Mennonites particularly, but the cultures and powerful convictions that have kept the Mennonites a peculiar people, a "called out" people, or, as they called themselves for many generations, "die Stille im Lande": the quiet people, who for their faith endured persecutions, untold hardships, being uprooted from their land again and again, on an average of once every century, giving up everything they owned if necessary, in order to preserve the freedom of conscience that they conceived as a God-given heritage.

My general thesis is the preservation of the basic tenets and doctrines of Mennonite faith through centuries of pilgrimage in many different countries, under varying conditions, both political and economic. Throughout all of this they seemed to prosper, so that while one generation might feel compelled to abandon all earthly goods and migrate, within two or three generations the thrifty, hard-working people again had regained prosperity and well-being, with beautiful farms, homes, and businesses. Even more so, large churches, schools, and other institutions, as hospitals, homes for the aged, orphanages, and homes for the mentally deficient.

The purpose of this paper is to show:

1. How steadfastly the Mennonites retained their basic beliefs, migrating to another country rather than compromise with the demands of governments.
2. They were able to adapt themselves to any condition, physically, politically, and economically. As a whole, they prospered under the most adverse conditions.
3. They stressed the two institutions--church and school--wherever they settled.
4. In America, they have found a freedom never before consistently experienced, and now, after a hundred years in

this country, for the first time since Menno Simons find themselves in a favorable and prosperous condition, with no reasons to migrate further.

5. The Mennonites have fully adopted the United States as their home, by the complete use of the language and customs of the country. This has never happened before in over four hundred years of their history.

Now, a hundred years after they migrated to America, it seems that the Mennonites have found their Utopia--a country where they have not suffered persecution. Under the Constitution of the United States they have been permitted to live according to their basic tenets of faith, especially those of toleration, non-resistance, and separation of Church and State. In fact, at the present time conscientious objectors have been viewed more favorably over this nation than ever before in history, and many other churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are beginning to support this position.

With this freedom of conscience and belief, the Mennonites have come to the end of their long period of wandering, and seem to be achieving a permanence and stability they have never before experienced. There is no reason at all, as far as can be presently discerned, why they should ever again be forced to take up their goods and migrate to another country. Further evidence of this is seen in the fact that for the first time the younger generation has not learned the language of their forefathers--German in the formal church services, Platt-Deutsch in the home. These have never before been neglected. Yet in America they are free to use either of them as they please.

To acquaint the reader with the background of the Mennonites, it is necessary to trace their history from their beginnings in the Spanish Netherlands, the migration to Prussia, then to the Russian Ukraine, and on to America. This general story is not new, for it has been recorded

by several historians, but it is needed to acquaint the reader with the reasons for the many migrations, and the importance of the permanent home in Oklahoma.

The settlement in southwest Oklahoma and the development of the communities has not been placed in a comprehensive written form so generations now growing to maturity will be able to visualize the hardships and sacrifices of their forefathers. Nor do they realize that this came about because of the deep, confident faith in their God and the religious convictions that have been the strength and mainstay of the Mennonite movement throughout the centuries. But these experiences, at least on the local scene, had to be searched out of the newspapers, the official church organs and publications, the archives of the Mennonite historical libraries, and in the church records of the Conferences, which contain news of the organizations, changes of leadership, size of memberships, and other pertinent data.

A valuable fount of information has been the personal recollections of older individuals who were present, either at the actual settlement, or whose memory recalls incidents that had been related by their parents concerning the early days, the organization of the churches, building of the schools, and the difficulties and hardships of the pioneer life. These personal experiences will soon be erased, as the older people pass from the scene.

As mentioned before, in the year 1974 the Mennonites will have been in this country for a hundred years, and eighty in Oklahoma. For the first time in their long history the national atmosphere is favorable to their beliefs and convictions, especially that of their conscientious objection to war. Consequently a mass migration does not appear to be in store for them, at least not in the foreseeable future.

FOOTNOTES

¹C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 454.

²Jesse D. Clarkson, A History of Russia (New York, 1969), p. 336.

CHAPTER II

ORIGINS AND BASIC DOCTRINES

The Anabaptist Movement

To understand the Mennonites and their unusual beliefs, one must go back to the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in Europe. This is a movement that has been almost completely overlooked by historians and yet formed one of the three major branches of the Reformation. History has concentrated on the Lutheran and Calvinist branches, ignoring the Anabaptist movement which in its varying forms was basic in formulating the doctrines of denominations that number millions of adherents today. Moreover, the Anabaptists originated several of the great doctrines that form the cornerstones of our democracy--toleration of all faiths, freedom of beliefs, and complete separation of Church and State. To be sure, these teachings appeared in different places, in isolated circumstances, and were never accepted into a body of faith until the great leader and spokesman of the Anabaptist Movement, Menno Simons, collated the doctrines, expressing them in an orderly, scholarly manner.¹

Menno, after whom the Mennonites are named, thus became literally the father of the Anabaptist churches of today, with the great Baptist church as the most numerous of those deriving their basic doctrines from the great leader.²

C. Henry Smith, the noted Mennonite historian, advances the theory that every historical movement tends to throw off both conservative and

radical wings, as political parties gravitate to the center, with their right and left wings. The Catholic Church is classified as the extreme conservative right. The Lutherans, retaining much of the ritual and ceremonialism of Catholicism, might be the right center. The Reformed (Calvinist) party, more liberal in worship and doctrine, the left center, while the Anabaptists, following the example of the New Testament church, with a voluntary, free and independent organization entirely separated from the state, are the extreme left of that era.³

The Anabaptist movement had many beginnings. It was not the work of one man, but of a large number. Men in different countries of Europe, through earnest study of the Bible, arrived at similar conclusions concerning various points of doctrine. Some began to teach their findings to eager listeners, gathering groups of followers who in turn spread the Word further.

Great Leaders of the Early Anabaptist Movement

While there were many others, as already noted, who had slowly and independently begun to cultivate Anabaptist ideas, a consideration of the Mennonites begins in Switzerland. The origins have been traced to peasants in the country and artisans in the cities. A second group was the medieval Christian brethren--anticlerical free-thinkers who broke with tradition and distrusted the ritual and creed of institutional religion. They became Anabaptists, so called because they insisted upon adult baptism upon confession of faith, in contrast to the Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist established churches, which practiced infant baptism.⁴ This in itself brought upon the "Wiedertäufer" the odium of the other churches, with the charge of heretical teachings absolutely

contrary to tradition.

In Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli began to be a leader of those suggesting changes in the rituals.⁵ He favored the abolition of the mass, the rejection of celibacy, and the use of the vernacular instead of Latin and simplification of forms of worship. However, when urged by others to take even further measures, he refused and eventually became more conservative, thus losing his influence. He had, however, begun a definite groundswell of movement.

Others began to make their voices heard. In 1524, Wilhelm Reublin, a former priest of Basel, publicly declared himself opposed to the baptism of infants.⁶ Three men who are recognized as forerunners of the Mennonite Anabaptists, Georg Blaurock, Conrad Grebel, and Felix Manz, picked up the challenge. They introduced believers' baptism when Grebel baptized Blaurock, who in turn baptized many others. For this they were arrested and imprisoned, but escaped and became active in preaching to, and baptizing, large numbers of people. It is said that Blaurock, in four years, baptized over one thousand persons.

The Council at Zurich, desperate because of the rapidity with which the movement spread, gave orders that the leaders were to be punished by drowning. Felix Manz was the first to fall under this edict, being thrown into the water of Lake Zurich with his hands tied to his knees to prevent his escape. Blaurock was beaten through the streets and exiled on pain of death at his return. As he and other reformers were driven from their homes, they spread their teachings--over Germany, Austria, Moravia, along the Rhine and Danube rivers, into the Spanish Netherlands. And everywhere they found the same methods of repression--imprisonment, beatings, hangings, being broken on the rack, thrown into rivers, and

burned at the stake with the most horrible tortures the human mind could devise. It mattered not whether in Calvinist, Lutheran, or Catholic territory--the results were the same. Grebel died of a pestilence in 1526. Manz was drowned in 1527. Blaurock was executed in 1529. Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, who was baptized with his entire congregation, is said to have influenced between six and twelve thousand to submit to believers' baptism in a year's time, but was seized in 1527 and burned at the stake the following spring. His labors were in Moravia, and the membership of the believers' communities are said to have reached seventy thousand.⁷ Then the imperial Diet at Speier in 1529 outlawed the entire Anabaptist movement, and the measures taken were most extreme. Michael Sattler, engaged in missionary work in south Germany, was tried at Rotenburg. The sentence was: ". . . delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue, and then throw him upon a wagon, and then tear his body twice with red hot tongs and after he has been brought within the gate he shall be pinched five times in the same manner." Then he was burned at the stake.⁸

Menno Simons

There were many other leaders among the Anabaptists whom one could mention. There was Hans Denk, who was the leader of the group at Augsburg. He was a pious, gentle mystic, said to be like St. Francis of Assissi. Pilgrim Marbeck, a mining engineer of the Tyrol, was another who worked with great devotion for many years. But many of the leaders were not theologians, and those that were could not exercise a great, over-all influence upon the divergent views.

In the Netherlands, two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Phillips became the

leaders of Anabaptists in the region around Leeuwarden. These men were instrumental in baptizing one another, and in recruiting to their cause one Menno Simons, who until the time of his conversion, was a priest in his native village of Witmarsum.

Menno Simons was born in 1496 in the little Frisian village of Witmarsum. Destined early for the priesthood, he became well-educated for his day, especially in Latin and Greek. He also attended a Franciscan monastery, although he was not a member of that order. With all his education, and in spite of preparation for the priesthood, he had never studied the Bible. As a loyal Romanist, he felt that reading Scripture might be dangerous, as it might mislead him.⁹

In 1524 Menno assumed the position of priest at Pingjum, only a mile or two from his birthplace. Rather light heartedly he passed his days, as he later wrote, in "playing, drinking, and all manner of frivolous diversions."¹⁰ But the Anabaptist movement spread to his area, and he began to be deeply interested and concerned, for he saw men and women being tortured and killed for believing that they must be baptized again. The first grave doubts concerning his own faith came as he was handling the elements of the Mass, said to become the actual flesh of Christ. In desperation, as his doubts grew, he began to study the New Testament and became convinced that the bread was not the actual body of Christ.

About this time in the capital of the province, a simple tailor, Sicke Freerks, was beheaded because he had been rebaptized. This raised doubts about infant baptism, and again he studied the Scriptures, finding no justification for his doctrine and many examples for adult baptism. He questioned his superior, an older priest, who confessed that

he knew of no direct Scriptural authority for the practice. Tradition said baptizing infants cleansed from original sin. The Bible said Christ's blood cleansed from all sin. Menno came to the conclusion that the Anabaptists were on firm Biblical grounds.

At this time Simons met Obbe Philips and his brother. At the same time, at Bolsward nearby, a group of three hundred Anabaptists had taken refuge in an old cloister when attacked by a force of soldiers. They were overpowered, and the men put to the sword, including Menno's brother.¹¹ Realizing that they had willingly died for a belief which he himself actually subscribed to, Menno Simons took the final step. In January of 1536 he renounced the Church, laid down his priestly office, and openly cast his lot with the Anabaptists, becoming their leader after his baptism by Obbe Philips. With his position, he also accepted a life as an outlaw with a price on his head.

Smith points out the difference between Simons and both Luther and Calvin. These last two became heads of their respective churches, honored and influential in the councils of state with its protection and power. For Menno and his family there was constant fear, with even those who dared to give food or shelter in danger of their lives.¹²

In 1542 Austrian Emperor Charles V issued an Edict of death for Menno, extending to those who conversed with him. Many died as a result. Simons married, like Luther, and his wife Gertrude shared his life and dangers. They had three children, a son John who died young, and two daughters. The reward for his apprehension was one hundred Gulden, equal to a year's salary of a parish priest, and if the informer were an Anabaptist, full pardon for having been a member of that group.

Menno Simons engaged in theological debates with many other

reformers, but is best known for his voluminous writings, which at first were treatises outlining his doctrines as expounded in the debates. One of his greatest books was The Foundation Book, which set forth his mature religious views. His writings were gathered, and published works enhanced his pre-eminence among Anabaptist leaders and had a dominating influence on later followers.

Possibly the fact that there was a price on his head led to Simmons' wide acceptance as recognized leader of the Anabaptists. He labored in Prussia in 1549, around the North Sea, in Lithuania, Livonia, and Estonia, but his special area of work was in Northern Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands.¹³

Menno died in Wüstenfelde in 1561 at the age of sixty-six, and was buried in his own garden. During the Thirty Years' War the village was destroyed and its site forgotten but tradition pointed out an approximate area, and a monument was erected to his memory in 1902.

Basic Doctrines

The question that most likely would be asked by one unfamiliar with Anabaptist position might well be: "What was so repulsive to Catholics, Lutheran and Calvinists alike, that would cause them to subject the Anabaptists to treatment ordinarily reserved to the most hardened and brutal criminals?" There were a number of doctrines; some were stressed more at some times and in certain areas of the countries, or as the toleration increased or decreased. But to consider at least those that were most important, it would be necessary to classify them as follows:

1. At the beginning this was possibly the most important-- the question of baptism. The other three major Christian religions all believed in and practiced, infant baptism.

Any variation of this was regarded as absolutely heretical, striking at the most sacred doctrine of the Church.

The Anabaptists, on the other hand, through their deep and intense study of the Bible, were convinced that baptism should be administered only to those adults who could make a personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ. This was usually referred to as 'believer's baptism'. Those who opposed, called it Ana-baptism, or again-baptism, since all had been baptized as infants. In Germany they were called 'Wiedertäufer', while in Holland they were referred to as 'Doopsgesinte'. At first those practicing believer's baptism did not wish to be called by the term, since, they averred, the first baptism was in effect meaningless. For them, baptism was defined thus in a 'Confession on the Two Sacraments' published by a group of ministers in 1533, 'an immersion (sprinkling was also accepted) in water, in which the candidate desires and receives for a true sign that he has died to sin, and being buried with Christ, has been thereby raised into a new life, henceforth to walk not in the lusts of the flesh, but in obedience to the will of God.'¹⁴

2. Church Membership.

This was obtained only after baptism upon confession of faith, which of course necessitated rebaptism as an adult. However, this may have been a later development, since in early times there may not have been formal membership. One of the early Mennonite churches was at Crefeld, in northwest Germany, in 1615, and at Hamburg, 1575,¹⁵ although it was years and in some cases centuries before they had meeting houses.¹⁶

3. The Christian Life.

In accord with the Apostolic Church, the Anabaptists stressed absolute purity of living. Far from being evil-doers, they ruled their lives by the highest standards. A Swiss Chronicler wrote: 'Their walk and manner of life was altogether pious, holy, and irreproachable. They avoided costly clothing, despised costly food and drink, ... Their walk and conduct was altogether humble.' Sebastian Francke in his Chronicle said: 'They taught nothing but love, faith, and crucifixion of the flesh, manifesting patience and humility under many sufferings, ... they broke bread with one another with true helpfulness... calling each other 'brother'.' The Anabaptists claimed they must so live as to be an example to all, that they might see their good works. To them, the legitimate test of disciplinship was in the words of Jesus--'By their fruits ye shall know them.' (Matthew 7:20)¹⁷

4. Religious Toleration.

Since the Anabaptists arrived at their beliefs by study of the Bible, reading it constantly in their homes

and in their gatherings, and insisted that each one must decide the Bible message for himself, they also granted the greatest degree of liberty to the individual conscience in spiritual matters.¹⁸ In Europe, in that stage of history, religious toleration was inconceivable. Yet the Anabaptists persecuted or harassed no man. If others disagreed with them, they quietly went their way, never offering physical harm to anyone, simply living their lives quietly in contrast to the general immorality, drunkenness, and carousing going on around them.

5. The Lord's Supper.

Menno Simons taught that the Supper was to be a symbol of remembrance, instituted by Christ himself. It was a memorial of the death of our Lord, but, even more, a time of self-examination for the individual Christian.¹⁹ It also repudiated the Mass and the doctrine of Transubstantiation, thus again regarded as deepest heresy by the Catholic Church.

6. Separation of Church and State.

Since Church and State were linked by the baptism of infants, and the Catholic claim of Papal Supremacy with the State as the civil authority to carry out church directives, the Anabaptists insisted that they were citizens of a heavenly State, and that the directives of the Bible, hence of God, took precedence over any earthly ruler. However, they acknowledged that governments were ordained of God. (Romans 13:1-7) Therefore they became most loyal citizens, paid their taxes without dissent, and were absolutely law-abiding, unless the State tried to interfere in matters of religion or conscience.

7. Freedom of Will.

The Anabaptists renounced the idea of predestination; even if a man is reborn, opportunities are present to be used, and if they are not used the man will perish.²⁰ Abraham P. Toews also stated that in Mennonite Ethics, the free will of man is fundamental.²¹

8. Non-Resistance.

This doctrine, held by the Anabaptists, is today the one great teaching that sets apart the Mennonites from other Anabaptist groups, and has also become the great prime mover in the many migrations. Newman traced this doctrine to the Waldenses,²² but Smith went to some lengths to point out that the Waldenses had nearly disappeared when the Anabaptist movement became prominent. He stated: 'The two (beliefs) were alike because they followed the same model...a simple, literal following of the Bible.'²³

Whatever the origins, the doctrine forbade the Anabaptist Christian to carry any kind of arms, whether in

the private pursuit of their daily business or as part of the military of a nation. Douglas Hale said of this, '...principle of non-resistance....the stubborn refusal to bear arms in the service of the state. Fidelity to this principle has driven pious Mennonites from their tidy homes and productive fields for centuries. It has turned them into a migratory people never quite at home in a world of violence and war.'²⁴

Not only was there a refusal to bear arms or engage in active warfare, but also for the Mennonites it meant going a step farther, by not resisting violence itself. This is literally the Biblical injunction to 'turn the other cheek.' When one was attacked, he raised no defense. This has been literally carried out, in that when arrested or beaten or tortured, they struck not one blow in self-defense.

9. The Oath.

Since Christ had categorically stated, 'Swear not at all...' (Matthew 5:34), this was taken literally. A simple yes or no would suffice. If any other words were to be used, a Christian could quote Scripture, but must under no circumstances swear.²⁵ This is still upheld, in that many Mennonites in a court of law will affirm, but refuse to swear to an oath.

10. Missionary Enterprise and Christian Compassion.

Beginning with the Anabaptists, who were constantly active in spreading their teachings, Missionary enterprise was a hallmark of the Mennonites, even to today. Although the total number of Mennonites in the United States today is possibly around 300,000, one of the smallest denominations, they support hundreds of missionaries with mission budgets totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars, possibly several millions per year.

In the area of Christian compassion, the Mennonites, following the lead of the early Anabaptists, continue to show compassion. In the Martyr's Mirror, a book giving many accounts of the sufferings and death of the Anabaptists, is a striking illustration of this compassion. In the year 1569, a man named Dirk Willems was trying to escape arrest by fleeing over a frozen stream. The officer, following closely, broke through and was about to lose his life. Willems turned and rescued the man, was arrested as soon as the officer was safely on land, and was tortured and executed. Yet he had gladly offered his own life and well being to save his enemy.²⁶

Today the Mennonites, through their Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.), a committee composed of representatives of all of the sixteen or seventeen branches of Mennonites, carry on relief work 'In the Name of Christ,' which has amounted to millions of dollars. An outgrowth of this has been their PAX work (Peace) which was

organized just after World War II, to send young volunteers into the wartorn areas of Europe for relief and rehabilitation work. John F. Kennedy possibly modeled the Peace Corps of the U. S. government after these PAX units.

Even more, the Mennonites have for centuries supported hospitals, mental institutions, homes for the aged, and in past years, orphanages, mostly without government aid of any form, completely supported by churches and communities. Another important institution is the school. It has formed an important part of their way of life to support educational facilities that enable them to provide the elements of learning to their young people in keeping with their tradition and heritages, to keep alive that sense of being different-separated from the world.

Compassion and Charity

The Mennonites have been known for their compassion and charitable deeds throughout their history. They cared for their own, their poor and their old. Whenever individuals or groups came into financial difficulties through misfortune or persecution or by reason of law contrary to their beliefs, all would contribute to relieve their brethren. Horsch stated that they were known for their relief work even in early periods of their history. Mennonites had contributed 7,000 pounds, Holland money, to aid the Waldensians. In 1689 they contributed 100,000 guilders to aid the Swiss Brethren and in 1709-1736 over 270,000 guilders to relief in foreign countries.²⁷

Hartzler stated that Mennonites always have had a positive doctrine of doing good.²⁸ Another writer stated that this comes from an intense desire to perfect God's kingdom on earth--the Kingdom here and now--where its citizens reach out to be of assistance to others. This also was based upon their high regard for the worth of an individual and a disregard for worldly power and individual position.²⁹

All different branches of the Mennonites have been known for this compassion and for taking care of their own. This was continued

throughout their history down to the present time. Their efforts in this aspect of their religion will be noted in connection with the different areas of their migrations. An example is given in the writings of a non-Mennonite of Crefeld, a city mentioned earlier, who stated "...they were exceptionally generous and hospitable, helping every worthy cause both within and without their congregations."³⁰ Later, in the same city, a statue was erected to the honor of a member of the de Graif family because of his liberal contributions to the charitable institutions of the city.

In the early years of this century, the same church was noted as having converted an orphan's home, due to lack of applicants, into an Old People's Home, thus continuing the long record of charity and compassion. Everywhere the Mennonites were committed to the belief that charity began at home, and never permitted any of their people to become a charge upon society. By the side of each church there was always a home for the aged and for homeless children, and a hospital for the sick. At times if the congregations were small, several would join together to carry out these functions. It was these institutions that were perpetuated in the many places Mennonites settled during the centuries of their wandering.³¹ In fact, the deacons of the churches were called "Armendiener" (those who serve the poor).³²

The First Document of Consolidation³³

Even before Menno Simons became a part of the movement, a number of the leaders of the scattered Anabaptist groups came together in the village of Schleithem in February of 1527. It is said they came together in disagreement and confusion, but during the meeting the Holy

Spirit led them to agreement and common conviction.

First, they disavowed the actions of fanatics who used their Christian freedom for licentiousness and moral excesses. Then they outlined their agreement on the understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Further, they defined the principle of separation from the world, what God expected of them as believers. Other definitions centered on the question of carrying weapons and of the use of oath. The importance of this lies in the fact that the great principles of the Anabaptist movement were beginning to be clearly enunciated--that their thinking was beginning to crystallize and come to a focal point instead of "Degenerating into a mere flurry of radical enthusiasm".

Quoting Dyck, the meeting had this effect:

On the level of doctrine, the position defined here was simple, Biblical, complete, and consistent enough that a simple Christian could understand it, testify to it, and suffer for it. The seven articles of agreement are sometimes referred to as the Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527), the first such confession among the Anabaptists. It is closer to the intention of those who were present, however, to call it a brotherly understanding, as they themselves did.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History (Chicago, 1948, Vol. II), p. 178.

² William Stevenson, The Story of the Reformation (Richmond, Virginia, 1959), p. 60.

³ C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 10.

⁴ Stevenson, Reformation, p. 52.

⁵ Smith, Story, p. 11.

⁶ Newman, Manual, p. 170.

⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

⁸ Smith, Story, p. 37.

⁹ John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1942), p. 185.

¹⁰ Menno Simmons, "Elements of the True Christian Faith," quoted by David V. Wiebe in They Seek a Country (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959), p. 18.

¹¹ Horsch, Mennonites, p. 190.

¹² Smith, Story, p. 100.

¹³ Horsch, Mennonites, p. 197.

¹⁴ Newman, Manual, p. 167.

¹⁵ Horsch, Mennonites, p. 227.

¹⁶ Smith, Story, p. 28.

¹⁷ Stevenson, Reformation, p. 51.

¹⁸ Smith, Story, p. 29.

¹⁹ A. H. Unruh, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde (Winnipeg, Canada, 1955), p. 24.

- ²⁰Stevenson, Reformation, p. 62.
- ²¹Abraham P. Toews, The Problem of Mennonite Ethics (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1963), p. 88.
- ²²Newman, Manual, p. 178.
- ²³Smith, Story, p. 25.
- ²⁴Douglas Hale, "From Central Asia to America," Mennonite Life (Newton, Kansas, July, 1970), Vol. XXV, No. 3, p. 133.
- ²⁵Unruh, Geschichte, p. 27.
- ²⁶Van Braght, Martyr's Mirror, Condensed version, edited by Cornelius Krahn as Martyr's Mirror for our Day (North Newton, Kansas, 1967), p. 28.
- ²⁷Horsch, Mennonites, p. 242.
- ²⁸J. E. Hartzler, Education Among the Mennonites of America (Danvers, Illinois, 1925), p. 43.
- ²⁹Toews, Ethics, p. 141.
- ³⁰Smith, Story, p. 266.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 280.
- ³²Ibid., p. 282.
- ³³Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), pp. 40-42.

CHAPTER III

BEGINNING THE MAJOR MIGRATIONS

As a result of persecution in Holland, the first of the major migrations of the Mennonites began to take place. This was a scattered migration without a central purpose or leader, dictated by unusually heavy persecutions. One of these was the persecution under Charles V and his son Philip II. As the Netherlands were under Spanish domination, this ushered in the terror and torture of the Inquisition under the direction of the Duke of Alva. An estimated 18,000 died for their faith in six years.¹ The "Martyr's Mirror" of Van Braght listed detailed accounts of 803 martyrs. No wonder those remaining, who could not retaliate, began to scatter to other areas.

There were three major migrations in the centuries that have occurred since Menno Simmons died in 1559. The first was from Holland to Prussia, the second from Prussia to Russia, and the third from Russia to America. These migrations will be discussed in their proper order.

Lesser Migrations

England

Before taking up the major migrations, it is well to touch upon several lesser groups and the effect they had upon the world. The first of these groups to be considered is the rather large number that migrated to England, particularly during Alva's "reign of terror" in

Belgium, 1567-1573, when thousands sought safety under Queen Elizabeth. The safety they sought eluded them, however, for Elizabeth issued edicts against all Anabaptists in 1560 and 1568. However, in 1580 tolerance became greater, and many groups began to organize, with many of their major points of doctrine similar to that of the Anabaptists. Many are said to have had close relations with the Dutch Mennonites.²

This relationship in turn led many English believers to migrate to Holland. An example was John Smyth, who led a group to Amsterdam, and another was John Robinson of Leiden. Smyth baptized himself and, returning to England, became the founder of the modern Baptist churches.³ These in turn have spread and multiplied until there are some 20,000,000 Baptists in America alone.

Dyck continues, "Of these congregations it is said, 'To the Smyth congregation, which accepted adult baptism as a result of contact with Dutch Mennonites, the General Baptists owe their origin...A number of members of Robinson's church were among the Pilgrim Fathers when they sailed for the New World in 1620.'"

A third English group greatly influenced by Mennonite doctrine was the Quakers, who arose in 1644 under the leadership of George Fox; he and others traveled among the Mennonites in the Netherlands and Germany.⁴ One Mennonite doctrine that is outstanding in the Quaker Church is non-resistance, which was not adopted by the Baptists.

America

While this is not ordinarily included in the great migrations, which were eastward, Mennonites settled in America, the first evidently under the direction of Cornelis Pieter Plockhoy of Zeirik Zee. The

settlement was made in 1659 in the Dutch colony of New Netherlands. Another group settled on the Delaware River, at Germantown, in 1683.

Later, many came to America, some as exiles, others to seek freedom. William Penn desired to have these Mennonites settle on his lands. One of the better-known groups in Pennsylvania and other states are the Amish Mennonites, followers of Jacob Amman, a native (or at least a resident) of Alsace.

Migration to Prussia

Even during the time of Menno Simons, there were several large congregations in Prussia, since Menno is said to have labored among them in 1549. The basis for these settlements is found in the character of the land. On the Vistula Delta region and eastward on the Baltic coast, the terrain was low-lying, swampy, watersoaked, and overgrown with brush. In 1562 two noblemen, Simon and Hans von Loysen, of Tiegenshof, invited some of the Dutch Mennonites to settle on their waste lands. They were promised the rights of religious freedom, and given long leases upon the lands, from twenty to forty years, with easy terms. Eventually the Mennonites came into complete possession of the lands, spreading across the Vistula and Nogat deltas. By 1608 the Bishop of Culm complained that the whole area was overrun by Mennonites.⁵

In 1711 King Frederick of Prussia urgently invited a group of Swiss exiles to settle near Tilsit and, by the close of the century, emigrants had proceeded up the river and several congregations were in existence around Warsaw.

In East Prussia they drained vast areas of swampland, transforming it into a prosperous agricultural region.⁶ After all, swamps, when the

excess water is controlled, form some of the most fertile soils to be found anywhere. With good soil and farming practices, the thrifty, hard-working Dutch people became prosperous and some comparatively wealthy.⁷

This was a gradual movement, covering the better part of two centuries. At times the established church, Lutheran in Prussia, would try to oppress the Mennonites,⁸ but there were no major persecutions such as they had endured in the Netherlands and western Germany. Then, too, the rulers saw that these people were law-abiding, quiet, hardworking citizens who were an asset to any country, and thus became unwilling to do anything to deprive their kingdoms of productive, peaceful farmers and craftsmen. In 1676 the Prince of Pomerellen attempted to have the Landtag exile the Mennonites. The deputy from Marienburg said, "One can easily tell whether a lazy, drunken farmer tills the soil, or a sober, industrious Mennonite; rather invite more of them than to drive out those already here."

An example of the heights to which some of the Mennonites eventually attained was found in the city of Grefeld. The von der Leyens family established a silk and textile mill, and the business was still in operation at the time Smith wrote his account (1941). One member of the family attained the rank of general in World War I. Earlier, one had been knighted, while others moved to Brazil and became wealthy coffee planters.⁹ In the von Beckrath family, Herman became a member of the Prussian Landtag in 1847, remaining a Mennonite although he no longer upheld the doctrine of non-resistance. For a short while he was minister of finance and later a recognized leader of the Liberal Party.¹⁰

In Prussia, voting rights were based on tax-paying ability. The wealthy citizens paid one-third of the taxes, and were entitled to elect a third of the representatives to the Landtag. The middle income group was entitled to elect another third, while the great mass of people, who paid few taxes, elected another third. Mennonites were almost invariably in the upper group.¹¹

Yet with their wealth and power, the Mennonites in general retained the simplicity of faith that had characterized them from the beginning, although, as noted in the life of one of the von der Leyens and the von Bekkraths, in later years the doctrine of non-resistance and avoidance of military duty was simply abandoned. This, however, came largely as a result of the pressures that led to the next great migration. Those who succumbed to the pressure and remained, chose their wealth and social, as well as political, power rather than retain all of the teachings and doctrines of their forbears. Gradually the old restrictions were discarded, until in later years there were few distinctives. In 1867 universal military service was adopted in all of the North German Confederation, and the Mennonites who remained made no serious attempt to stay out of the military.

Most rulers in the years in Prussia and Poland were reasonably well-disposed towards their Mennonite subjects. Sometimes government officials would blackmail the church for large amounts of money, which would be paid under threat of military force. An example was Willibald von Haxberg, minister to the Polish King Wladislav IV, who secured authorization from the king to force payment of upwards of fifty thousand thaler from the Mennonites. They paid, but received another charter guaranteeing exemption from such payments in the future.¹²

Military Exemption

Most of the time military exemption was included in the charters issued to the new settlers, or as an inducement for them to settle. In times of war this was taken care of in various ways; sometimes by a special exemption tax, or, as in the siege of Danzig by the Swedes in 1734, the Mennonites promised to fight the fires caused by incendiary shells, thus performing a non-combatant service.¹³

In the mid-eighteenth century, however, the Polish dismemberment caused the Mennonite people to come under the rule of the Prussian Hohenzollern kings, who were determined to conscript all suitable young men into their armies.¹⁴ As early as 1723, Frederick William I had a special group of soldiers in his Potsdam Guards. These were especially chosen for their great height and size. When his recruiters noticed a number of tall, muscular Mennonites, they dragged them by force into Potsdam. The elders of the church reminded the king of their charter, and he, very unwillingly, released the men.

When Frederick the Great, 1740-1786, came to the throne, he united the different areas inhabited by the Mennonites into one political entity. He granted the Mennonites great religious freedom. This included the delta region. When the delta region came under his jurisdiction in 1772, they were well pleased with the change. They sent him a gift from their farms: "Two oxen, four hundred pounds of butter, twenty cakes of cheese, and a large assortment of chickens and ducks."¹⁵ But with the gift they also presented a petition for the renewal of their liberties, including exemption from military service. This was more than he was willing to give. In the other areas of Prussia the Mennonites had been more scattered, but the delta region was almost solidly peopled by them.

Frederick was encountering resistance to his constant demands for more soldiers, even among the native people, and the request for complete exemption was unpopular with him.¹⁶

Eventually a compromise was worked out. The Mennonites got their exemption upon payment of an annual sum of five thousand thaler for the support of a military academy. Because the state church was dependent upon the taxes from its constituents' lands, and the Mennonites did not pay these taxes, the rapidly increasing holdings of the Mennonites were reducing the amount of money the church was receiving. A law thus was passed in 1774 limiting the purchase of land by the Mennonites, and the church authorities set about enforcing the law. In 1789, Frederick's successor issued an edict that no more lands could be purchased by Mennonites, and no prospective settler could be admitted unless he had at least two thousand thaler. In mixed marriages, (Mennonite and non-Mennonite) all children must become members of the state church and forfeit the special privileges of the Mennonites.¹⁷

At this time, according to Smith, there were twelve thousand Mennonites in the Vistula and Nogat delta areas alone, and many more in other areas. The free city of Danzig, where a large group lived, did not come under the Prussian kingdom until 1793. When this occurred, they were assessed a sales tax of six percent if they purchased property, and also required to pay six hundred thaler annually towards the support of the military academy at Culm.

At this time, when the Mennonites felt themselves hemmed in by restrictive edits and laws, when they could no longer purchase land or property for their growing numbers and taxes were exorbitant, especially for the support of the military academy, which was contrary to their

non-resistant beliefs, there came what they considered a call from God, giving them a way out of their difficulties and dilemmas.

In 1786 a royal summons from Empress Catherine II of Russia was presented to the Mennonites, through Representative George von Trappe, a colonization agent of German extraction, telling them that land was available in Russia. Whoever would migrate there should present himself to the Russian Land Office. His expenses would be paid by the Russian government.¹⁸ The inducements offered were generous: free lands, free transportation, and free support until they were able to become established in their own homes. Taxes were remitted for some years, and they would have complete religious freedom, including exemption from military service and the freedom to have educational institutions of their choice.

The people were impressed, and two men were sent to investigate, to "spy out the promised land" as it were. Johan Hoepfner and Jacob Bartsch left Prussia in 1786. They sailed to Riga, crossed over to the Dnieper, and went down that river to Dubrowna in late November. They later met Prince Potemkin and were presented to Catherine herself, who was inspecting her territories. After selecting an area near where the Dnieper flows into the Black Sea, they started back for Prussia by way of St. Petersburg, where they were assured that all the promises and inducements would be honored.¹⁹

Von Trappe returned to Prussia with Hoepfner and Bartsch, and renewed his efforts to gain settlers. The mayor of Danzig-Pelegan tried to prevent the Mennonites from leaving, but more and more families applied for exit permits. At first only the poorer families applied, and they received the permits. This meant that at first not many who were

qualified to be leaders, teachers, or ministers would be among the emigrants, passports being denied to those with property. By the fall of 1788, two hundred and twenty-eight families were at Dubrowna. This was the first wave of the great migration to Russia.²⁰

The Language and Education

The basic language of the Mennonites for most of the nearly two centuries in Prussia and Poland continued to be Dutch. In fact, those in the northwestern part of Germany retained it until into the nineteenth century, with church services conducted in that language. Because their ministers were trained in the Amsterdam seminary, it was natural that they would cling to what they regarded as their mother tongue. Smith said that in some western areas the change (at Emden) to German was not made until 1889.²¹

However, evidently the transition was made earlier in the Prussian-Polish areas. Wiebe identified the time at 1780 to 1785, about the time when the first agitations began which led to large-scale migration to Russia. It was said that when a Mennonite bishop first preached a sermon in High-German, the whole church was upset.²² Otherwise, the Mennonites clung to their Low German, or Dutch dialect, as the language of the home. Most likely it also was the language of the schools that were operated by the people, according to the privileges that had been granted to the Mennonites, as King August II had specified in 1737 that they could:

1. Freely practice their religion.
2. Hold religious services in houses and other buildings.
3. Have their own schools and teachers.
4. Baptize their own young.²³

These stipulations were to set a pattern that would be observed

throughout the migrations that were to come. The language change from Low-German to High-German, as used in the churches, was to be the only change for several more centuries, until the great pressure to change to the English language in America in the present century. In Poland the Mennonites seem never to have used that language, retaining the Low-German until they went into the use of the High-German.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹David V. Wiebe, Grace Meadow (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1967), p. 10.
- ²Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 92.
- ³William Stevenson, The Story of the Reformation (Richmond, Virginia, 1959), p. 64.
- ⁴C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 198.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 270.
- ⁶John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1950), p. 17.
- ⁷Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1973), p. 5.
- ⁸Smith, Story, p. 263.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 264.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 265.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 275.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 276.
- ¹⁴Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, p. 286.
- ¹⁵Smith, Story, p. 286.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 287.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 289.
- ¹⁸Bekker, Origin, p. 8.
- ¹⁹Smith, Story, p. 385.
- ²⁰Bekker, Origin, p. 9.

²¹Smith, Story, p. 267.

²²David V. Wiebe, They Seek a Country (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959),
p. 19.

²³John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1942),
p. 230.

CHAPTER IV

MIGRATION TO RUSSIA, PRIVILEGES GIVEN, AND REVOKED

German peoples were not newcomers, nor unknown, in Russia. There seem to have been periods of close cooperation between the Russian government and Germanic peoples. Even in the beginning of the Reformation, during the time of Ivan the Terrible (1533-1584), many German technicians, military officers, craftsmen, merchants, and scholars were invited to Russia to practice their varied skills. Before this, Ivan III had invited German doctors to his country,¹ a practice which Ivan IV continued, for he was said to be particularly fond of practitioners of that nationality.²

Many of the later Czars were greatly influenced by German culture and technology, especially by German and Prussian military expertise, and often they married Prussian princesses, of whom Peter III and Catherine were the most noted examples. Nicholas I also married a Prussian princess. However, "Peter (I) was opening, while Nicholas I was shutting windows to the West."³

During the time of Ivan the Terrible, St. Michael's, the first Evangelical Church in Moscow, was built in 1576, and later the Church of Saints Peter and Paul. Secondary schools were built, enrolling both boys and girls, which eventually served up to 1,200 students and were regarded as providing the best education to be had in Russia.⁴

Germans, especially those in agricultural areas, were inclined to

migrate to Russia because of:

1. Political and religious oppression at home by foreign powers, princes, and governments.
2. Military and feudal service in the homeland and for foreign powers as hired mercenaries. In Russia there was freedom from military service 'for eternal time.'
3. Economic distress, crop failures, hungry years, scarcity of land, tax burdens. In Russia they could have land in almost unlimited quantities, with possibilities of land purchase and freedom from taxation.
4. Harsh and often unjust administration at home, while in Russia they were promised self-administration.
5. Introduction of innovations in church and schools in Germany, but in Russia complete freedom in the sphere of religion.⁵

However, the experiences of the earlier tsars were with Germans and Prussians in general. They also had previous acquaintance with the Mennonites. When Peter the Great had gone to Holland to learn the trade of shipbuilding, he lived in the city of Zaardam in the home of a Mennonite family, and is reported to have said later that he learned there to appreciate these people. When he left Holland, he took along a Mennonite physician as his personal doctor. Perhaps he felt more secure with a man who paid no attention to political affairs. His name was Nicholas Bidloo, and he later became the director of the Czar's first school of medicine.⁶

In 1745 Prince Peter, nephew and heir of Empress Elizabeth, who in turn was a daughter of Peter the Great, was married to a Prussian princess, Sophia-Augusta-Frederika of Anhalt-Zerbst. She was rebaptized into the Russian Orthodox Church, which she wholeheartedly accepted, and renamed Catherine. After the death of Elizabeth, Peter became the ruler, but his arbitrary and rough methods and edicts soon alienated many of the nobles and prelates, while he threatened Catherine with

seclusion in a monastery. At this, Catherine, with the assistance of some officers of the Guard, seized power and had herself crowned empress. A few days later Peter died, supposedly in a brawl, but more likely as the result of an attack by Guards officers.⁷

In 1770 Turkey declared war on Russia. The Russian fleet and army both won victories, but as a result of the Pugachev Revolt, so many domestic difficulties were encountered that Catherine concluded a compromise peace in which she gave up a large extent of territory in the Aegean and the trans-Danubian provinces of Wallachia and Moldavia, and Austria annexed Bukovina. On the other hand, Catherine acquired the whole northern shoreline of the Black Sea, except for the Crimea, which, however, was detached from Turkish control.⁸ In 1782, by the Treaty of Jassy, the Crimea was brought under Russian domination.⁹

This new territory had few inhabitants except wild Cossacks who had to be driven away, and some commerce began to be built. Catherine, however, had an eye to the vast expanse of plains, or steppes, with rich deep soil waiting for the plow. Being well-informed of conditions in neighboring countries, she apparently had heard that the Mennonites were dissatisfied in Prussia, and, because she herself had spent her childhood in Prussia, evidently had become acquainted with the thrifty Dutch farmers who had so successfully conquered the swamps of the Vistula deltas. Now, needing settlers to transform the vast steppes into farmland that would be productive and, even more, who might teach the Russian peasants better methods of agriculture, she sent Baron von Trappe, a noted Russian army officer, as her personal representative to the Mennonites to make them a liberal offer to migrate to South Russia.¹⁰

To the Mennonites, who felt hemmed in and increasingly restricted

in Prussia, this offer came as though God himself was showing them a way out of their dilemma. One writer remarked about this event thus: "Aber seht, auch hier hatte der Herr für sie gesorgt, Es erfüllte sich Sein Wort: 'Noch ehe sie rufen antworte ich schon, und während sie noch reden, erhöere ich schon'. Ja, im Süden Ruzlands lag damals meilenweit die fruchtbaren Steppe, die nicht bearbeitet wurde."¹¹

Ewert continued with a poem, written by an unknown Mennonite who was trying to picture the situation in which the Mennonites found themselves:

Bald zogen sie entschlossen fort
Nach Ruzlands weiten Steppen
Wo sie an dem bestimmten Ort
Fruchtbaren Boden treffen.
Doch auf dem meilenweiten Raum
Wahr durchaus nichts, kein Strauch kein Baum;
Setzt sich die Karavane.

Es ist ihr Ziel, sie Müssen da
Sich einzurichten trachten.
Man kauft Bauholz in Odessa,
Das die Tschumaken brachten.
Baut Häuser dann, bestellt das Feld,
Denn das ist frei zum bauen, -- gelt;
Und nach der Arbeit Mühen
Können' man ins Heim einziehen.

Der Anfang war besonders schwer,
Als sie das Land betreten.
Weil kein brennholz zu schaffen war'.
Mussten sie Dünger kneten.
Das ist ihr Brennmaterial;
Den Frauen war das sehr fatal,
Allein, was ist zu machen?
Sie mussten Speise kochen.¹²

The Mennonites received Catherine's invitation with joy, at least most of them. The conditions offered were such as they had never enjoyed before.¹³ As this seemed too good to be true, they had two men, Johann Hoepfner and Jacob Bartsch, go to Russia, at Russian expense, to investigate the possibilities of settlement and see if the offer was

indeed as good as it seemed.

In the summer of 1786 the two set out on the long and perilous journey. They sailed to Riga, crossed over to the Dnieper, reaching a station called Dubrowna in November. They sailed down the river, meeting Potemkin at Krementschug. The following May they were presented to Catherine herself, who was on an inspection tour of her new territories. This was part of the tour in which Potemkin, her current favorite, had facades of villages constructed along the riverbanks, to simulate prosperous towns, then had them moved overnight to the next stopping place.¹⁴ Some of the Mennonites later recalled seeing the false fronts of the villages, propped up, without any substance and deserted, as they journeyed down the river.

The two men of the deputation chose a rich plain along the Dnieper, not far from where it flowed into the Black Sea, near Berislav. This was a rich alluvial plain, similar to the Vistula delta region. They started back home, but went by way of St. Petersburg where they met a number of government officials, including Crown Prince Paul, the son of Catherine. They kissed his hand, and he kissed them on the cheek. They also secured official confirmation of the promises made to the Mennonites by von Trappe, which had seemed almost like fairy tales to them, but were now to become reality.¹⁵ The government had high hopes for the settlers that were to come. There already were settlements of Swedes and Germans in some of the areas, but these were not successful for they came from a land where the soil, climate, and vegetation were different, and they simply had not yet mastered the art of farming under the conditions that were experienced in this area.¹⁶ The Mennonites had shown themselves resourceful and adaptable. Most likely they would succeed in

turning the vast area into what later became the bread basket of the Empire.

Late in 1787 Hoepfner and Bartsch returned to Danzig, without any other major incident except that Bartsch had frozen his toes in the winter, and Hoepfner had broken a leg, delaying their return by several months.¹⁷

Accompanied by von Trappe, the two voyagers gave thrilling accounts of their findings, and with the glowing messages ringing in their ears the harried Mennonites, oppressed by the emperor, taxed as much as five or six times as heavily as other citizens, completely forbidden to buy lands or houses for their growing families, and with ever greater pressures by the militaristic government to force them to drop their cherished doctrine of non-resistance and accept military service, were ready to depart immediately. In fact, four families had already left for Riga before the two deputies returned.¹⁸

Now the Danzig officials began to stir themselves. Although they had severely restricted and taxed the Mennonites, they were appalled at the thought of losing so many of their most industrious and prosperous farmers and laborers. They therefore refused to issue passports, or emigration permits. The church elders appealed to them personally, and after a time the authorities issued passports, but only to the poorer people, those whose resources were 4,000 Florine or less (\$600).¹⁹ Evidently they felt that not much capital would leave the country. Even with these restrictions, many began to make preparations to leave.

In March of 1788 the first eight families left Danzig, accompanied by Hoepfner. Five weeks later they reached Riga, where they rested for a month. Another six weeks brought them to Dubrowna, but Russia and

Turkey again were at war, so they had to remain there over the winter. By spring there were 228 families in the camp.

The Conditions, or the Privilegium

Before taking up the entrance to the areas in Russia, it may be well to take a look at the conditions and promises that had been extended to the Mennonites by the Russian government. These were expressly given by Catherine, through her representative George von Trappe. As offered to them in Danzig, these were:

1. Each family was to receive sixty-five dessiatine of land free. (Sometimes spelled desjatin--2.7 acres, thus approximately 175.5 acres.)
(Note: Some authorities give the figure at 2.7 acres. Bekker's translated writing states it at 2.8.)
2. Free use of crown forests.
3. Free transportation to Russia.
4. A loan of 500 rubles and support money of ten kopecks per person per day until the first harvest.
5. Absolute religious freedom and exemption from military service.
6. Autonomous local government, except for capital crimes.²⁰

There were a few more concessions, but these are sufficient to show the tremendous incentives used to cause the Mennonites to move to an untried land.

Not long after their arrival in Russia, Catherine died suddenly in November of 1796. Having had previous experiences that changes in rulers often brought changes in the privileges they had been promised and enjoyed, the new settlers became uneasy about the prospects for their future. They therefore sent a delegation of two men, Epp and Willms, to St. Petersburg to procure a written assurance from the new Czar, Paul I.

For two years they had to wait, but finally secured the charter they sought, returning to the colonies in October of 1800 with a beautiful parchment printed in gold letters and bearing the monarchical seal. This was called the "Privilegium". It was carefully preserved in a special vault, together with other important papers and documents that needed safe-keeping and remained until the Revolution.²¹ When the Bolsheviks swept through the area, the parchment and papers were destroyed--in just what way seems unclear. Some authorities say they were used for packing other articles, some that they were used for kindling fires. Whatever the fate of the documents, they evidently were deliberately destroyed to eliminate all vestiges of autocratic control.

Since this Privilegium was the charter which enumerated the special privileges of the Mennonites, it may be useful to reproduce it in its entirety as written in 1890 by Jacob P. Bekker, one of the eighteen founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church, (Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde), which broke away from the original or so called "Kirchliche" or organization. Written thus in an early time when the original document was still extant most likely it was accurately reproduced, and was stated thus:

As by the benevolent grace of God, Paul I, ruler of all Russians....etc. (Be it declared that): Regarding the original charter of our most gracious Privilegium, upon the petition received from the Mennonites settled in the new Russian provinces according to the testimony of their inspectors, and, because of their outstanding industry and their commendable way of life which serves as a model for other nearby colonists and thereby deserves our particular attention, we have hereby not only affirmed the previously granted rights and privileges, but also, to encourage them even more in their diligence and concern for agriculture, graciously stand ready to bestow upon them additional rights:

First: We reaffirm to them and their descendants the religious freedom promised them by virtue of which they may adhere to their doctrines of faith and perform their religious practices without hindrance. We also most graciously

grant that if occasion should require them to testify in court, their spoken 'yes' or 'no' instead of an oath shall be considered legal.

Second. Concerning the 65 desjatin (1 d = 2.8 acres) of arable land designated for each family, we guarantee to them and their descendants the right of incontestable and perpetual possession restricted, however, to the extent that no one, no matter what the pretext, shall relinquish, sell, or legally transfer even the smallest part thereof to any foreigner without the express permission of the constituted authorities.

Third. To those Mennonites already settled in Russia as well as to those who, in the future, may desire to settle permanently within our domain, we grant the right to establish factories or pursue other useful occupations not only in their own districts but also in the cities of the country. They may also join or form guilds and corporations, and may freely sell their products subject, however, to the respective laws of the land.

Fourth. In accordance with their property rights we permit the Mennonites the enjoyment and benefits of all the incidental rights and products of their land such as the right to fish, to brew beer, and distill liquor to supply their own needs and for retail sale in a limited way on their own landed property.

Fifth. We forbid all outsiders to construct beer and liquor taverns in Mennonite districts or to lease facilities for the purpose of selling liquor or the operation of taverns without the consent of the Mennonites.

Sixth. We affirm our most gracious guarantee that none of the Mennonites already settled as well as those who may in the future choose to settle in our domain, nor their children, nor their descendants, shall at any time be forced to serve in war or civil service, unless they volunteer.

Seventh. We absolve all villages and residences in the Mennonite settlements of every kind of military quartering obligations (except when detachments should pass through, in which case the procedure shall be according to the established method of quartering). The same shall apply to their horses and wagons and to the government employees. But, in turn, the Mennonites are obligated to maintain the bridges, overpasses, and roads and to keep them in good repair in their entire districts.

Eighth. We most graciously grant to all Mennonites and their descendants the full liberty to use and bestow

their well-earned possessions as each finds proper (which does not include, however, the lands bestowed by the government). But if someone desires to leave the country and take his wealth with him, he is obligated to pay the government a royalty equal to three years rent on capital acquired in Russia after he has paid all debts in full. For this payment he, as well as the village officials, shall be duty and conscience bound. The same procedure shall apply to the settlement of the estates of the deceased whose heirs and relatives reside in foreign countries. The estates shall be executed according to their customary practice regarding the rights of succession. In relation to this, we authorize the village parishes with the right to appoint guardians for minors who become owners of the estates of deceased according to the customs brought with them.

Ninth. We confirm most graciously the ten-year exemption from taxes already granted and extend it also to all Mennonites who may settle in the new Russian province in the future.

However, because after investigation their situation reveals that a state of need has arisen because of poor crops and epidemics among the livestock, and because the settlement in the Chortitz district is overpopulated, it has been decided to move a number of Chortitza Colony families to other areas. In view of the need and poverty, we most graciously approve that an extension of another five-year exemption from taxes be made after the expiration of the first ten years of exemption to those who remain at their present place of residence. For the families that are to be moved, we designate another ten free years, but require that each family in possession of 65 desjatin land pay 15 kopeks per desjatin annually after the expiration of the ten-year period and be exempt from payment of all other taxes to the government. At the expiration of the years of exemption, the funds advanced by the government shall be repaid in ten equal installments; the families who are to be moved shall make repayment in twenty years.

Tenth. In conclusion, in this our imperial letter, we grant to the Mennonites and most graciously guarantee these rights and privileges, and we therefore order all our civil and military administrators as well as our court authorities not to disturb the peaceful and quiet sojourn of the aforesaid Mennonites and their posterity which was granted to them through our most generous charter, but rather in all cases and at all times to give them full aid, counsel, and protection.

Given in the city of Gatschina on September 16, in the year 1800, A. D. of our reign, the fourth, and of the Great Ministry, the second.

The original signed by His Majesty in His own hand,

Paul
Count of Rostopschin²²

The Emigration

By the fall of 1788 two hundred and twenty-eight families, mostly from Danzig, had arrived at Dubrowna. Here they had to remain for the winter. It was a difficult time. Supported by the government in poor living quarters that were only temporary shelters, with homesickness and discouragement becoming stronger, they nevertheless continued on their way when spring came. However, the greatest difficulty was that they did not have a single minister among them, no school teachers, and no physician. Many died before the first contingent was able to reach its destination.

Leaving Dubrowna, they made their way on foot, by cart, and by river barge. When they came near the Promised Land, the Turkish war was still going on, and they were forced to stop at a spot farther up the Dnieper near a small tributary called the Chortitza, where they laid out the first village, called Chortitz, in the center, and others around it. Later groups that came enlarged the settlements so that there were 346 families in seven colonies.

In 1804 the largest contingent, 342 families left Prussia, in 1808, 99 families, and in 1820, another 215 families. Others came from time to time. The first 400 families settled in the Chortitz area, while others settled further south on the Molotschna river.²³ Chortitz was in the province of Ekaterinoslav.

The Molotschna Colony

The settlers on the Molotschna were better farmers, and were well-to-do, retaining enough capital to stock their farms. The Russian government had given them a grant of 360,000 acres on a fertile, treeless plain in the province of Taurida. By 1820 there were some six hundred families, and by 1840, forty-six villages with a population of about 10,000.²⁴ Twenty years later fifty villages, with a population of 18,000, and the two colonies together had 30,000.²⁵ The villages were named after their former Prussian homes. Halbstadt was the center, and others were named Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, Rosenort, Tiege, and Ohrloff.

The story is told that one of the villages, named Alexanderwohl, was composed of an entire congregation which had migrated from Poland. On their way they had met Czar Alexander, who wished them well. Upon arriving at their destination, they named their village, Alexanderwohl. But the story does not end there. In 1874, when the reigning Czar, Alexander II, abrogated the special rights of the Privilegium, especially those of military service and of freedom of education, the entire congregation, numbering some eight hundred, emigrated again in a body to America, settling north of Newton, Kansas, where they built a church and called it the Alexanderwohl Church. It still bears the name. It is said that only seven families remained in the Russian village. Thus, the same congregation migrated twice in a century, en masse.²⁶

Just south of the Molotschna settlements were bands of half-savage Tartars who had been removed from their land to make way for the Mennonite farmers. They often raided the villages, driving off cattle and horses. Finally, the Russian government forbade them the use of weapons,

and they became more friendly and peaceful.

Other colonies were later established in several other areas, notably in the province of Kiev and in the province of Samara on the Volga. Most of these came later, and were not granted all the special privileges of the earlier settlers. From the original mother colonies, which began to outgrow their land allotments, daughter colonies were sent out, southeast into the Caucasus-Kuban and Terek provinces, and east toward the Urals, even beyond into western Siberia and Asiatic Turkestan.

The numbers of Mennonites is difficult to ascertain, but it is estimated that perhaps 9,000 migrated from Prussia and elsewhere. The number grew tremendously, doubling every twenty-five years until by 1914, even after some 18,000 migrated to America in the 1870s, there were around 100,000 in all the settlements, occupying nearly 3,000,000 acres an area three times the size of Rhode Island.²⁷

Political Privileges

The Mennonite colonies experienced a political freedom in Russia that is astounding, even in our modern day. They were granted a large measure of self-government. The Czar, supreme ruler of the colonies, appointed an administrative board, consisting of a director and two assistants, with jurisdiction over the colonies. These persons lived in Odessa, with mainly judiciary functions. Usually these men were dishonest and corrupt, although there were a few noted ones that were honest.

Each colony composed a district called a Gebiet, with a superintendent in charge called an Oberschulze. His office with its secretaries

was called a Gebietsamt. These officers were all elected by the village representatives, and the Gebietsamt had the power to administer punishment for ordinary offenses, to hold court, and to regulate government matters of common concern to the villagers. Capital offenses could be tried only by Russian Courts.²⁸

Chortitz and Molotschna were separate Gebiets at first, but Molotschna was later divided into two, Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld. Each Gebiet had its insurance fund and took care of its delinquents, sick, and defectives, as well as many other functions which in the native villages were taken care of by the Russian government.²⁹

Each village had its own government for control of schools, electing its teachers and herdsmen to care for the cattle on the common pastures. It also cared for roads and relief of the poor. At the head of village government was the Schulze, whose work was to preserve order, enforce the laws, and preside at all the village meetings. He, too, was elected by the landowners. Gradually the church officials came to have quite a lot of power. After 1850 the seven church elders formed a church-convent, "Kirchenconvent," which had some political authority and ruled the church autocratically.³⁰

It was a strange situation, rather like a democratic state within an autocratic state. The Mennonites enjoyed a political freedom never granted to or experienced by native Russians. In fact, many of the people claimed to continue their Prussian nationality and German culture, so they scarcely seemed to be Russian citizens.³¹

Education and Language

With the local autonomy granted the Mennonites was included

control of their schools. These were entirely in their own hands. At first, possibly because in the earlier groups that migrated, the Prussian government allowed almost no professional or better-educated people to receive passports to emigrate, there were few schools. Then the first years of settlement were attendant with poverty and the struggle to become established. There were no laws compelling school attendance in any part of Europe, so the schools of the colonists were not unusual. However, every village, from the start, had a primitive elementary school where children could at least learn to read and write. To be sure, schoolmasters possibly knew little more, since they were poorly paid, or not paid at all, and the classes most likely were kept in the "Groszstube" of the master's house, or in the workroom or workshop of older men who were unable to pursue their craft too well, that of carpenter, shoemaker, or tailor.

It often took several years for children to learn the alphabet, a little arithmetic, and memorize some Bible verses. Then they had finished their education. If they were fortunate in having a better teacher, some might attend longer to learn artistic writing, a little more ciphering, and more Scripture verses. In general there were several educational goals for the Mennonite settlers.

1. To teach reading and writing.
2. To perpetuate the German language.
3. To instill in each child an additional knowledge of the Bible. Smith called it the fourth "R". Reading, 'Riting, 'Rithmetic, and Religion.

Another writer broadens these goals.

1. To help the child leave close family bonds, and prepare him to enter the larger world.

2. To help bridge the gap between play and work, between childhood and adulthood, by directing desires, building strength, and instilling obedience.
3. To raise him to a higher spiritual level of life.
4. To help him develop self-understanding, and to build values and ideals.³²

It was regarded as the duty of the emigrants to establish and build a school system that would meet these requirements.

P. Braun, in a manuscript written for the "Mennonitisches Lexicon," said, "In der regel hatte jedes Dorf vom ersten Jahr seiner Ausstellung seine eigene Schule" (As a rule, each village, from the first year, had a place for their own school).

In the school, each day's teaching began and ended with prayer and the singing of hymns. Music instruction was also stressed whenever possible. Religious teaching formed a large part of the curriculum, for that was one of the basic motivations for having the school, the Sunday School not being adopted as part of the church service until another century had elapsed. Classes were divided as follows: Die Fibler, or primary grades, evidently so called because the primary book was called Die Fibel, which continued to be the standard text even into the early part of this century, much as the McGuffey Readers in the American schools; the elementary grades were Die Testamentler, and the upper grades were Die Bibler.³³

The language, especially in the early years, was in Low-German, or Plattdeutsch, which was generally the language used in the home and in social life. Later, and especially in the higher grades, High-German was used. Classes were co-educational, although girls were not expected to learn as much as boys. The curriculum stressed Religion,

Bible History, the Ten Commandments, Bible memorization, the Lord's Prayer, and Hymns. Of course, some reading was required, and some arithmetic, possibly fractions and figuring. To further show the goals of the schools, the following quotes may illustrate: ". . . die hauptsache ist, die Kinder für Jesum zu gewinnen" (The main thing is, to win the children for Jesus) and, "We have no further goal for the school except that they may be fruitful and good citizens of the colony, in the blessing of God."³⁴

The school room was usually furnished with a long table in the center, with the teacher at the head, the boys down one side, and the girls down the other. Smaller children might be seated on benches along the walls. Discipline was harsh, and the rod was used freely. However, before too many years passed, there were far-sighted men who perceived the need for higher educational standards. Among these was one who was outstanding in several ways, a man named Johann Cornies who by shrewdness and business acumen had gained great wealth. Cornies helped form a school association in the Molotschna for the purpose of training teachers for the village schools (1820). A trained teacher, Tobias Voth, was called from Prussia, and the school was supported by tuition fees. Later, Heinrich Heese was placed in charge, and continued for a number of years. Another Prussian teacher, Heinrich Franz, was called and carried on the work. Franz was a strict disciplinarian, the author of a mathematical textbook, and the composer of a popular Choralbuch.³⁵

Cornies was an arbitrary administrator, but he introduced many reforms, among them the erection of model schoolhouses, compulsory attendance, the licensing of competent teachers, uniform textbooks, and good courses of study. There is a story told that in 1846, in order to

impress upon the school committee the difference in schools, Cornies had a presentation of two types of schools. The first one, held in the teacher's home, with the teacher ill-prepared, and no order in the classes. The students paid little attention, while the teacher jumped here and there in the lesson, scolding, cursing, and screaming.

Then another presentation was given. This featured a building that was well built, pleasant, and well arranged. The teachers were well trained and prepared. The students had good textbooks and wall charts, and the curriculum was coordinated so that the classes were in orderly progression. Naturally, this was impressive to the committee, and they adopted Cornies' recommendations.³⁶ Shortly each village had a school with compulsory attendance. At first, Russian was taught only in the secondary school, but later in the elementary. By 1897, it was compulsory, but an allowance was made that "all classes in Religion be taught in German, as well as German language classes."³⁷

By 1870 the committees were replaced by regular school boards. The high schools were called Zentralschulen, and eventually many young people availed themselves of the educational opportunities they offered. These schools were primarily for teachers and secretaries, although there were regular secondary schools and schools of agriculture.³⁸ In Chortitza there were over 3,000 graduates, and five to eight percent of all Mennonites attended the Zentralschule. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Zentralschule was the entrance to the Russian Gymnasium, the School of Commerce, and technical schools.

In 1874 a special girls' school was founded in the Molotschna, followed by similar ones in the other colonies. Taught by women teachers, these were desired by the Russian government which disapproved of co-

education in advanced schools. Also, the Mennonites felt it better to give the girls special training to make them better housewives. All in all, the Mennonite schools were far better than either their Russian or non-Russian neighbors enjoyed. The Russians and Non-Mennonite Germans often sent their children to the Mennonite schools. Stumpp remarks that Mennonite literacy was high, practically 100 percent, compared to twenty-two percent among native Russians. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the twenty-five Zentralschulen had more than 2,000 pupils, of whom 1.5 percent acquired a university education.

For graduate or higher studies, the Mennonites attended the Universities of Odessa, Kharkov, Kiev, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. Secondary schools frequented by Mennonite students were at Ekaterinoslav, Alexandrovsk, Halbstadt, Berdjansk, and Kharkov. Here Russian was the only language used, although the students spoke either High or Low German among themselves. Some students were able to attend a foreign institution such as the University of Basel, or the Universities of Berlin, Jena and Heidelberg. Ministerial students studied at such seminaries as the Evangelical Seminary of Basel, Barmen Theological Seminary, Hamburg Baptist Seminary, and the Seminary at Neukirchen.³⁹

Education, then was deeply ingrained in Mennonite consciousness and its cultural heritage. Above all the determination was that their children would be educated in their way to preserve their heritage and their religion, as well as their traditional language. After 1880, many of the special privileges in South Russia had been lost, and the Russian government gradually assumed control of their schools, but by this time many Mennonites again had migrated, this time to America, where they were able to resume their educational practices and hold fast to their

language, traditions, and cultural practices, as well as to the peculiar facets of their religion.

Concerning the language used, the Prussian churches had just barely changed over to the use of German in their services. Wiebe placed this change as finally taking place in 1780-1785, just at the time when the first emigrants were leaving for Russia, while in some areas of Prussia the change was not made for another century (1889). Those who lived in Poland at that time seem never to have adopted the Polish language, clinging entirely to the German and the traditional Low German in the home for everyday use. These languages were carried into Russia; there, because of the clause in the Privilegium which allowed them full religious freedom and subsequent laws granting them complete control over their schools, they were able to continue using their traditional tongues in their accustomed places.

In Russia they clung even more to their languages. As mentioned before, the primitive schools originally were conducted in the everyday Plattdeutsch and, because the teachers themselves were poorly trained and educated, the general cultural level deteriorated for a time. Gradually, however, the High German language came into greater use until after some time it was the basic language of the schools. Tobias Voth, already mentioned as one of the instructors from Prussia brought in by Johann Cornies, taught only in the German, while Cornies advocated that Russian should be included in the curriculum. Evidently this was one area in which Cornies did not succeed in imposing his will on his fellow Mennonites, for at the time of the Ukase which took away the special privileges promised them in perpetuity (1870), the chief spokesmen of the delegation sent to St. Petersburg to petition Czar Alexander II were

unable to speak the Russian language. This, of course, could not help but create suspicion and ill-will on the part of the Russian officials with whom they came in contact.

The Ukase took away their military exemption, and also the exclusive control of their schools, their use of the German language, and a large degree of their political autonomy while the Russian language was to be taught side by side with their beloved German. This was just too much for the Mennonites to accept. To them, "there seemed a close relation between their distinctive Mennonitism and their Deutschtum. It was a matter of grave doubt to many of them whether they could maintain their traditional religious principles separated from their German tongue and culture."⁴⁰ This statement must be kept constantly in mind as the history of the Mennonites continues to unfold.

Some students of Mennonite history believe that the Low German dialect so peculiar to the Russian colonies was gradually evolving into a standard modern language. If the Revolution and the consequent dispersion had not shattered the compact cohesiveness of the South Russian villages, the language, which was the common avenue of communication of a hundred thousand Mennonites, besides other thousands in North and South America, was being reduced to writing and lacked only a spread of literature and literary effort to have possibly been accepted into the family of modern languages.

Even so, the Low German was regarded as the common vernacular in use in the home and in all the usual social intercourse.

High German came to be regarded as the sacred language, for was not the Martin Luther translation of the Bible written in this form? Thus it was used in the church exclusively for sermons and quoting Scripture.

Also, it was the language of education and learning, for one needed to know it well for positions of leadership. On the other hand, Russian was regarded as a profane language not to be used in the church or even in the everyday concourse between friends. Only a low individual would use it, others only when it was absolutely necessary.

The only Mennonites who came under the influence of Russian were the university students. Of necessity, they had to intermingle with Russians and perforce to use their language. P. M. Friesen, a noted Mennonite historian and author of the monumental work Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland, related that at times in his life, possibly during periods of study at a university, Russian became predominant. This was the experience of many other educators also. But when he and they came to the United States and Canada, all became staunch supporters of the German language.⁴¹

Possibly because of this barrier, there was very little intermarriage between Mennonites and native Russians. However, among university students one notes a departure from this separateness, since twenty-one percent of Mennonite students married Russians. This led to great problems, for Russians could not adjust to the isolated Mennonites; most likely they were strictly ostracized and forced to remain outside social and family life. More, a Russian was forbidden by law to be re-baptized or join any religion other than the Orthodox; consequently they remained as unaccepted outcasts. Most couples of these mixed marriages moved to or remained in the cities, resulting inevitably in the loss of the Mennonites as far as enriching the professional or educational life of the colonies was concerned.

H. H. Epp, in a paper given at the Grünfeld Congress in February,

1921, entitled "Aufgaben der Russichen Mennoniten in der Gegenwart,"

said:

The Russianization policy of the government was the beginning of an assimilation and acculturation of the Mennonites during the Revolution and later and will continue and ultimately lead to disintegration, if nothing is done to stop the Process. Through the animosity in regard to everything German during the war, our ethnic and religious self-esteem has been strengthened. Whoever likes his background and wants to preserve the heritage of his forefathers and does not want to surrender everything, must counteract the disintegrating process of our time.⁴²

Evidently in later years Russian became a useful second, or rather third language; in 1914 two Mennonites, H. Bergmann and P. Schroeder, served in the Duma as representatives from their area.

Agriculture and Industry

The Mennonites, from the time of Menno Simmons, had a reputation for being some of the finest, most industrious, and efficient farmers to be found anywhere. This was recognized in the 1600s when Prussian nobles began inviting them to settle on their swampy river deltas. Here they drained the land, laid out canals and roads, and built beautiful farmsteads with well-kept orchards. Their prosperity brought upon them the envy of native Prussians and Poles and persecutions began, more because the natives asked themselves and their lords, "Why should these foreign Anabaptists own the finest farms and most productive fields?" Those nobles who intelligently applied reason to their answers could easily see that it was self-evident. The Mennonites had been settled in areas nobody wanted, but which, when properly drained, had deep, fertile soil and little fear of drouth. Thus it naturally followed that those nobles who reasoned in this manner, protected their prospering tenants and for over 200 years (1550-1780) continued to encourage them in their work.

In some areas of northern Germany and Prussia the Mennonites demonstrated skills in crafts other than farming. At Krefeld they contributed to the economic life by making the city an important textile center.⁴³ Further along the North German coast at Schleswig-Holstein, and at Hamburg, Mennonites became merchants and shipowners. At Elbing, where they became numerous, there were so many laborers that the citizens complained they were taking the bread out of the mouths of natives. At Danzig they opened a silk shop, a venture that was to grow to great proportions, reaching even into the spinning and weaving industry. Smith gives a quotation of a statement made in the Landtag on an occasion when some deputies were attempting to expel the Mennonites. One said in their behalf, "One can easily tell whether a lazy drunken farmer tills the soil, or a sober industrious Mennonite; rather invite more of them than to drive them out."⁴⁴

These were the qualities that Catherine was looking for when she invited the Mennonites to settle on and develop her newly won lands in South Russia. As the Prussian Emperor Frederick then was pressuring his subjects to abandon their stand against military service, this offer from Catherine II was enthusiastically received. The first contingents of the Mennonites had to settle near the Chortiz River, on land that was rocky and barren, with wide gullies and covered with patches of dried grass. What a contrast to the Vistula delta. Many of the colonists were city laborers, not farmers, and even those who were farmers were accustomed to fertile, flat, well-watered fields. Now there were grasshoppers and drouth, and they had to learn how to deal with conditions neither they nor their fathers had ever experienced. Since the government had promised a partial support until they could raise crops,

help that was often months in arriving, they managed to continue their pioneer work and to build their homesteads. Later arrivals were more prosperous, mostly farmers, and were able to build the colony into a semblance of prosperity. By 1824 some 400 families had located in eighteen villages.

The Molotschna Colony, a hundred miles south of Chortitza, received a grant of 360,000 acres. The first settlers came there in 1803, and by 1840 numbered some 750 families. These were mostly farmers, with greater material prosperity who seemed to have had an immediate success with dairying, and soon wheat farming became an important industry. Here were not as many great natural hazards as the drouth and the grasshoppers of Chortitza, but just to the south of the settlement were nomadic Tartars who hated the settlers like the Indians hated the white farmers in America. They raided and drove off cattle and horses, even killing some of the unarmed Mennonites. The Russian government had to use severe measures to stop the raiding. The colony prospered and by 1860 numbered 18,000 in population.⁴⁵

The Mennonite farmers settled in villages of from fifteen to thirty families. Their house, barn, stable, and shop were all under one roof, one end facing the street. In front of the house was a large flower garden, behind the house a fruit orchard and vegetable garden. The first buildings, of course, were of mud or sod with thatched roofs, but as the farmers prospered these were replaced by buildings of wood or brick. Each family was allotted its sixty-five desjatines (175 acres), divided into long, narrow strips so each could share in good and poor land. A large area of land that had not been divided was kept as a village pasture, where the cattle or sheep were pastured.⁴⁶

At first the income was basically from cattle and sheep, but after a few years the Mennonites adjusted to the dry conditions (fifteen inches of annual rainfall) and by the 1830s wheat became the most important product. For a while they also pursued the silk industry, planting large numbers of mulberry trees along the highways and around fields. At first their farming methods were very primitive. All work was done by hand. Labor was scarce, so large families were practical in providing help. There was said to be an average of eight children per family, which accounted for the rapid increase of the Mennonites, who are said to have doubled in number every twenty-five years.

The principal crops were wheat, rye, barley, oats, and flax. The orchards produced a variety of fruits, which, with the vegetables and watermelons, were easily disposed of in nearby cities such as Berdyansk. Klaus says,

Soon the Mennonites achieved. . . a hitherto unknown prosperity and an excellent organization. On the Steppes, where in previous times had been no water or even one shrub, now rose, as if by magic, one prosperous settlement next to the other. There is plenty of well water, there are groves of orchard, mulberry, and shade trees. In the well-kept pastures are herds of sheep, cattle, and horses of all kinds and excellent breeds.

The Mennonites based their work on religious beliefs. The Bible and plough became inseparable, and agriculture became a religious duty.⁴⁷ A foreign observer who saw the summer fallowed fields, and those nearby farmed by natives, is said to have exclaimed, "Why? Do the Mennonites have a different God?"

In 1830 an association was formed that was called the Agricultural Improvement Society. This commission had government support and was encouraged by the Fuersorge Komitee of Odessa--a Board of Trustees appointed by the Russian government so supervise the political and

economic life of the colonies. The head of this society was Johan Cornies, the same Cornies instrumental in organizing teacher-training schools and upgrading education. He was a successful, large-scale farmer with a big estate on the Juschanlee, which became a show place of Mennonite efficiency. By 1847 this model farm or farms, since he owned several, had some 100,000 trees, both fruit and shade, and a large nursery. He had brick and cheese factories, and he propagated improved herds of Dutch dairy cattle and high quality breeds of horses.

Through the efforts of Cornies and the society, forty-seven villages of the Molotschna planted some 5,000,000 trees. He was also instrumental in increasing silk production, which was one of the principal sources of income for a time. When the Mennonites migrated to America, they brought along silkworms and tried to develop the industry there, especially in Kansas. Hence the large numbers of mulberry trees in their settlements in this country. This work continued after Cornies' death in 1848 in perfecting the high-producing breed known as the Molotschna Dairy Cow. Cornies himself had a flock of 8,000 Merino sheep, four or five hundred horses, and a large herd of cattle. Among his other accomplishments was the promotion of dry farming and summer fallow, and the introduction of more efficient farm machinery. Cornies was cultivating some 25,000 acres at the time of his death with the help of many workers.⁴⁸

Cornies obtained a generous recognition for his services to agriculture. His estates reportedly were visited by both Alexander I and Alexander II, and offered great honors. He was made a member of the Academy of Science, and had been offered the governorship of the province (gubernia), but he declined. The only decoration he accepted was a plain

gold medal with a simple inscription.⁴⁹

In all of these experiences, the Mennonites were carrying on the tradition of their forefathers--that of being the finest, most efficient, industrious, and productive farmers that could be found anywhere. This reputation reached the highest officials in St. Petersburg, even to the Czar himself.

Good and efficient agriculturalists as the Mennonites were, there was one problem that became great within a generation or two: the scarcity of land. The original settlers received their sixty-five des-jatine of land but had an average of eight children per family, yet the Russian government stipulated that the original acreage could not be divided. Only one son could inherit the land. Other sons had to find another method of gaining a livelihood. This led to the rise of a landless class known as Anwohner (marginal people), while those owning land were called Wirte, or landlords. In the Molotschna by 1865 there were 2,356 Anwohner and 1,384 Wirte; thus nearly two-thirds of the population was without land and without political power, since only landowners could vote. This made them second-class citizens and engendered strife and hatreds.⁵⁰

This took place despite the fact that there were 64,500 acres of communal land which had usually been leased to the wealthier farmers for a ridiculously low rental for sheep raising. Eventually the landless appealed to St. Petersburg, and after government pressure was applied, this large tract of land was divided into smaller units, of one-half and one-quarter estates of $32\frac{1}{2}$ and $16\frac{1}{4}$ desjatinas. This relieved the problem to some extent. Adding to the relief was the migration to America of some 18,000 in 1874-1880 and the development of manufacturing on a

large scale, thus absorbing many of the laborers.⁵¹

Another means of releasing the pressure of population was the establishment of daughter colonies. The older settlements would purchase from the government or from the private estates of noblemen large tracts of land upon which to locate the excess population. The new settlers were then given the opportunity to pay for their land over an extended period of time, possibly ten years. The money was then re-cycled back into the purchase of more land.

The first daughter colony was at Bergthal in 1835. As time went on, more than forty-five other colonies were established in the Ukraine, in Crimea, Caucasus, south central Asia, and Siberia. In Siberia, Mennonites from all four settlements founded the large Slavgorod-Barnaul colony in 1908, with fifty-four villages on 135,000 acres of land.⁵² A unique stipulation in these colonies was that half of the villages were to be settled by Losdoerfer, to whom the land was given in lot if they could not afford to buy, and half of the villages were settled by Freikaeuferdoerfer, those who could afford to pay. At first it was easy to tell the difference between a Losdorf and a Freikaeuferdof, but after ten years or so the Losdorfer had prospered enough to catch up with the others economically.

The mother colony never sold such land at a profit, but the low prices often were an inducement for even the wealthier families to move to the new area where there was a plentiful supply of cheap land, and they often served as private lenders of money to the poorer settlers.⁵³ The total of the daughter colonies encompassed about 365 villages and over 4,000,000 acres of land by 1914.⁵⁴

Industry

As mentioned before, in Prussia many of the Mennonites were involved in the textile industry, basically in silks. They also engaged in various forms of business enterprises, businesses, even in shipping: their vessels were sent out without the usual cannon in keeping with their policy of non-resistance.

In Russia, Mennonites also became involved in various businesses and industries. Some of these were really not in keeping with the profession of purity of life of the Mennonites. According to the Privilegium, they had the sole right to brew or distill beer or liquors in their villages, and, even more, the sole right to sell such beverages. In time this became a problem in the colonies, although the villages realized a profit from the sale of the drinks. The breweries were located in the villages and possibly their products were for local consumption.

With the rise of wheat production, there also arose a greater demand for better farm machinery. When this was supplied, it in turn led to large-scale farming and a surplus of grain that had to be channeled into whatever markets were to be had. This led to a grain gathering industry, as people with capital must purchase and store the grain, and to a flour milling industry.

Halbstadt and Chortitz both became famous for the manufacture of fine farm machinery. A Mennonite named Peter Heinrich Lepp built and sold the first threshing machine in 1853.⁵⁵ By the early twentieth century the Lepp and Wallman firms of Schönwiese annually were producing 15,000 mowers, 3,000 threshing machines, 10,000 plows, and other farming equipment.⁵⁶ Eight major industrial firms had a working

force of 1,744 men and an annual production of more than 3,000,000 rubles.

There were thirty-eight factories producing brick and tile, which constituted the main building materials in the colonies. But the largest of the industries centered in the grain and milling trade. The largest was Niebuhr and Company of Alexandrovsk, which had an annual return of 3,000,000 ruble.⁵⁷ The flour milling industry was almost entirely in the hands of the Mennonites. Besides the grist mill in every village, they eventually owned some seventy steam-powered mills. The modern mill of J. J. Siemens, who won a gold medal for his flour at the Paris World's Fair, had a capacity of 3,300 bushels daily.⁵⁸ But a sad commentary on this vast industrial effort was that, although industry accounted for fifty to seventy-five percent of Mennonite assets, it was centered in the hands of 2.8 percent of the people. As a further note to the manufacturing industries of the Mennonites, Klassen, writing in the Mennonite Life in April of 1969, stated that the first combines (combined harvester-threshers) were produced in the former Mennonite factories of A. A. Koop, Lepp and Wallman, and Hildebrand and Pries. Mennonite engineers who aided in the development of the combines were P. Dyck, G. Hamm, and Cornelius Unruh. In Stalin's great purges of 1937 they were exiled and never heard of again.⁵⁹

The Field of Social Welfare

The Mennonites had always had a deep concern for the care of those in need. They were determined never to be a burden to their government in whatever country they resided. They established their own hospitals, homes for orphans, homes for the aged, a school for the deaf and dumb

(the Marien Taubstummenschule in Tiege, bei Halbstadt), and, later, a sanitarium for epileptics and those with nervous disorders.

Although the Mennonites were staunchly non-resistant and refused military service, they provided food and shelter to troops and horses during the Crimean War (1854-1856).⁶⁰ They always obeyed the government and prayed for it in every way possible. They received official recognition for the services rendered in the above mentioned war, and for the major medical and food contributions they made. They cared for some 5,000 wounded soldiers, who were brought to their colonies from the nearby front. In fact, some Mennonites resided in the seacoast cities, especially Berdyansk. When the front approached this city, all the Mennonite families fled to the Molotschna settlement and did not return for nearly a year, although the English ships approached the city only one time. Berdyansk was a collection and shipping point for the grain industry,⁶¹ and was the home of a Mennonite congregation under the leadership of Leonhard Suderman. The city was founded in 1735, and by 1897 had 27,000 inhabitants.

To continue showing the action of the Russian Mennonites one must go farther into the nineteenth century. In 1880, as a result of the revocation of the military exemption, many Mennonite young men were recruited into alternate service in forestry and industrial work. To meet their obligations to the government during the Russo-Japanese War (1905), the Mennonites made special efforts to aid the families of Russian soldiers. Every family bordering the Gnadenfeld district of the Molotschna, including some twenty-seven villages, received a sack of flour and five rubles. Another 25,000 rubles were given to the Russian Red Cross, while dozens of young men volunteered their services to care for the

sick and wounded at the front, of whom seventy-five percent never returned. One Mennonite doctor also died there.

This work was continued on a much greater scale in the years of the first World War, when some 12,000 men were recruited for forestry and hospital work, about half of the total in each of the two branches. The churches and colonies underwrote the cost of the projects by completely supporting the young men, including much, if not most, of their equipment, at a cost of over 3,000,000 rubles in 1917 alone. In fact, some writers make the claim that the Mennonite ambulance service was the most efficient corps of its kind in the Russian army. Yet they were not trusted, for every man had a perfect command of the German language and could converse fluently with the wounded enemy soldiers. Naturally they were immediately suspected of being in collaboration with the enemy.⁶²

After 1917 the Mennonites encountered a period of their greatest persecution since the Inquisition in Holland. The struggle between the Red and White armies swept back and forth over the Ukraine, as much as twenty-three times over some areas. Then came pillaging by bands of ruthless outlaws, one of them said to command an army of 100,000 who ravaged the land, plundering, raping, and murdering. The unarmed Mennonites were entirely helpless, and hundreds were killed. After the bandit hordes faded away, disease, spread by filth and lack of sanitation, especially typhoid, raged through the colonies, and several thousand died. The greatest burden was the psychological shock to the Mennonites, who had been stripped of their prosperity, their possessions, their food, their women ravished, their men brutally killed, their communities and churches devastated.

But that is a different story and not within the scope of this paper, which is basically concerned with those who left Russia in the years from 1870 to 1880. This subject has been inherent in many of the areas discussed in this chapter, but requires at least a short treatment in itself.

The Mennonites were influenced very little by their Russian environment. They retained their German customs and Mennonite traditions. Few of them spoke the Russian language. In 1897 there were said to have been only 486 who were designated as speaking Russian, and most of these may have been living elsewhere than in the colonies. As more of the young people began to learn the language, of course Russian culture began to affect them.

As most of the Mennonites were farmers, or lived in rural areas, there were few interested in literary arts. They had a few books, mostly imported from Germany, as the works of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips; the Martyr's Mirror, the Wandelene Seele, or Arndt's Wahre Christentum. A few may have read the writings of Jung-Stilling, a German mystic. Aside from these were some works by German Baptists.⁶³

There were a few Mennonite writers, mainly historians: Peter Hildebrand, D. H. Epp, Franz Isaac, Franz Bartsch, and P. M. Friesen. The last one is the only one whose works were widely known, being regarded as a great source of historical knowledge.

The aversion to, or at least the general lack of, literature did not extend to all the Mennonites. Cornelius Jansen of Berdyansk, a well-educated man fluent in German, Russian, and English, distributed large amounts of literature, mostly in Bibles or religious or devotional books, tracts, Christian stories, and others. Among the authors were

Spurgeon, the great English preacher, and Bunyan, the writer of Pilgrim's Progress. Bibles were obtained from the British and Foreign Bible Society, and were printed in many languages besides the ones usually used, as Bulgarian, French, and Italian, for there were many of such descent in Berdyansk, and in Hebrew, for the many Jews of South Russia. Jansen himself had an extensive library and subscribed to newspapers from Odessa and St. Petersburg.⁶⁴ There were a number of doctors in the colonies, but few if any lawyers, and few that were writers. There were many teachers and preachers, although most of the ministers had little special training.

In the area of culture we again must go to the turn of the century to see the spreading of the cultural influences. Several newspapers were being printed--Die Botschafter at Ekaterinoslav became the semi-official organ for the Old Mennonite (Kirchliche), and the Friedensstimme, at Halbstadt, served the Mennonite Brethren (Bruedergemeinde). The publishing firm Raduga printed a number of books and tracts, but it was only a matter of a few years until the Revolution put an end to such things, since it was basically religious.

By 1910 there were 400 elementary schools, with 500 teachers, and an attendance of 15,000. About 250 men and women were attending Russian institutions of higher learning, while another fifty were in foreign bible schools and universities. Many of these university students came to appreciate Russian art, history, literature, and the theatre. Most likely this would have a cultural impact on the Mennonite colonies if it had been allowed to develop naturally, and not hindered by the Revolution.⁶⁵

The ministers were quite influential, but as a rule were

unsalaried, therefore usually chosen by lot from among the wealthier landowners. As late as 1910, in a list of 150 preachers, 110 had only finished the elementary schools, forty had some ministerial or teacher training in the Zentralschulen, and only one had a university education. Yet the culture of the Mennonites was far higher than that of their Russian neighbors. Even the other German colonists near them, mainly Lutherans, could not approach the high level of literacy, learning, and knowledge of the Mennonites.

The Privilegium Revoked

Everything was going along smoothly. The older colonies were prospering. Daughter colonies were being established, and the school system was being enlarged with better preparation for the teachers. As a whole, the colonists were a small minority in a vast nation under one of the most autocratic governments in the world, yet existing as an autonomous state within a state with a different language, democratic local governments, a superior system of education, a different religion, and a completely different cultural and economic background.

Many educated Russians had become "slavophiles", fanatically concerned with maintaining and elevating all things Russian, and intent upon Russianizing all facets of their citizenry. In 1870, a tremendous change came about. Czar Alexander II, in an imperial Ukase, proclaimed an end to special privileges for all foreigners, especially for the Mennonite colonists. The Fuersorge Komitee at Odessa was to be abolished, and the colonies were to be governed directly from St. Petersburg. Russian was to be the official language in political areas as well as in most subjects in the schools. The schools themselves were to be

under the supervision of the imperial education authorities, and, above all, the military exemption that had been enjoyed for nearly a century was to be abolished. The colonists were given ten years in which to comply with the new laws, after which they would go into effect (1880). These laws had been instigated by Prime Minister Stolypin, who greatly desired to Russianize all subjects.

This came like "lightning from a clear sky."⁶⁶ One of the first to become aware of the Ukase was Cornelius Janzen of Berdyansk, a dealer in and exporter of grains who retained a Prussian citizenship and was a Prussian consul in that city. Janzen reported that he heard of the new law "when the Governor-General von Kotzebue told a friend of mine in 1870, that the law of universal military service already confirmed by the Emperor, would also destroy our privileges. A few weeks afterwards, being personally acquainted with this governor-general, I called upon him in Odessa, where in circumstantial conversation he convinced me for certain about our dark future."⁶⁷

To make certain of the information, one of the leaders of the colonists sent a telegram to Senator Edward von Hahn at St. Petersburg. Von Hahn had been a supervisor of the Mennonite colonies for many years, and his suggestion was that they send a deputation to the capital to confer with high officials. This suggestion was carried out. A delegation was chosen under the leadership of Elder Dueck of Berdyansk. Unfortunately, none of the men could speak Russian, which irritated the officials with whom they had to confer.

The delegation was not able to meet with the Czar, but did meet with the president of the Fuersorge Komitee of Odessa, the governing body over the Mennonite colonies. Through his help, they were able to

talk to a number of important officials who were directly concerned with the new laws. Count Heyden, who was on the commission drafting the laws, suggested non-combatant service in the hospital or sanitary corps, but the Mennonites refused.

A second delegation was sent to St. Petersburg the following year, which met with Crown Prince Constantin who had visited the Mennonite villages previously. He, too, while sympathetic to their religious scruples, informed them there would have to be some non-combatant service. Disappointed in their efforts to retain their Privilegium, the people began to consider more and more the idea of a new emigration. The basic question was: "Where to. . . ?" Some suggested Russian Turkestan or the Amur region, which was Russian, but under different laws. Some thought of New Zealand, or to North or South America. All the places were completely unknown and seemed to be but asylums for convicts. Elder Suderman, who eventually became one of the strongest supporters of the movement towards America, said: "How can one live in peace under his vine and fig tree amid such people? Such a life might be possible for those who had their pockets full of revolvers, but for a non-resistant people it would be impossible to found homes amid such surroundings."⁶⁸

Elder Leonhard Suderman and Cornelius Jansen, both of Berdjansk, the latter a prosperous grain merchant and Prussian consul, mentioned before, became the leaders in the emigration movement. Jansen had begun correspondence with a John F. Funk, of Elkhart, Indiana, the editor of the Herald of Truth newspaper (Der Herold der Wahrheit), who provided a great amount of information concerning America, its lands, opportunities, and laws, especially about military requirements. In addition,

Jansen inquired of the British consul in Berdyansk about settlement in Canada. When word reached Canadian authorities that there was a prospect of securing up to 50,000 of the finest farmers known for settlement on the western Canadian prairies, they immediately began actively working to secure such settlers. The British ambassador wrote to St. Petersburg, asking if the imperial government would object to the Migration. Prince Gortschagov, the foreign minister, answered that they would not hinder it in any way. This, too, had been included in the Privilegium, that if the Mennonites desired to leave, they were free to do so.

The Canadian government sent William Hespeler to tour the Mennonite settlements and authorized him to grant all their demands:

1. Freedom from military service.
2. 160 acres of free land to each head of a family, in large, compact areas in Manitoba.
3. Freedom of religion.
4. Freedom to use their German language.
5. Control of their own schools.

These were basically the same privileges offered by Catherine II when the Mennonites migrated to Russia. Hespeler wrote about them: "They are not a people like the general run of immigrants--they are a reasoning, thinking, cautious, and to a large extent, an educated people."

Hespeler was exiled from Russia for his activities, and so was Cornelius Jansen, who was working more towards migrating to the United States. The Mennonites, seeing little could be done about the situation in Russia, chose a delegation of twelve men from the various districts, and sent them to America to search for a place of settlement. They traveled in 1873 throughout the entire area of cheap lands, from

Winnipeg south through Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. The United States did not grant as favorable terms as Canada, but influenced by American Mennonites, the matter was taken up in the senate. A senator from Minnesota presented the Mennonites as being the "very best farmers in Russia", while the senator from Nebraska said, "If there is any portion of the world that can send us a few advocates of peace, in God's name, let us bid them welcome."⁶⁹

The bill was never brought up again, but Secretary of State Hamilton Fish gave them a certified statement referring to the laws concerning conscientious objectors, while President Grant said: ". . .that for the next fifty years we will not be entangled in another war in which military service will be necessary."⁷⁰

When the delegation returned in the fall, the Chortitz, Bergthal, and Kleine Gemeinde people chose to go to Canada, while those from the Molotschna chose the United States. A few had not waited until the delegation returned, but had already departed for America. A problem arose when people by the thousands began to dispose of their goods and possessions, especially in those areas where whole congregations and villages were leaving, as the Alexanderwohl group mentioned previously, where only seven families remained while over 800 left in a body for Kansas.⁷¹ There were delays of months in securing passports from St. Petersburg with heavy expenses and, as Smith says, "accelerated only by liberal gratuities to corrupt government officials."

Now it was the government's turn to be alarmed. Officials realized the Mennonites had taken them at their word when ordered to conform to the law or get out of the country. The prospect of losing, in a few years, thousands of their best and most prosperous farmers was appalling.

Cornelius Jansen informed Dr. Smith, the American consul in Berdyansk, and he in turn reported to the U. S. Department of State, as follows:

I have lately received a visit from Mr. Jansen, of Berdyansk by the Sea of Azoff, one of the foremost of them (Mennonites) as to property and intelligence, who represents that the Russian government. . .does not intend to exempt them from military service. He informs me that there are thirty thousand families of them, numbering an hundred and fifty thousand souls.

They occupy over two hundred thousand acres of land and have ninety villages; fifty of which are in the valley of Molotschna or Milk River, which flows into the sea not far from Berdyansk, and forty in that of the Dnieper between Kherson and Ekaterinoslaff. He assures me. . .that they are an industrious, quiet, law-abiding people, frugal, simple in their habits and are like the Quakers opposed to war and strife from religious principle and, therefore, cannot conscientiously enter the military or naval service. . . . Mr. Jansen would be glad to know whether they could obtain large tracts of land in one or several places by themselves, and whether as free homesteads or by purchases, at the established government rate, and in general what encouragement could be offered them were they to emigrate.⁷²

In just a few years, by 1880, some 18,000 of them left Russia for America in the first great wave of emigration.

The Russian government sent Adjutant General von Todtleben, a German Lutheran, well known as a hero of the Crimean War and acquainted with the colonists, to persuade the Mennonites to remain. The law was altered somewhat to permit some civilian service in lieu of military service. He further tried to discourage emigration by painting America as a land of savages, swamps, and forests without any laborers to help them in the work. He also said that another war with England was inevitable, and the United States would impose military conscription. Many of the Mennonites were influenced by the persuasive words of the General. Frank Epp, speaking of this decision, said: "In view of the tragic developments later on, the decision not to emigrate has sometimes

been called 'the historical error'."⁷³

For a time it had seemed as if all the Mennonites would migrate en masse, but the concessions promised by von Todtleben, with work in hospitals, factories, or forestry as an alternative to direct military involvement, seemed to satisfy the majority, yet there were a strong minority that believed that work in any form would eventually come under military direction and thus violate their conscientious scruples, since this service was performed under the control of the military department.

Then, too, as was mentioned in the discussion about the use of the German language, since the new laws abolished local control of the schools and the Russian language had to be used, this threatened the entire cultural outlook: "To the Mennonites, especially, there seemed to be a close relation between their distinctive Mennonitism and their Deutschtum. It was a matter of grave doubt to many of them whether they could maintain their traditional religious principles separated from their German tongue and culture."⁷⁴

An additional incentive to emigration was the plight of the landless. Mennonite culture was a culture of the farm--of rural areas. They were actuated by a strong work ethic, and the work that was specifically blessed of God was the tilling of the soil. No doubt this was one of the motivating factors underlying their success at what to them was their God-given place in life--to promote life and growth. Thus when the prospect of limitless areas of good farming land was held out to them, thousands grasped at that hope of obtaining their own land and thus enhancing their position in God's plan for his people.

Ten families from the Swiss congregations in Volhynia left in the

spring of 1874. At the end of May, some thirty families under the leadership of Elder Jacob Wiebe left the Crimea, and made their way to Kansas.⁷⁵ They settled in Marion County, eight miles west of Marion, just south of what is now Hillsboro. These smaller groups seemed to break the dam, and a flood of Mennonite farmers, mostly in large groups, as the Alexanderwohl congregation of some 800, who settled just north of Newton, Kansas. By the end of the year some 5,300 had located in the United States, mostly in Kansas, and about 1,100 in Manitoba.

The groups that had been influenced by Cornelius Jansen settled in Nebraska, where the leader himself purchased extensive land holdings, and soon built up a ranch that was designated as the "finest in the country." His sons carried on the business, building it up until they were feeding around 25,000 head of sheep, in addition to cultivating hundreds of acres of crops. The town of Jansen, Nebraska, was named after Cornelius; and a son, Peter, entered politics. He became a personal friend of William McKinley, and was named to represent the state of Nebraska at the funeral when the president was assassinated. Peter served in the state senate for one term, 1910-1912. In 1900 he had been named by the president as a United States Commissioner to the Paris Exposition. He then visited the old homeland in Russia as a special envoy of the United States. Given a brief interview with De Witte, the Prime Minister, he greeted the official in Russian. Asked how he knew the language, Jansen replied that he was a native, and had been exiled with his father when twenty years old. Now he was back as an envoy of the United States. De Witte, impressed, had him seated, and they conversed for two hours.⁷⁶

Most of the emigrants, however, came to Kansas and settled in

groups according to their church affiliation and native villages in the old country. The Wiebe group mentioned, from the Crimea, settled in a village formed south of Hillsboro. Hillsboro was settled by a mixture of Mennonite Brethren and what are now General Conference Mennonites. Further south, around Newton and east of that town, were General Conference and Swiss Mennonites. A large number of all of the different groups settled west of Newton, with Buhler and Moundridge as centers. Thus an area was covered stretching from Hutchinson, across Newton, then northeast to Marion, a distance of some fifty miles. This area was the locale of the Russian Mennonite migration of the 1870s. By 1880, when the new laws took effect in Russia, most of those to whom their spiritual and cultural freedom was of paramount importance, had migrated to the new land. Those who were left behind accommodated themselves to the new laws. The pressure of the landless had been relieved for the time being, and life continued as usual for another generation. Then the Revolution broke up the colonies, and the remainder of the privileges were forfeited.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Jessie D. Clarkson, A History of Russia (New York, 1969), p. 99.
- ²Ibid., p. 122.
- ³James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe (New York, 1970), p. 208.
- ⁴Karl Stumpp, The German Russians--Two Centuries of Pioneering (Bonn, Germany, 1967), p. 7.
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶David V. Wiebe, They Seek a Country (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959), p. 20.
- ⁷Clarkson, Russia, p. 241.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 249.
- ⁹Ivar Spector and Marion Spector, Readings in Russian History and Culture (Palo Alto, California, 1965), p. 106.
- ¹⁰John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1950), p. 18.
- ¹¹William J. Ewert, "Ein Rückblick auf der Geschichte der Mennoniten, and speziell auf der Veranlassung und Vorbereitung zur Auswanderung von fünfzig Jahren." Zur Neuen Heimat (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1924), p. 7. English translation: But notice, the Lord provided for them even here. The Word is being fulfilled; '....before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.' (Isaiah 65:24). Yes, in Southern Russia, at that time, lay miles of fertile Steppe, which was not being cultivated.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 8. English Translation:
Soon, with determination, they left for Russia's wide Steppes
Where, at the appointed place, they would find fruitful ground.
Yet, on the miles-wide vista, there was nothing; no bush or tree.
But the Caravan began its way.

It was their goal, that there they would have to arrange a dwelling.

They purchased building-wood in Odessa, that had been brought by the Tschumaken.

Then they built houses, arranged their fields.

For that is free for building -- gold. (?)

And after the tiring toil, man can move into his home.

The beginning was unusually difficult.

When they began to settle the land.

Since they were unable to find wood for fuel,

They were forced to use dung.

That is their material for burning.

For the women, this was almost fatal,

But what can otherwise be done?

They had to cook the food.

- ¹³Wiebe, They Seek, p. 21.
- ¹⁴Clarkson, Russia, p. 237.
- ¹⁵G. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 385.
- ¹⁶Cornelius Krahn, From the Steppes to the Prairies (Newton, Kansas, 1949), p. 1.
- ¹⁷Smith, Story, p. 385.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 386.
- ¹⁹Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1973), p. 9.
- ²⁰Smith, Story, p. 23.
- ²¹Wiebe, They Seek, p. 25.
- ²²Bekker, Origin, p. 22.
- ²³Wiebe, They Seek, p. 22.
- ²⁴Smith, Story, p. 396.
- ²⁵Lohrenz, The M. B. Church, p. 20.
- ²⁶Smith, Story, p. 453.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 403.
- ²⁸Lohrenz, The M. B. Church, p. 21.
- ²⁹Smith, Story, p. 412.

- ³⁰Lohrenz, The M. B. Church, p. 22.
- ³¹Smith, Story, p. 412.
- ³²Leonhard Froese, Das Pädagogische Kultursystem der Mennonitische in Russland. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (University of Göttingen. 1949), p. 54.
- ³³Ibid., p. 59.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 63.
- ³⁵Smith, Story, p. 416.
- ³⁶Froese, Das Pädagogische, p. 75.
- ³⁷N. J. Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia in Russia," Mennonite Life (Newton, Kansas, April, 1969), p. 52.
- ³⁸Stump, The German Russians, p. 21.
- ³⁹Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia," p. 53.
- ⁴⁰Smith, Story, p. 452.
- ⁴¹Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia," p. 54.
- ⁴²Ibid.
- ⁴³Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 94.
- ⁴⁴Smith, Story, p. 273.
- ⁴⁵Lohrenz, The M. B. Church, p. 20.
- ⁴⁶Smith, Story, p. 404.
- ⁴⁷Krahn, Steppes, p. 2.
- ⁴⁸Dyck, An Introduction, p. 133.
- ⁴⁹Lloyd C. Penner, The Mennonites--A Century of Migration and Cultural Development. Unpublished Manuscript, 1972, p. 20.
- ⁵⁰Dyck, An Introduction, p. 113.
- ⁵¹Smith, Story, p. 411.
- ⁵²Dyck, An Introduction, p. 134.
- ⁵³Smith, Story, p. 411.

- ⁵⁴Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus (Altona, Manitoba, 1966), p. 19.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁵⁶Dyck, An Introduction, p. 137.
- ⁵⁷Krahn, Steppes, p. 6.
- ⁵⁸Epp, Exodus, p. 17.
- ⁵⁹Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia," p. 55.
- ⁶⁰Epp, Exodus, p. 26.
- ⁶¹Gustav E. Reimer and G. R. Gaeddert, Exiled by the Czar (Newton, Kansas, 1956), p. 8.
- ⁶²Epp, Exodus, p. 28.
- ⁶³Smith, Story, p. 474.
- ⁶⁴Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled, p. 28.
- ⁶⁵Klassen, "Mennonite Intelligentsia," p. 55.
- ⁶⁶Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled, p. 43.
- ⁶⁷Ibid., p. 44.
- ⁶⁸Smith, Story, p. 442.
- ⁶⁹Krahn, Steppes, p. 8.
- ⁷⁰Ibid.
- ⁷¹Smith, Story, p. 453.
- ⁷²Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled, p. 50.
- ⁷³Epp, Exodus, p. 26.
- ⁷⁴Smith, Story, p. 452.
- ⁷⁵This Elder Wiebe was an uncle to David V. Wiebe, author of They Seek a Country and Grace Meadow, both of which have been referred to in this paper.
- ⁷⁶Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled, p. 144.

CHAPTER V

A NEW LAND OF PROMISE

The great wave of the Mennonite migration from Russia to America took place in 1874-1880. In those years some 18,000 left homes, farms, cattle, and goods, selling what they could at whatever price it brought on a glutted market. Then came the inevitable tearful goodbyes, heart-breaking since there would be no reunion on this earth for most of them. Yet even this was resolutely endured, because keeping faith with their commitment to the Word of God was more important than any material possessions, earthly ties of family, or blood relationship. Often the grief of parting was minimized by the fact that entire families--from grandparents to grandchildren--were traveling together.

In many groups, if there were those who simply were too poor to secure passports and exit visas, plus the necessary travel expenses, those who were more prosperous helped to supply the need so that no one need remain behind. One who was there recalled that in his group 12,000 rubles were collected for that purpose. For those who were leaving prosperous farms and businesses, going out into the unknown "wilderness" in what was to them a savage land lately wrested from the control of Indian tribes, it must have taken much soul searching. Yet they, like their fathers before them, were resolute in following the dictates of their conscience. Nothing could deter them from their chosen goal once their minds were made up. William J. Ewert, on the fiftieth anniversary

of the Migration (1924), said:

Wird es uns dabei nicht wieder aufs neue zur Gewisheit, dasz des Herrn Gemeinde auf Erden eine Kreuz gemeinde ist, und dasz ihr Herr und Heiland nach seiner Weisheit sie durch manche Glaubensproben gehen lässt? Zeicht die Geschichte aber nicht auch sehr deutlich, dasz der Herr den Seinen beisteht und sie in allen Glaubensproben bewahren kann; ja, dieselben für sie segensreich werden lässt? Ich meine ja.¹

It had become for the Mennonites a pilgrimage which they were willing to undertake at all costs. Many of those who traveled on this journey have left detailed accounts. One of the most intriguing is the story of Anna Barkman, a young girl of eight in a family of emigres. Her appointed task in preparing for the long journey was to pick out two gallons of seed wheat, kernel by kernel. This seed, sown in the rich, fertile soil of Kansas, was the basis of the hard red Turkey wheat, the parent stock of the hard red wheat that is produced in the Midwest and has made Kansas into one of the greatest wheat producing areas in the world. Coupled with the hard work and almost uncanny farming ability of the Mennonites, it caused The Daily Record of Lawrence, Kansas, to say in 1890:

After sixteen years those Mennonites are with us still. They abided and toiled in Marion, McPherson, and Harvey counties. . . .went on tilling their 100,000 acres of land . . .and every fall, no matter what the season, wheat has been brought to the Newton market in untold quantities from that settlement. . . . The Mennonite says nothing, but goes on marketing his fat cattle, his corn and wheat. . . .²

Another said:

Day after day, all through the fall and winter, the Mennonites come in with wheat. The native American stands on the corner and complains, but the Mennonites come in with wheat. The Farmers Alliance holds its secret and noiseless sessions, and nothing breaks the silence save the chuck of the Mennonites' wheat laden wagons.³

Not that all the wheat came from Anna Barkman's small container, but that story is symbolic of the impact made on Kansas farming by the Mennonites. In fact, Bernhard Warkentin, a Mennonite miller of Newton, imported some 15,000 bushels of seed wheat in 1900.⁴

As the emigrants left their homes in Russia, they traveled across the country by train--the country that their grandparents had traversed by wagon, or on foot with their belongings on a handcart. P. A. Wiebe related it thus: At 6 p.m. on July 22, 1874, their train left the station at Prischip, the nearest railroad to the Colonies. Their train halted at a number of cities, and in between alternated great forests and fields of grain. Their route paralleled the line of march of Napoleon's retreating army of 1812, where 450,000 French troops lost their lives. At 7 o'clock on the evening of July 27 they arrived at Werbalowa, the border of Prussia. Here they had to pause for physical examinations and exchanged some of their rubles for Prussian thaler, at the exchange rate of 100 to 94. However, another rather startling development--the date had to be changed from the Old Style Russian, July 27, to August 8, to be in step with the rest of the world.

Reckoning time now by the new calendar, they arrived in Berlin on August 10, at 9 a.m., and at Hamburg at 9 p.m. This was the goal of the European journey. During their five-day stay, they paid their \$40 far per person for passage to America and changed the rest of their Russian rubles for American money. Early on the morning of August 16 they boarded a small ship, and at noon were transferred to the steam ship Teutonia that was to take them to America. To their dismay, their quarters were filled with coal dust, as though the rooms had been full of coal and recently emptied. There was no other course, but to clean

up as well as possible and make the best of it.

With a rising wind, the sea began heaving. So did the passengers, who became violently seasick. As the first week on board ship came to a close, there was an added horror. A fire had broken out in the engineroom, so all passengers who were in the center of the ship had to go on deck while the crew fought the flames. All were heartened when word came that the fire had been extinguished and they could return to their rooms.

At 2:30 p.m. on the second of September, the Teutonia entered New York Harbor and at 6 p.m. the passengers disembarked. Two days later, on September 4, they were on a train bound for Topeka, Kansas, arriving on the 8th. Thirty-seven days had been spent on the journey--about half the time on railroad trains, and the other half aboard the ship. A tremendous undertaking, beginning on July 22 (O. S. Calendar) and ending September the 8th. Yet their journey was not at an end, since they had to travel further to get to the area in mid-Kansas where their homes were to be established.⁵

At times whole shiploads of Mennonites came to America in groups of 700 or 800. Upon arrival in Topeka, several men often were sent to the area where land was to be had and purchased a large tract for the entire group. C. B. Schmidt, a German-speaking agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, was especially active in promoting the sale of lands belonging to his company.

One possibly representative group was the so-called Krimmer Mennonite Brethren from the Crimean Peninsula. Under the leadership of their pastor, Elder Jacob Wiebe, they also had traveled to Hamburg, Germany, then to New York on the Inman line City of Brooklyn. They had

stopped at Elkhart, Indiana, with a Mennonite group while Wiebe and Franz R. Jansen went to look at land in Dakota and Nebraska, then to Kansas where C. B. Schmidt met them and showed the land owned by the Santa Fe. After several days Wiebe and Jansen executed the papers securing rights to twelve sections, 7,680 acres of railroad land. The alternate twelve sections were government land, also available.

By mid-August of 1874 the settlers arrived and began laying out their village in accordance with the pattern used in Russia, with the main street on the half section line instead of on the mile lines. Each half section was divided into twenty strips, a half mile long, with the sod houses on the central street. It was not long, however, before the village system was abandoned and each family moved on their own, larger farm lands.

As it was in late summer, immediately some were at work plowing the sod for wheat planting, while others were engaged in erecting temporary dwellings. The first houses were simply built of a wooden frame in an inverted "V" shape, thatched with long grass. A mud-brick stove and chimney was constructed for cooking and heating. Often stock was housed in one end of the building as was the custom in Russia. Later, houses were built of sod, or adobe brick made by mixing earth with hay or straw, dried in the sun. However, in just a few years, frame houses began to appear, and as the people prospered it was not long until the older houses disappeared.⁶

A grist mill was built in 1876, powered by a Dutch windmill, and was soon running day and night. Several sugarcane mills were in operation, powered by horses, and provided molasses for the families, some of whom laid up as much as a hundred gallons a year. Every house had a

flower bed in front and gardens and orchards in the back yard. A visitor in 1876 said: "Their yards are immense bouquets. . . ."

As it had been true throughout the history of the Mennonites, one of the first buildings erected was a schoolhouse, and the education of the children continued with scarcely an interruption because of the migration. Naturally, this was mostly in the German language as there no longer was any use for Russian, and, at least in the first years, few teachers were really qualified to teach English. In fact, many of the original settlers lived out their days with only a bare minimum of acquaintance with the English language, transferring the feeling of a secular or profane language from the Russian to English.

A church was also built in the center of the village--of sod and thatch, but it continued the worship of God. After all, it was for this they had come. They had left their old home because their freedom of worship and belief had been threatened.

Contrary to policies of most communities in developing frontier areas, when the Santa Fe planned to build a railroad west from Marion to McPherson, it was to have been built through this particular village, (Gnadenau), but the settlers strenuously opposed it. They feared it would break up the unity of the community. So the railroad bypassed the village, and it eventually ceased to exist.⁷

Other Mennonite groups settled around Newton, as the Alexanderwohl group mentioned earlier. Then the area spread towards Hutchinson, and the towns of Moundridge, Hesston, Halstead, Buhler, and Inman were more or less composed of Mennonite families. As in other areas, each of these settlements built their churches and schools. Examples may be given: at Inman a Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church erected an academy

that remained in existence for many years. East of Inman a General Conference Mennonite group built the Hoffnungsau Academy. At Buhler an academy was also built half a mile north of the town. One of the teachers was Professor J. F. Duerksen, who was the head of the school for a number of years. His son, A. G. Duerksen, still living in Corn, Oklahoma, (1975), relates incidents from his memory of the school. He was born in the schoolhouse, for the living quarters for the instructor were upstairs. In the school, where the instruction was in German, were students of all sizes and grades, up to fifteen years old. School was in session only a few months out of the year, and as there were no laws compelling attendance, the students did not advance very rapidly. The young Abraham would often sneak away from his mother and go sit between the students while they were studying their lessons. They responded by showing him their letters and pictures.⁷

Education

Several of the church schools have already been mentioned. The Mennonite settlers had not left the old country at such a tremendous sacrifice only to give up the right to control their schools. The Alexanderwohl congregation that migrated in a body established a small Vorbereitungsschule near Newton, Kansas, in 1882. The next year a building was erected at Halstead, and it was carried on as the Fortbildungsschule with the same principal who had been in charge of the Alexanderwohl project. This continued for ten years, until in 1893 it gave way to Bethel College in Newton. This school, while not directly controlled by the Mennonite Church (General Conference), furnished many of the church leaders and missionaries.⁸

Another effort by the Mennonite settlers, this time by the Mennonite Brethren, centered at Hillsboro, Kansas. This was near the site of the Russian-type village described previously (Gnadenau). The first venture was the formation of the Kansas School Association in 1884, which supported a small Bible school in Canada, Kansas, some five or six miles east of Hillsboro. This only lasted two years. Later the school was moved to Lehigh.

The Vereinschule at Buhler, already mentioned, was under the direction of John F. Duerksen. In 1898 the Mennonite Brethren churches felt the need for a spiritual counselor for students attending McPherson College. Professor Duerksen assumed the chair of the German Department at that school, with the Mennonite Brethren furnishing financial support. This arrangement continued until 1904. Duerksen then left for Oklahoma where he was instrumental in improving the Corn Bible Academy.

Other schools were in existence, but they were all on the elementary or secondary level. What was needed was an institution of higher learning. This need was fulfilled in 1908 when two community leaders, Reverend John K. Hiebert, and Reverend Henry W. Lohrenz, organized a corporation which sponsored a new institution called Tabor College. Hiebert was chairman of the board, and Lohrenz became the first president. The purpose of the college was to provide an education based on the Bible. By 1918 there was a faculty of fifteen and a student body of 200. In April of that year a fire destroyed the building, but it was rebuilt with the present administration facility. In 1935 the corporation was taken over by the Mennonite Brethren Conference, which has been responsible for its control and financing ever since. It presently has a student body of over 500 and is fully

accredited by the North Central Association. The institution was for many years the center of biblical instruction for Mennonite Brethren ministers and missionaries, until 1954 when the theology department was moved to form the nucleus of a new Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, leaving the Liberal Arts College in Hillsboro.⁹

Music has always been an important part of the life of the Tabor campus, and the development of a strong choral tradition has been nurtured by the Tabor College Choir. Through local appearances and annual concert tours, the choir has become known for its artistic and meaningful sacred performances. Their tours have taken them from coast to coast, through many Canadian provinces, and recently to the country of Romania. The 1974 tour, in keeping with the centennial celebration of the bringing of Red Turkey wheat to Kansas, took the choir to all of the state capitals in wheat growing areas. There they sang as ambassadors of good will, having been proclaimed the official wheat centennial choir by Kansas Governor Robert Docking.¹⁰

Thus the Mennonite settlers in Kansas continued the tradition of fostering education that had characterized them in the various countries of Europe.

Culture

In the earlier years in Kansas, the culture they had known in Russia was retained as nearly as possible. Although the village system was soon abandoned and each family lived on its own larger farm, the family, church, and school was nearly unbroken in continuity. The church, which had divided into several groups in Russia, remained divided here, basically into what is now the General Conference, Mennonite

Brethren, and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. These last two eventually merged (1960) into the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America.

True, each country in which the Mennonites lived down through the centuries had left its mark in some way. For example, the German language was added in Prussia, and it has stayed with them. In Russia a number of words and expressions were added to the Low German and High German, as borscht, bulke, and selenke, articles of common food. There are many more, the exploration of which would form an interesting subject, but is not properly within the scope of this paper, except to mention in passing. These words, and the foods themselves, were additions to the Mennonite culture, to be sure, but were extraneous additions which merely enriched the culture itself. In a similar way, during the passage of the last century, have English words been incorporated into the Platt-Deutsch of the original settlers, wherever it is still used. Otherwise, it differs little from that spoken in the lowlands of West Prussia several centuries ago.¹¹

In the early years in Kansas, very little literature was produced by Mennonite workers. Evidently the toil and labor of making a living, providing for the family, and then expanding into prosperity consumed all their energies. Neither was there any great amount of production of artistry in paintings and other forms. The Mennonite consciousness was focused upon producing goods, crops, farms, businesses.

One important facet of their culture that survived the long journey into a new land and sprang into fullness of life was the intense interest in sharing--and caring. Hospitals were built, old people's homes were provided, and orphans were cared for. Each town had its benevolent institutions so that no one would be cast upon the care of governments.

All their efforts were not turned in upon themselves, however. They continued contributing to worthy causes. Millions have been sent to relieve the suffering of fellow Mennonites in the old countries during the wars that have devastated Europe. Clothing and other goods, as grains and meat for food, in tremendous proportions, flowed out to help those in need.

The spiritual aspect was not neglected. Within a few years after the first great Migration to America (in 1879, the Mennonite Brethren Churches adopted a resolution to engage in Foreign Mission work), they were sending missionaries to many countries--India, Africa, China, Armenia, South America, and many smaller areas. This work began in the 1880s and 1890s, and has continued unabated ever since.

FOOTNOTES

¹William J. Ewert, "Ein Rückblick auf der Geschichte der Mennoniten uns speziell auf die Veranlassung und Vorbereitung zur Auswanderung vor fünfzig Jahren," Zur Neuen Heimat (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1924), p. 12. English translation: Is it not again newly brought to mind, that the Lord's Church here on earth must carry a cross, and that our Lord and Savior, in His wisdom, allows it to go through testings of faith? Does not the story, however, show clearly that the Lord stands by His own, and protects them in those testings of faith; yes, even making them rich in blessings? I believe so.

²Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 156.

³Cornelius Krahn, From the Steppes to the Prairies (Newton, Kansas, 1949), p. 11.

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵P. A. Wiebe, "Erlebnisse auf der Reise nach Amerika," Zur Neuen Heimat (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1924), p. 15.

⁶David V. Wiebe, Grace Meadow (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1967), p. 44.

⁷A. G. Duerksen, Taped Recollections, 1974.

⁸C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 764.

⁹A Century of Grace and Witness (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1960), p. 31.

¹⁰From a brochure of information concerning Tabor College, 1975.

¹¹Smith, Story, p. 759.

CHAPTER VI

SETTLEMENT--CLAIMS IN OKLAHOMA

The Great Migration from Russia to America took place in 1874. Many came in the years following, but the pace gradually slackened until in the 1880's it was reduced to a mere trickle. Later, after the Russian Revolution, there were several more waves of Mennonite migration involving thousands of people, but most of these landed in Canada, and in the 1930s and following World War II, many thousands found places of refuge in South America. They settled mainly in Paraguay and Brazil, with a few in Argentina and Uruguay. However, that is another story, and will not be further explored here.

At first the available land in Kansas seemed almost limitless. However, most Mennonites purchased land from the railroad grants--they did not want to homestead the government land on the alternate sections, since they did not desire involvement with the American government. They were not yet ready for citizenship, and were fearful of entanglement which might compromise their freedom. Naturally, the generation born here were citizens by birth, and many of the immigrants did become naturalized. But that all took time, especially to ease their fears of government intervention in their lives and religion.

With more people coming into the Kansas communities, and with the natural fecundity of the Mennonites that had doubled their population every twenty-five years in Russia,¹ the available land was soon

exhausted or became too expensive for those who had little money. Consequently many persons began looking for land in other areas that would be suitable for settlement.

Indian Territory

In April, 1892, southwest Oklahoma was opened to settlement. This was land that had been in the reservation of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian tribes--an empire of 4,300,000 acres--and only slightly over 3,000 Indians, two-thirds Cheyenne and one-third Arapaho. However, the western part of this area was rough and hilly, with scant rainfall, making farming difficult and hazardous.² Congress had provided for opening these lands, along with other areas belonging to various tribes, by passing the Indian Appropriation Act of March 2, 1889. A commission, commonly known as the Jerome Commission after one of its members, negotiated agreements with nearly all the Indians whose land laid west of the Five Civilized Tribes. In October, 1890, an agreement with the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribes was reached. Every member was to receive 160 acres of land, and the rest was purchased by the government for \$1,500,000.³

The Indians insisted on payment before they drew their land allotments. So \$1,000,000 was placed in the Treasury, drawing interest at five percent, paid annually on a per capita basis. Four installments of \$50,000 each were to be paid in cash, and cash meant in silver dollars. Each Indian received seventy-five, weighing over six pounds.

With the payment of over \$200,000 in silver, the Indians accepted their land allotments, with 230,000 acres set aside for schools, and 32,000 for military purposes. The rest of the reservation was then

opened for settlement by white persons.

At noon on April 19, 1892, the lands were opened with a Run. Some 25,000 persons took part, a rather small number compared to the 100,000 taking part in the Cherokee Outlet Run a little over a year later. Even so, the eastern part of the area filled quite rapidly. There were six new counties, C, D, E, F, G, and H. The last two, later named Custer and Washita, became the area that attracted the Mennonites from Kansas. Some writers have expressed the view that many settlers were rebuffed by the semi-arid climate, being afraid of crop failures. Thus much of the area remained cattle country. Then too, it was far from a railroad, although many early farmers did not count on raising large amounts of produce for market.

Fortunately, the weather co-operated, and the first ten or fifteen years of settlement were said to have been quite productive, at least for many. Farming was guesswork, since few had any experience with the particular type of farming required. As one writer said: "It was a hit and miss proposition the pioneer farmers were up against, in their first few crops. One man's guess was as good as the next one's. Some guessed wrong and it didn't take many wrong guesses to end a lot of homesteader's dreams because many were working on shoestrings."⁴ Mostly they farmed as they had in the old home they left before coming to Oklahoma. At first a quarter section was considered quite a large farm, some consisted of only 80 acres. Even this limited acreage kept a farmer busy with the implements available.

This, then, was the setting that drew the Mennonite farmers from Kansas. It may be that they were better equipped to cope with the semi-arid conditions, since it resembled the climate and topography of

southern Russia where they had learned through hard experience what methods and crops would give the best returns for their labor. Whatever the reason may have been, they soon prospered so that they were able to erect frame houses to replace the original dugouts, and other outbuildings as they were needed.

One crop that possibly was new to most of the Kansas Mennonites was cotton. It may well have been several years before they ventured to plant what to them must have been an exotic crop, preferring the more customary and familiar fields of wheat and corn, supplemented with cattle; a few milk cows from which they could sell the cream for extra income; some hogs, both for domestic as well as for sale; and some chickens for eggs and meat. Each family had a garden in which were grown all the vegetables the family could use. Fruit trees were soon planted, to add variety to the diet. Within a few years the farmsteads were again livable and prosperous. To be sure, a few crop failures came, and some of the settlers became discouraged and sold out or simply packed their meager belongings and left, but most of them, and especially the Mennonites, remained and made the best of their opportunities.

Filing the Claims

Word had traveled swiftly to the Mennonite settlements in Kansas that land was available in southwestern Oklahoma. The country was not entirely unknown, since both the Mennonite Brethren and the General Conference Mennonites had had missionaries to the Indians in this area for some years. The General Conference Mennonites had pioneered in this field with a mission station at Darlington, near present El Reno,

in 1881. Later, as the Indians moved further west, a mission was begun at Cantonment. An Indian Mennonite Church is still in existence south of Canton. In 1889, a mission was opened at Shelly on the Washita River, where a large Arapaho settlement was located. This station formed the nucleus for the General Conference Mennonite homesteaders, who took up land around the mission, and used it as their first meeting house.

The Mennonite Brethren established a mission to the Comanche Indians in 1894, at the Post Oak Mission five miles northeast of Indianoma. It had been in the planning and preparatory stage for several years, since 1889, thus antedating the actual settlement on the Washita River. It was some distance away, but did serve to acquaint Mennonite Brethren leaders with the area, and its settlement possibilities. These mission stations will be dealt with more fully later.

Most of the Mennonite settlers that came to the Cheyenne-Arapaho territory came as homesteaders. Most were poor, some extremely so. They filed on the quarter-section claims they had selected, by going to Guthrie for that purpose. Then they returned to their old homes in Kansas to settle their business and bring their families to the new homestead. A few of the Mennonites had already filed late in 1892. However, it seems that none had taken part in the original run, but came when they could take their time and look over the land to make a deliberate choice.

The following spring, belongings were loaded into covered wagons-- clothing, bedding, cooking utensils, and some furniture. A coop with chickens was fastened on one side, and a trough for the horses in the back of the wagon. The cows were driven by the children, if they possessed any cows. It took two weeks to make the trip.⁵

Most of the Mennonites that settled along the Washita came from the areas of central Kansas, from Buhler, Newton, Hillsboro, and their neighboring communities. A few may have come from other areas, as Nebraska. Most of them filed on homesteads, or purchased land from the government at \$2 per acre.

As so many of the settlers, not many Mennonites were wealthy or affluent enough to build frame houses of wood. They did the next best, which was to construct a dugout, half in the ground, usually on a hillside, with the walls above ground of sod. A large beam was laid along the center, boards nailed across, and the roof covered with sod. When it rained, the sod soaked up the water like sponge, and like a sponge continued to drip long after the rain ceased. Beds and furniture had to be covered with oilcloth to keep them from becoming soaked with muddy water. The floor, usually of hard-packed earth, would also become muddy. Spiders, insects, centipedes, and sometimes even snakes, found their way into the dwellings. Small wonder that every settler built a house of wood as soon as he raised a few crops to secure enough cash money for such a project. Rattlesnakes abounded, but seemingly were not a great factor in causing injury or death.

At first the settlers chose farmsteads that had a creek for water, and trees for firewood, shade, or even lumber. Two sawmills were some of the first businesses established, one at Big Jake's Crossing, and one at Shelly. These mills made lumber out of the native cottonwood trees, which were plentiful along the creeks, especially along the Washita River. The lumber had to be stacked, and weighted down for several months until it had thoroughly dried and cured, else it would curl like a piece of paper. One old settler recalled, "We had a sod house, around

28 feet long, and 12 feet wide. It had cottonwood 2 x 6s squared off, nailed like studding, filled up with sods and plastered with mud. The inside was whitewashed. We didn't have any lime, so we took some of this white gyp (gypsum) earth that we have around Corn and used that. It would make a grayish finish. Those that were very particular about things would take a torch, light it, and smoke the walls."⁶

The lands with creeks were chosen first, since water was a necessity. Later settlers had to take quarter sections which were in some instances more level, and thus better for actual farming, but without the coveted water. Then they faced the task of digging wells by hand, with spade and pickaxe, to a depth of as much as forty-five feet. Even so, most of the well water, like that in the creeks, was extremely hard, or "gippy", leaving a whitish residue when boiled, and with an unpleasant taste. As soon as the houses had shingled roofs, cisterns were dug and rainwater collected for cooking, drinking, and family use.⁷

The first thirteen Mennonite settlers were said to have been: Jacob Funk; Cornelius Reimer, Sr.; Abraham Berg; Benjamin Wedel; David Balzer; Gottfried Berg; Cornelius Reimer, Jr.; J. J. Fast; C. H. Jansen; J. H. Janzen; and Henry Flaming, Sr.

In August, 1893, another group arrived, consisting of the following: Reverend Peter Neufeld; Gerhard Koop; four brothers, Gerhard, Henry H., Peter W., and Cornelius H. Kliever. Also, Reverend Abraham Richert; John H. Dyck; Henry H. Wohlegmuth; Martin Schlichting, Sr.; Peter Bergmann; Abraham Reimer; Henry Penner; Henry Merk, Julius Hinz; and others.⁸

Experience With the Indians

The Indians of the area had been settled at what is now the tiny village of Colony, originally called Seger Colony. It had been given this name in honor of John H. Seger, who had been working with the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indians around the Agency at Darlington. In 1882, the military commander at Darlington decided to move the Indians some fifty miles to the west, to their reservation land. He asked the Indian agent, J. D. Mills, to suggest someone who could lead the Indians, numbering around five hundred, to the new location. Mills recommended Seger, saying that he was probably the only man who could successfully influence the Indians to make the move.

Seger first made a trip to the new area, choosing the spot on Cobb Creek where Colony is now located. Finally, in 1886, the Indians, supplied with provisions, started the trek to their new home. The greatest hardship was in crossing the South Canadian River, but it was negotiated safely. After the crossing, Seger asked all the men to lay aside their blankets, and gave each one a complete outfit of white man's clothing.

Settled on Cobb Creek, bricks were made, and a school and church were built. However, the Indians spread out along the creeks and the Washita River, for shelter, food, and fuel, as well as range for their numerous ponies. Colony remained as the center of their activities, often having pow-wows lasting for several weeks at a time.

Agatha Funk, a pioneer school teacher, wrote of the Indians:

The settlers were anxious to see the Indians--and they soon saw them. A row of wagons came down the Indian trail to the Washita River. Their chief was Big Jake. Other Indians were: Left Hand, Hobble Horse, Big Horse, Two Baby, Red Bird, Antelope, Coyote, etc. Indian sun dances and harvest festivities were big events and other Indians came.

At their dances, several persons danced themselves to death. The big drums went bang-bang all night long. The youths went to the camps. It was very quiet. The men and squaws wore white sheets. It was what we say in German--'Unheimlich.'

By the time the Mennonites arrived, the Indians no longer roamed as freely as before. One of the major sources of contact were the large herds of ponies, which roamed freely. These horses relished the grain crops of the settlers. Feed had to be stacked in the yard, where it could be guarded.⁹

The settlers carried on some trade with the Indians. Watermelons, garden vegetables, fresh fruit, or bread would be traded for blankets or moccasins. Occasionally a calf or cow was sold to them. These were butchered on the spot, and eaten immediately. Most of the newcomers became acquainted with the chief, Big Jake, who seemed to have had a bridge built across the Washita, where it was possible to cross. Otherwise it was difficult crossing the river, especially when the water was high, since in most places the banks are steep.

There was little danger from the Indians, but evidently an attack was planned at one time, however futile it would have been. Some U. S. cavalrymen came riding into the new settlement, and inquired about the Indian camp. Word had reached Ft. Reno that a tribe was coming down from South Dakota to help the Cheyennes. A contingent of cavalry had been sent further north to cut off the advance of the Dakota tribe, and the others rode to the camp on the Washita, disarmed the Indians, and sternly warned them they would be shot like dogs if they harmed any whites.

Agatha Funk related an episode in which some neighbor children were badly frightened when some Indians came to their house. They had hidden their baby sister in the "corner shelf", and in the summer heat

she had almost suffocated. Also, since some of the children had red hair, the squaws would get quite excited, and feel of the red hair while they gestured and talked.¹⁰

As a whole, the relationships between Indians and the Mennonite settlers were quite harmonious with some close friendships being formed. One Indian, whose name was not given, was said to have had a wife who had been raised by a Mennonite family in Kansas, and thus was able to communicate very well with the settlers. Even her husband had learned to talk the German, evidently the Low-German dialect.¹¹

Formerly, there were Indian cemeteries along the Washita. When one of the Indians died, his favorite pony was shot, and the food he liked best was placed on his grave, with all kinds of trinkets and pretty things. They were dressed in their finest clothes, especially the women, with fancy beadwork of different designs. Their graveyards have long since disappeared, the land plowed, and the crops planted over them. Now succeeding generations have completely forgotten their locations.

Transportation

Most of the families that settled in the Washita River area tried to be self-sufficient. After all, they had little money to purchase anything, and the early crops were small, not because the fields did not yield, but because acreage was limited. Jakob Funk recorded in his diary the following entry: March 22, 1893, we arrived. We built a house 14 X 20, planted Kaffir corn and raised enough for 2 horses, 1 cow and a calf. In fall I sowed 10 acres of wheat, it yielded 150 bu. in 1894. The income was \$65.88."¹²

Still, what surplus grain there was, had to be transported to market, to be converted into cash for the few necessities that had to be purchased. The nearest market was at El Reno, sixty to seventy miles away. The roads were primitive, some were rocky, some sandy, with many creeks and gullies that must be crossed. The most serious obstacle was the South Canadian River, with its wide sand bottom. Often the river was up, at flood stage. Even after the water receded, there was danger of quicksand. One pioneer recalled that his father had taken a wagon load of wheat to El Reno. The wagon became mired in quicksand, so the farmer carried the grain on his back, to the dry sand further on. It had been placed in burlap bags, and the heavy sacks were enough to discourage most men. After the wagon had been unloaded, the horses were able to pull it out of the sand. Once it was free, the sacks of grain were again loaded, and the journey completed without incident. It took four to five days for a round trip.¹³

Another old settler related stories of the efforts to provide power for machinery. A horsepower machine was ferried across the river, but it was too heavy and sank in the quicksand. It had been brought all the way from Kansas on wagons. A few years later another one was procured, and since it happened to be a dry season, and the river was down, it was successfully brought to its destination. The same year a light Case steam engine was taken to the crossing, planks were placed under its wheels, and an attempt made to bring it across. The shifting sands would not support the weight, and the engine disappeared. It is still resting in the bed of the river.¹⁴

As a rule, the settlers would not attempt the journey to El Reno alone. Usually it was made in groups of four or five. Then if one

wagon began to sink, other teams were hitched on, and with the added horsepower the vehicle was usually drawn to safety. Or else the men all helped to unload the wagon, wading through the water with the sacks of grain on their backs. On the return trip, the wagons would be loaded with whatever merchandise was needed, possibly lumber for a house or other buildings, or goods for some enterprising merchants. When the river was high, branches and logs would come floating down the stream and the settlers would be forced to make camp and simply wait until the water had receded. Kroeker concludes the account with these words: "The Lord protected them on these journeys, no wagons were lost, only an old Horsepower."¹⁵

Even after the hardships had been endured, the farmers did not strike it rich. Eggs sold for 3 to 5 cents per dozen, corn for 18 cents per bushel, wheat for 30 cents per bushel. Hogs and beef cattle brought \$3.15 per hundredweight.

After a few years, four Penner brothers began to haul freight to El Reno and back. These enterprising young businessmen operated a freight train of wagons, making the trip once a week--that is, if the river allowed the crossings. They would carry grain, produce, even passengers. The produce or grain would be sold for whatever it would bring, and the money returned to the owners. What was equally important, they also brought back the mail, so that it could be delivered to the settlers. This was worth more than all else, since they were able to keep in contact with loved ones in other communities and states. Mail was not too plentiful anyway, as Peter Rogalsky related that he, his parents, and two others chipped in to subscribe to the "Lincoln Frei-
Presse"--evidently a German language paper--which cost them a dollar a

year for the subscription. It helped him to learn to read German, since he had not had an opportunity to attend a German school.¹⁶

On one of their trips, the Penner brothers had run out of food. Upon meeting a group of settlers from home, they made known their plight. In a play upon words, Henry Janzen had passed on this information to the others with: "Da fratasch habe nuscht to frate." (The freighters have nothing to eat.) One must understand the Low German, or Platt-Deutsch, to appreciate the pun.¹⁷ A few years later, the railroad was built west from El Reno, to where Weatherford is at present. At first the bridge over the Canadian washed out often, but eventually one was built that withstood the floods. This improved the methods of transportation, but it also put the freighters out of business.

Agriculture

Prices of farm products were low, but there had to be some way to have a cash income. As soon as the dugout had been constructed, the tough prairie sod was broken in order to plant a crop. Usually the first grain seeded was kaffir corn, a sorghum somewhat like milo, but with straight, erect heads. (Early milo had the heads hanging down, and was often called 'crook-neck' milo). The grain of the kaffir was white, while that of milo is red or brown. Often in the first years, until a crop of wheat could be harvested, this kaffir was ground into flour and used for baking bread, as well as for feed for the horses, cattle, hogs, and chickens. The grain was "hand-topped", the heads being cut off with a knife, and the stalks could be used for cattle fodder.

In the fall, an acreage of ground would be prepared for the sowing

of wheat. The first crop was harvested by rather primitive methods. Rogalsky related that his father's first crop was spread out on a level place where the grass had been cut, and a Mr. Warkentin threshed it out with a roller made from a log, pulled around over the wheat. The straw, grain, and chaff was then thrown upwards with a pitchfork so that the wind could blow the lighter material to one side. After a while, the heavier grain would become separated from the residue.¹⁸

Another spoke of an early type of threshing machine, turned by a Horsepower, by means of which they were able to successfully and easily complete their harvest with much less labor. A Horsepower was driven by from four to eight horses, going in a circle. Through gears, the power was transmitted to the thresher by a tumbling-rod. This was a great improvement over the roller, and was the only power available until a gasoline or steam engine could be brought over the Canadian River. The first harvest for them (the Julius Hinz family) had included about ten acres of wheat. They threshed out about a hundred fifty or seventy-five bushels--a mere drop in the bucket for a modern farmer, but it meant some money for essentials in those difficult pioneer days.¹⁹

A crop that was also very prominent in the early days was another sorghum, "sugar" cane. This became very important, since it provided fodder for the cattle, but even more, could be processed for sorghum syrup, or molasses. For most pioneer families, the home-made molasses was the only source of sweets readily available. Sugar was far too expensive and too difficult to obtain, so the sorghum molasses was used to sweeten baked goods and as a spread for bread in place of jellies and jams.

A Mr. Bergmann, living just east of the present town of Corn, had

a sorghum press. At the proper time, the cane was cut, the leaves stripped off, and the stalks were hauled to Bergmann's yard. There it was unloaded and stacked. When the appointed day came, the cane was run through the sorghum press, the juice allowed to collect in the cooking pans, and boiled until the water evaporated and the dark brown molasses remained.²⁰

An incident that may be amusing to us, yet illustrated the ability of the people to make do with what they had, is the following--the Rogalsky family were out of food, so they visited some neighbors. These too, were out of food. The hostess had an idea. "We have some nice cane," she said, "so we can peel it and eat it." This was done, and the cane became their lunch.

The Rogalsky family had had similar experiences before. When they first came to Oklahoma, the father had possessed only \$20. The filing fee took \$16, and he was left with only \$4. Soon after this, a neighbor came by and asked to borrow some money, as he had none and had to buy some groceries. The elder Rogalsky then loaned him half of all that he himself possessed--\$2. Before their garden could produce some vegetables, the remaining \$2 was spent. A letter was sent to a brother in Kansas, asking for a loan, but it took weeks--a month--before an answer came with the money. The family was in desperate straits. But now the loan to the neighbor paid off. The neighbor owned a cow, and was getting a generous quantity of milk, which they shared with the Rogalsky family. For three long weeks this milk constituted the sole diet of both families. There was a little flour on hand, not enough to bake, but enough to make a small amount of dough which was crumbled into the milk and then slightly cooked. The resulting soup, called "kleeta

moos" by the Low German settlers, was the entire meal, three times a day, for three weeks. Mr. Rogalsky remarked, "When one eats skim milk three times a day for three weeks, it gets to be a very thin diet."²¹

Other crops that were popular were corn and broomcorn. In fact, the town of Corn was given that name when a government inspector saw the green fields in the surrounding area. The broomcorn, as well as the field or Indian Corn, had to be picked by hand. Later the seeds had to be removed from the brush, and the brush dried and baled.²²

Young people were in demand, since much of the work was done by hand. Corn and broomcorn must be picked and processed. The cotton had to be chopped and picked. Wheat was cut with binders, but had to be set up in shocks and later the bundles hauled to the threshing machine. There was a need for all the help the farmers could get, hence the large families that were in vogue in the community.

In addition to the grain crops, many, if not most, of the farmers milked some cows as soon as they could acquire them. The cream was taken to the little town of Shelly, where one of the early missions to the Indians had been located. Here one Peter Flaming, called "Cheese Peter," was operating a cheese factory. Without refrigeration, it was impossible to keep the cream sweet for long, but the cheese factory evidently carried on a prosperous business for some years. Cream was kept sweet by various ways. Some covered it with a wet cloth to cool by evaporation, some had a well-house with a water barrel, or it was hung into a cistern. If these things were not available, then it was kept in a cellar which was reasonably cool.

A basic implement was the sod plow, with a flat metal share to cut the soil, and a mouldboard of rods instead of a solid curved piece of

steel, to turn the soil. Planting was done by using a little hand planter with two handles that were hinged together. Between them was a small container for the seed. A quick jab into the earth, and when the handles were pulled apart a seed was dropped into the resulting hole. The soil was then closed around the seed by stepping on it with the foot. One enterprising pioneer punched a hole in the bottom of a large tin can, filled it with seed, and hung it between the handles of his hand plow. The seed then dribbled into the furrow as he plowed, and was covered by the next round. This too made a crop in the rich soil of the Washita River area.

Founding of the Towns

Shelly

Five miles southwest of the present town of Corn was a place called Shelly. It was established in July of 1889 by General Conference Mennonite Missionary J. J. Kliever, who was sent by his Conference to begin a Mission Station to the Cheyenne-Arapaho Indians who lived along the Washita River. Kliever drove there in a covered wagon, chose the plot of ground, and proceeded to build his house. This was a simple affair. He cut down small trees, dug a trench the size and shape of a house, set the poles in the trench like rows of posts. A strip of wood was laid along the top and nailed to each post. The roof was a frame of heavy sticks or poles, with long grass and brush piled on them, and covered with a layer of dirt. Cracks between the posts of the walls were chinked with clay. Simple doors were placed in the openings. This was called a palisade-type of a house.²³

When the Cheyenne-Arapaho land was opened to settlement in 1889,

(before the Run of 1892), it was an opportunity for the mission workers to secure 160 acres of land near their station. The order giving all of the Indians a quarter-section of land in severalty disturbed them greatly, and hindered the work of evangelization. Then all land was opened to homesteading, even the plot upon which the Mission stood, so the Mission personnel were forced to file in order to keep their land. Before long, the Indians moved away, and the Station was used as a meeting place for the General Conference Mennonite settlers. In 1900 the Mission was discontinued by the Mission Board, and Kliewer became pastor of the newly founded Bergthal Church.²⁴

While the Mission was in existence, several businesses sprang up as the settlers streamed into the area. A general store was opened by George Bushman, with Frank Janzen as clerk. The post office was also in the store, with the address as: Shelly, Oklahoma Territory, County H. The mail came in from El Reno twice a week, if the roads and bridges were passable. J. P. Kroeker writes that one morning he had gone with his parents to Shelly. When they came to the Washita it was half-full, and the bridge had washed out. The water was too deep to ford, so a number of people were simply waiting for the river to go down. The merchants of Shelly had a rowboat, and offered to ferry the people across, after which they could walk the quarter of a mile to the stores. At first all were afraid, but finally some ventured to make the crossing. Others were encouraged to try it, and eventually all of the people were able to cross and take care of their business.²⁵

Another enterprise in Shelly was the cheese factory mentioned before, operated by Peter Flaming. (Cheese Peter) Here the farmers were able to sell their cream, often the only source of hard cash income for

the settlers, at least until they could harvest a crop. Another store was operated by Henry Wiens and Henry Wohlgemuth. The first stage coach driver was Henry Flaming, Sr., who drove the run from Shelly to El Reno.

Evidently there were several small saw mills in the area, one at Shelly, and one at Cloud Chief. The huge cottonwood trees found along the river were sawed into lumber. These two mills furnished the wood for many of the original buildings, and the roof beams and boards for many of the sod dugouts. Later, possibly when the cottonwood became scarce, or when the most affluent settlers could afford the more expensive but stronger and more durable fir and pine lumber, it was hauled in from El Reno. One writer states that there was also another mill at Big Jake's Crossing, northwest of the present town of Corn.²⁶

The population of Shelly rose until it numbered between 200 and 300 persons, with two general merchandise stores. In 1900 the Frisco Railroad tracks reached into Washita County, and the town site of Stout was laid out beside the railroad. Henry Wiens moved his store to the new site, but H. A. Flaming remained in Shelly in the store they had formerly operated together. John Ratzlaff, in another store, also remained in Shelly for several years. A district school was later to stand on the abandoned town site, after all had left.

Stout

The new town of Stout already had a post office established by John Stout and his brother soon after the territory opened. Stout grew rapidly for two years, replacing Shelly as the outstanding town of the area. By 1903 the railroad had reached the present town of Bessie, and it was decided that this was a better townsite than Stout. The reason

given was that Bessie had a better water supply. It was explained that Boggy Creek had a more plentiful flow of water and that a roundhouse would be constructed there. The railroad then also decided to move its depot to Bessie.

The people of Stout objected. They got a restraining order, even after the depot had been loaded onto a railroad car to be moved. The car was chained to the rails, and the railroad was told it could not be moved. However, an agreement was reached when the citizens of Stout were reassured by the townsite company that they could have lots in the new town of Bessie. The move was made in 1903.

Bessie

The roundhouse and a lake were constructed in Bessie. The roundhouse remained in use for fifteen years. Six locomotives could be handled, and a crew of twenty-five men were employed. So Bessie was a railroad town for a while, but the roundhouse was closed by a strike in 1917, and never reopened to its former use, although it was used as a turn-around point in the line for a time, and then torn down.

Ben Wohlgeomuth moved a hotel from Stout to Bessie, this became one of the pioneer businesses. In addition, two elevators, three business houses, and about ten residences were moved to the new town, which is still a wheat shipping center for this area.

The first church in Bessie was built by the Baptists south of town, but the building was demolished by a tornado. A Lutheran church was also built, and there is still one standing on the approximate spot, being called the Peace Lutheran Church. It is about a mile northeast of town. Bessie had as many as five saloons at a time. A cider press

and a broom corn factory were also in operation. A German-language newspaper was moved there from Weatherford, and was printed for a time.

Bessie was named after the daughter of a division superintendent of the Frisco Railroad.²⁷

Corn

The quarter section of land where the southeast part of the town of Corn is located, including the site of the present Washita Heights High School, was homesteaded by a man named Friesen. It became so dry and dusty that he traded the whole 160 acres for a horse and saddle and headed back to Kansas. Another man had 80 acres nearby, but also became discouraged and traded it for a mowing machine. He too returned to Kansas. However, most people stayed, made good crops, and began to prosper.²⁸

The first post office in this area was located about five miles north of the present town of Corn. It had been robbed several times by outlaws, and the postmaster had to carry a six-shooter to keep the bandits from taking all his money. The postmaster's name was Henry Kendall. An application had been made to have the post office moved south to be near the site of the M. B. Church, which was rapidly superseding Shelly as the center of the east area of the settlement, just as Bessie was to become the center of the western part. At first the store was moved two miles south, to a rock farm house, but shortly thereafter was moved to Corn.²⁹

A government agent, arriving at the newly-opened Cheyenne-Arapaho country to select a site for a post office, had not given any thought about a name for the new location. Seeing a corn field near the Kendall

store, he decided to name the new post office "Corn". However, the postal department evidently made a mistake in signing the official papers, and the name was "Korn" until some years later--in 1918--when the name was changed again to what should have been the original spelling, "Corn".³⁰ During the antagonisms of World War I, the word "Korn" sounded too German, leading to the change in spelling. Actually, as far as can be determined, there was no connection between the spelling and the language spoken by the settlers of the community.

The first postmaster of the newly created post office was George Flaming. Businesses were needed in a town, so a general store was started by the Flaming brothers, G. B. and Henry. Then too, to take care of the corn that was being raised in abundance, a grist mill was needed. Peter Bergmann acquired a small grist mill, and ground the corn into meal. The grinder was operated by a small gas engine. Later a small steam engine was installed to drive the mill. It was housed in a building on the creek, just on the west edge of town, on the south side of the road. Some years later a flour mill was built on the east edge of Corn. Here a diesel engine was installed, and the mill continued to grind flour for many years. D. P. Guenther and Jacob F. Reimer built the first mill on the present site in 1919, later selling it to Peter Rogalsky in 1927.

Rogalsky related some of the difficulties he encountered. At first, business was poor. Most people had the idea that a small mill could not make good flour. In reality, the quality was as good as that from larger mills. In fact, for some time the mill made and packed flour on contract for the Expansion Mills of Wichita, which produced the most popular brand of flour sold and used in this area. It was then

sold under their brand, often to the same people who refused to try the flour under the brand name of the Corn Milling Company. In the second year of operation, Rogalsky, with the help of two sons, had built up their business until they were making a profit of \$7 a day. Not exactly a fortune, but as he remarked, "You don't go broke when you are making \$7 a day."

An interesting sidelight came when working hours were discussed. Since Korn was dominated by the Church, and practically everyone was a member, the mill was shut down at midnight on Saturday night. Just after midnight Sunday night, the mill would be started up again, and continue running all week until the following Saturday night.³¹

The first cream station in Korn was owned by Peter Bergmann. The first blacksmith shop was operated by Jake Bergmann. Other businesses were added until by 1918 there were two grocery stores, a garage, a hardware store, and two implement dealers. The DeFehr Implement Company of Weatherford, dealers in the John Deere line, began their existence in Korn. Another blacksmith shop was also in operation. A bank--the Korn State Bank, was located in the town. J. P. Kroeker, who became the assistant cashier and teller of the bank in 1911, related that the cash in the community seemed to really circulate. As the treasurer of the local Sunday School, he had kept all the pennies for a while, replacing them with larger currency, causing a penny shortage. Later, taking the pennies to the bank, he was informed that they had been running out of pennies and had to replenish their supply from neighboring banks.³²

Additional businesses that appeared in Korn at some time or another, some remaining, some disappearing after a while, were two grain

elevators, a cotton gin, three filling stations, a loan office, and several barber shops. For a time, Korn was served by a freight line, consisting of a Caterpillar tractor pulling a number of wagons with grain boxes that held a hundred bushels each. The train hauled grain from Korn to the Bessie elevators.³³

One very important business that appeared in Korn in its early years was its newspaper, the Washita County Enterprise. It had its beginning at Colony in March, 1917. The original equipment was purchased at Meeker, with the Colony Chamber of Commerce and a Mr. Armstrong negotiating the deal. The same year it was sold to H. C. Ramsey, and published by Eugene Forbes. In 1918 Ramsey moved the machinery to Corn. H. A. Unger became the new owner in 1922, but sold it two years later to the Reimer Brothers, and A. G. Duerksen became the editor for some years. Unger bought it back, but two years later sold it to J. E. Heinrichs, who continued to edit the Enterprise until his death. His wife Viola then took up the work, although in the last years the printing has been done by the Schoonover Publications of Sentinal. As long as it was actually printed in Corn, it was said to be the only hand-set newspaper in western Oklahoma, and the press was still the original one with which it started, a Prouty Power Printing Press No. 2.³⁴

The business district of the present town of Corn has been shrinking, as most, or at least many, small rural towns do. Yet it is still very much alive, with a hardware store, a grocery store, a hairdresser's shop, an automobile repair shop, a large Co-op Elevator and a smaller elevator at the old Mill site, a plant for slaughtering and processing meats, a blacksmith shop with a filling station, and an implement dealer with a thriving business. A time-honored institution that is known far

and wide is Tina's Coffee Shop and Drug Store, where the farmers of the community congregate for their morning coffee. Others come at all hours for the tasty meals, especially the Monday Special, a "Vereneke" dinner, an old-time Mennonite dish.

In addition there is a very busy electrician, and an equally busy plumber, both of whom carry a line of goods relating to their trade. Much of the local building is done by local people, contracting the work as a part-time vocation, giving employment to a number of persons. A concrete mixing plant is in operation, and a firm that fabricates the steel framework of large buildings, which it also erects wherever the buyer wishes.

The two largest enterprises in Corn, however, apart from the local junior and senior high school, are the Corn Bible Academy and the Home for the Aged. These will be dealt with in separate sections, both for their long history, and for the part they have played in fulfilling two of the traditional roles of the Mennonite peoples--that which is expressed in education and in the philanthropic enterprises of caring for those who can no longer care for themselves, in a demonstration of Christian love and compassion.

FOOTNOTES

¹C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 468.

²From the files of the Cordell Beacon, reprinted April 18, 1974, pp. 7f.

³Edward Everett Dale and Morris L. Wardell, History of Oklahoma (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1948), p. 260.

⁴Quoted from the Cordell Beacon, April 18, 1974, pp. 7f.

⁵J. P. Kroeker, Pioneer Days, Unpublished Manuscript, 1973, p. 48.

⁶A. G. Duerksen, Recollections, 1974 (Taped Interview).

⁷Kroeker, Pioneer Days, p. 48.

⁸Agatha Funk, History of the Corn Community, Unpublished Manuscript, No date given; no page numbers given.

⁹Peter Rogalsky, Recollections, 1974 (Taped Interview).

¹⁰Funk, History, no page numbers given.

¹¹Henry H. Hinz, Recollections, 1974 (Taped Interview).

¹²Funk, History, no page numbers given.

¹³J. D. Schlichting, Recollections, 1975 (Taped Interview).

¹⁴Rogalsky, Recollections.

¹⁵Kroeker, Pioneer Days, p. 53.

¹⁶Rogalsky, Recollections.

¹⁷Funk, History, no page numbers given.

¹⁸Rogalsky, Recollections.

¹⁹Hinz, Recollections.

²⁰Rogalsky, Recollections.

²¹Ibid.

- ²²Duerksen, Recollections.
- ²³H. P. Krehbiel, History of the General Conference Mennonite Church (St. Louis, Missouri, 1898), Vol. I, p. 311.
- ²⁴H. P. Krehbiel, History of the General Conference Mennonite Church (Newton, Kansas, 1938), Vol. II, p. 14.
- ²⁵Kroeker, Pioneer Days, p. 51.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Quoted from an article in the Cordell Beacon, April 18, 1974.
- ²⁸Duerksen, Recollections.
- ²⁹Funk, History, no page numbers given.
- ³⁰Article in the Cordell Beacon, April 18, 1974.
- ³¹Rogalsky, Recollections.
- ³²Kroeker, Pioneer Days, p. 54.
- ³³Ibid.
- ³⁴Washita County Enterprise, September 11, 1974.

CHAPTER VII

BUILDING THE HOUSES OF WORSHIP

True to the Mennonite traditions, one of the first concerns of the settlers was that of building a House of Worship. Some scarcely had their own dwellings completed when their attention was turned to a church building. This was true not only of the Mennonites, but also of almost all of the people that entered the new territory. In addition to the General Conference Mennonites, several other branches of Mennonites came to the area of the Washita River, mainly Mennonite Brethren. There were others, as a Krimmer Mennonite Brethren church that was in existence for a time, later merging with the Mennonite Brethren whose doctrines and practices were similar. There were also churches of other faiths--Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and the Indian Mission. Churches were there in sufficient variety to attract all kinds of believers. The Mennonites on the Washita River, or in the vicinity, in the confines of the Mennonite settlements were mainly of the above named three branches of Mennonites, with possibly a sprinkling of others, but not enough that they were formally organized into a church that was permanent.

The Mennonite Brethren Church

When the settlements near the Washita began, they immediately followed the Biblical injunction, "Not forsaking the assembling of

yourselves on the Lord's Day...." (Hebrews 10:25). In the absence of specific houses of worship, they simply met in different homes on Sundays. The first meeting in the Corn community was in the John Dyck home, but further details are lacking. Some of the early records were destroyed in a fire when the Reverend H. H. Flaming's house burned.

C. Bergmann, in the opening paragraph of his "History of the Corn M. B. Church," made this statement;

To make it good and plain for everyone to know that the Mennonite Brethren never build a church, nor ever will be able to build one. We want to cling to the word 'Meetinghouse' (Versammlungs Haus) as used by those that taught us from childhood on. This name was prevalent with all the early settlers in this community, regardless of creed or nationality. The Church is not man-made....¹

Not all homesteaders arrived at the same time; some came in the spring, others in the fall of the year, but by November, 1893, some sixteen families were there to join themselves together to be one in doctrine, in heart, and in mind for Christ Jesus. This was the nucleus of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Washita County. Under the leadership of Abraham Richert, an unordained minister at that time, the organization took place on the John Dyck farm two miles south and two miles west of what is now Corn, Oklahoma. One that was present at this historic meeting later recalled that Dyck said of that day, "We had a blessed time....How often the Heavenly Father had to frown upon the behavior of those believers, and of those that followed, we do not know. Neither do we know how often He has smiled upon our many services, but this we know, we are still His Own."²

Those sixteen families became the charter members of the Corn Mennonite Brethren Church, although at that time it was simply called the Washita Church. There does not seem to be a list of names of the

charter members extant, evidently due to the fires that destroyed records several times. However, the original Church Record Book remains, and, while it does not list the charter members as such, it does have a list of the original families from 1893 to 1900. (This list will be included at the end of this section.) Brother Abraham Richert was elected as the leader of the group.

The major consideration for the meetinghouse was: that it be centrally located. When it was indicated that most of the settlers of this particular branch of the Mennonites were clustered in this area, they agreed to build on the present site of the town of Corn. Peter Bergmann agreed to donate the land to the church.

Once the site was decided and the land acquired, the settlers fell to with a will to make their plans become a reality. The plans called for a building that was a sod-dugout. Choice of construction was limited for there was little money in the community, and wood was expensive. They could have built a complete dugout, or a sod building above ground, a log house, or a rock house. Logs were scarce, so a compromise was accepted for a sod dugout. The ground was excavated to a depth of four feet. Four-foot walls of sod were erected around the excavation, making the walls eight feet in height. The dimensions were--forty feet in length, and twenty feet in width. The length was in an east-west direction.

The roof was constructed of cottonwood lumber sawed at the local mills along the Washita. As Bergmann wrote, "Only enough lumber was used to form and support the roof...which was overlaid with sod. To keep the dirt from sifting down through the cracks between the rough cottonwood boards, some building paper was laid between the boards and

the sod 'shingles'." The total amount of capital involved was \$25, an incredible sum in the inflated times in which the third and fourth generations of their descendents live. Of course the sum did not include any charges for labor, which most likely was all donated. No one received or expected to receive any remuneration for their work. After all, this was a labor of love--love for their God, love for their fellow-man, and love and care for their own families which were to be nurtured in the faith of their fathers at this meeting house where they would all worship.

When the sods were cut for the walls, men with teams and sod plows cut the soil (instead of a solid share and mouldboard, a sod plow had a flat plate of iron for cutting the ground, with some long curved rods to gently turn the strips of sod over as the plow was pulled along; a sharp coulter, a thin disk of metal, cut the strip to the desired width ahead of the share). Other men with wagons would load the sod strips, after having cut them into appropriate lengths with a sharp, flat spade. The loads were then taken to the place where the walls were to be erected and laid in the manner of bricks, with overlapping joints. The sod, being filled with the tough, dense roots of the grass and with one side covered with the grass itself, could stand the rain and storm for an amazingly long period of time before crumbling to the ground. An added advantage was the natural insulation of the ten; or twelve-inch thick walls. These buildings were easy to heat in winter and were cool in the summer.

The windows and doors had to be framed with heavy timbers. The writer of the "Church Chronicles" says only that there were 'sufficient' windows, and two doors, one at each end, east and west. True to the

Mennonite tradition of the separation of the sexes, the men came in at the west door, the women at the east, and were seated at the same end of the building at which they entered. The benches were placed cross-wise, facing the center. The platform for the pulpit was in the center, on the south side of the building, with the choir facing the pulpit. These choir seats were the only ones lengthwise in the building. The benches were hand-made from cottonwood lumber. The pulpit was a small table. Kerosene lamps were used for lighting. The floor was simply the red Oklahoma earth. The construction was under the direction of Heinrich Flaming.

This meetinghouse was dedicated to the Lord on Thanksgiving Day in November of 1894. It is not certain who officiated at the dedication, but C. Bergmann states "...that all dedications and ordinations of the M. B. body of believers at this place...were carried out with the help of Bro. Abraham Schellenberg, Sr., an Elder from Buhler, Kansas, from whence the majority of these church members came."

A word of explanation concerning the large number of ministers may be in order. Due to the scarcity of trained and educated ministers, especially in the newer settlements, the Church usually observed the practice of having a number of ministers. None of them received any remuneration, and almost all of them farmed for a living. The leading minister was often the most prosperous man in the community. To lessen the load on the leader, a number of men who were regarded as being deeply spiritual and talented, were elected to the ministry by the Church, thus being 'called by the Church.' The writer of the Chronika refers to these men as Lehrer, or teachers. After serving in this capacity for some years, if the Church felt they were indeed gifted and useful

workers, they would be ordained to the ministry. They were then Prediger, the preachers.

Usually the work of proclaiming the Word was divided, with the work rotated among the Lehrer, the Prediger, and the leading minister, who, after a period of years, could be ordained an Elder. Election could be for a period of time, or indefinitely, but ordination was for life, whether as an Elder, a minister, or as a deacon. An Elder was worthy of great honor; in some churches, especially the General Conference Mennonites, baptism and the Lord's Supper was usually administered only by Elders. This was rather an inconvenience, since often the Elders had to travel all the way from Kansas by train in order to perform these services. An Elder usually retained his position as the Church leader (Gemeinde Leiter) as long as he lived or his health allowed.

This practice was both good and bad: good in that it provided a firm, strong, stable leadership, which was especially important in the formative years of settlement. It required one that was of a temperament that could function as a leader, sound in doctrine and theology, steadfast in the face of changing conditions, financial adversity, and possibly even opposition. However, the long periods of probationary experience gave ample time to develop such a temperament, since often a minimum of five years of service as an elected minister was required before ordination to the ministry could be considered. Then additional years of service were necessary, until by the attrition of age or infirmity the Elder or Leader was removed, thus presenting an opportunity to a preacher to become an Elder. Some churches went even further, requiring election to the deaconate, serving some years as an elected

deacon, being approved by the rite of ordination. Then the elected ministers were chosen out of the staff of ordained deacons.

Another advantage of this system was when one was ordained in one church, either as a deacon, a minister or Elder, all other churches of that Conference were expected to honor that ordination for life. Even though the population was not as mobile as it became in later years, many people moved from state to state. Their ordinations moved with them. The Record books often had notations in them stating: "Prediger ----- moved into the community, and became one of the Workers in the Word" (Arbeiter am Wort).

One disadvantage of the system was that at times leaders, especially when approaching old age, became very conservative and insisted on doing things "as they had always been done." Change was resisted, and often the younger members were alienated. It could and often did present the problems of arbitrary action, often autocratic and dictatorial. After all, they were elected and ordained for life, and could not be removed from their office except by Conference action. This was so unlikely as to be almost non-existent. The high-handed methods often caused dissatisfaction and unrest. However, as a whole, most of these men who attained ordination were thoroughly dedicated to the service of Christ and the Church. They were deeply spiritual and concerned with the growth and advancement of the work entrusted to their hands, realizing they were dealing not with the sod, boards, and bricks of a building, but with the spiritual well-being of immortal souls whom they were leading through life in preparation for an eternity with the Lord Jesus Christ whom they served so faithfully. They were in truth "Shepherds" of their flock, and they, for the most part, felt their

responsibility keenly. As the writer of the Chronika stated: "Die Gemeinde vergrößerte sich, und wurde von Gottes segnen begleitet."

In relating the story of the early day church services at Corn, Agatha Funk wrote: "Every Sunday there gathered a happy throng. The Sisters dressed in calico, some men wore 'schlorra', and some even came to church barefoot." (Schlorra were a type of slipper, similar to the "scuffs" of today, which were worn in the house by both men and women. They made a clip-clopping sound when the wearer was walking.)

The first baptism in the new Congregation was observed before the first sod-dugout was completed. In May of 1894, four people, Peter Bergmann, Jr., who had donated the land on which the church was being built, Henry Warkentin, Trude Kroeker, and Anna Reimer, were baptized in the waters of the Washita River by Jacob Funk. The first wedding in the new church took place in June of 1894 when John Schlichting and Marie Kroeker were married by Peter Neufeld, Sr., who was the leader for a short time. This account of the wedding was written by the bridegroom:

The First Wedding in Corn, Oklahoma, June 17, 1894

J. M. Schlichting

The groom was the son of Martin F. and Elizabeth Schlichting; and the bride was Maria, the daughter of Peter and Anna Kroeker, all members of the Corn M. B. Church.

The preparations for the wedding feast were made on Saturday by both parents---namely; zwieback and pflaumenmusz.

Sunday morning on June 17, 1894, I the bridegroom together with my parents drove in the ox cart (I had a pair of large oxen at that time) to the Corn M. B. Church (sod house) for Sunday School and worship service. The parents of my bride brought her to this same meeting.

The pulpit for the preacher stood in the center of the church, the men sat on the west side and the women on the east. We were not permitted to sit together during this service, but each in his department. Understood? The church had two doors, east and west.

After the worship service the minister, Peter Neufeldt, said--If we were still minded to get married we should step forward and take the chairs in front of the pulpit. We were both obedient and met in the center, I coming from the west and my bride from the east, and took the chairs for a 30 minute instruction period for our future life. The admonitions were far-reaching-for our whole life. For the ceremony we stood. After the questions we both said "Yes" and "Yes". Peter Neufeldt performed the ceremony.

After the vows and closing song we could go home, where the wedding meal was waiting for us. I was permitted to drive home with my young bride in the spring wagon of her parents--the first time in the history of our lives. That was a joy.

After the meal everything had to be washed up. Then came the second act of our lives. My large ox wagon was the vehicle with which I could take home my chosen bride. This was her first ride in an ox wagon but not the last. We all arrived home safe and well: praise the Lord! But the water supply was exhausted and there must be water; because without gyp water you cannot make good "prips" with roasted corn. (A substitute for the scarce and expensive coffee.)

My brother William and I had to go to Cob Creek to get three barrels of water. Out of caution I left my young bride with my parents until we had gotten the water. The sun had set and the whole thing was taking too long to suit my Maria so she decided to meet me. She walked a half mile and sat down in the deep grass in her white dress to wait for us. We had my father's young oxen hitched to the wagon since my big oxen were tired.

We were nearly home with our precious gyp water, and right at the place where Maria was waiting for me. She sprang up out of the grass in her white dress. This the young oxen did not expect. Maria wanted to get into the wagon, but with the speed of lightning the oxen dashed homeward. There was no holding. In my father's yard was a large stone oven to bake bread. The oxen ran around the oven but dragged the wagon with the water over the oven and the lovely water ran all directions. Monday water had to be gotten and the oven rebuilt, but we thanked God that no one was hurt.⁴

In the winter of 1897, the sod-dugout was becoming too small and inadequate to meet the needs of the growing congregation. Besides, the settlers were prospering; people were building wooden houses to replace the often damp, leaky dugouts that were usually small with dirt floors, full of insects and vermin. With prosperity, the church also needed to be replaced. The new one was built of lumber hauled from El Reno by horse-drawn wagons, and the often flooded and dangerous South Canadian

River had to be forded because there still were no bridges.

Two members of the Building Committee were Isaak J. Harms and H.A. Flaming. One of the carpenters was Jacob Funk. This new building was sixty feet long and thirty-two feet wide. Kroeker in his Chronika mentions that two small buildings were built in 1900, one for a kitchen and one as a dwelling for the minister. Bergmann states that in 1901 two extensions were added to the main building, of twenty-by-forty feet in size each, even with the west end and extending east the forty feet. It is difficult to determine whether these were two separate projects, or both were referring to the same buildings, since the dates differ. The carpenters on this project were David and Peter Buschman from the K. M. B. Church near Weatherford, with J. J. Kroeker as one of the overseers (Probably the J. J. Kroeker who wrote the "Gemeinde Chronika"). Trustees for the church at the time of its incorporation in 1901 were H. H. Kliever, D. D. Wiens, J. J. Kroeker, H. J. Kroeker, and Isaac J. Harms. The new meeting house was dedicated on April 10, 1898. Soon this building also, was too small, even with the above-mentioned wings added. One of the wings was used to seat the choir, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other.

An interesting side glance is needed here to comment on the beginning of the church school (Gemeinde Schule). There being no public school in the immediate area of the church, the children of the community spent the long winter months in idleness. A young man, Jacob Penner, was out hunting with friends and was shot in the hand accidentally. Parents became concerned, and especially Isaac Harms, who was the leader of the Church. They reasoned that if the young men had been attending a school, the accident might not have occurred. Meetings were

held, and as a result, the people decided to build a church school (Gemeinde Schule) where the young people could receive instruction, especially in the Bible. Consequently, in 1902 the Corn Gemeinde Schule opened its doors with fifty students, ranging in age from beginners to twenty. This school is still in existence as the Corn Bible Academy. This demonstrated the energetic spirit moving the Church in building the school in addition to the newly erected church edifice. Several times later, both the school building and the church building were replaced almost simultaneously.

The Church continued to grow and increase in membership. Accurate figures are not available until 1915 when the actual membership stood at 376. By October of that year it had reached 425. A more or less steady increase sent the number soaring to a high of 730 in August of 1924, after which a decline set in, dropping to a low of 606 in 1932. Most likely this was a result of the depression and the drought of the "Dirty Thirties" which bankrupted many of the smaller and poorer farmers. The following year a dramatic increase again occurred, possibly as a result of 61 baptisms, and the membership increased to a record height of 736 in 1940.

Following is a list showing the dramatic growth of the Church to 1940:

1915	376	1928	653
1916	421	1929	661
1917	415	1930	650
1918	---	1931	650
1919	541	1932	606
1921	600	1933	605
1922	610	1934	675
1923	613	1935	691
1924	730	1936	698
1925	692	1937	667
1926	671	1938	709
1927	---	1939	687
		1940	736

One of the greatest gains at one time came in 1918 when Reverend Abe Harms conducted a two-week revival. He had to leave at the close of the second week, but Reverend H. D. Wiebe continued for two more weeks. On the last evening 150 converts stood and sang "At the Cross." The Church then held two baptismal services, one with 120 candidates and another with 30 candidates. These then were received into the membership of the Church.

As a result of the dramatic increase in membership, the meeting house again became too small and a decision was made to construct a new and larger one. During World War I a separate children's service was held in the Bible School building, which was directly across the street to the north of the old church. Reverend J. B. Siemens often preached at this children's service.⁵ On February 4, 1918, a farewell festival was held for the old meeting house, and immediately a ground-breaking ceremony was held for the new. The old building was dismantled to make way for a new one which measured 60 x 70 feet in dimension with the walls 24 feet in height. Balconies on three sides added to the total capacity of this building.

By March 31, the basement was completed so that services could be conducted there. In the interim, the congregation had been divided into several groups and worshipped in schoolhouses in the communities. Now with a basement the size of the yet-to-be completed building, they could again assemble as a body. On the fifteenth of December services were held in the sanctuary, beginning with a prayer meeting of Thanksgiving to God for his gracious kindness and the protection that enabled them to complete the work thus far without any accidents or major mishaps.

On Easter Sunday, April 20, 1919, the dedication service for the

new sanctuary was held. A large tent was erected on the north side of the new building to accommodate the large number of people who came from far and near to take part in the service. Elder M. M. Just of Fairview presented the act of dedication. At the same festival, John F. Duerksen was ordained to the ministry, and Bernhard A. Richert was ordained to the position of Deacon. Elder H. H. Flaming was the pastor of the Church (Gemeinde Leiter) and P. J. Franz was the choir leader. The church was paid for when it was dedicated. The cost of this large edifice was as follows:

Lumber	\$6,458.00
Old Lumber	700.00
Metalware	1,119.00
Sand	112.50
Labor	3,864.00
Value of Volunteer Labor	4,010.00
Two Heating Furnaces	1,237.00
Lights	773.10
Benches	<u>1,589.00</u>
	\$19,862.60

The Bible school (Gemeinde Schule), whose building had been used by the church to house its overflow was inadequate, and a few months after the dedication of the new church building the congregation decided to erect a new school building also. On July 27, 1919, the decision was made, and in November the work of building on a new site was begun. Classes were held in the basement of the new meeting house. The dedication was held on October 17, 1920, and the next day classes began in the new school house.

The Third Building is Lost

The congregation continued its steady growth. The Sunday School consisted of twenty-five classes, each with two teachers. For a while, according to J. J. Kroeker's Gemeinde Chronika, a normal class was

offered by Professor J. F. Duerksen of the Bible School. Evidently this was a special class for training Sunday School teachers, a task for which Professor Duerksen was eminently well fitted, having been a college instructor for some time at McPherson College, Kansas, as head of the German Department.

On January 16, 1949, the large meeting house that had been the center of spiritual activity in Corn was destroyed by fire early on a Sunday morning. It had been standing for thirty years. Agatha Funk wrote, "We lamented: Our holy and beautiful house, and all our pleasant things are laid waste" (Isaiah 64:11). Services were held in the high school auditorium and in the Bible School, which, by unusual coincidence, had just been built anew. Now for the third time the community was faced with the necessity of erecting both buildings simultaneously.

Business meetings were held and plans adopted. On March 3, 1949, a groundbreaking service was held, with Pastor J. P. Kliever turning the first spadeful of earth. The tractors and bulldozers immediately began breaking up the ruins, and deepening the original excavation to a ten-foot depth. Someone remarked, "Our fathers built upon a rock." The area is underlaid with a strata of shale, which had to be blasted loose, then loaded on trucks and hauled away. On April 12, 1949, some 100 men poured the concrete walls of the basement, while the ladies prepared a dinner for all at the Home for the Aged.

The work proceeded as rapidly as possible, with the new building 124 feet long, 60 feet wide, and with the walls 32 feet high. It was completely fireproof, with walls of brick and masonry. Louis C. Williams was the architect, while Henry Wiebe was superintendent of construction and Arthur Penner was the mason. Wiebe, a local contractor, and Penner

were both members of the church. Most of the labor was donated. The cost of this building was \$121,328.65, and it is said that the first donation toward meeting this cost was made by a girl, Jodelee Hinz, who gave the contents of her piggybank: \$1.35. The Scripture says, "A little child shall lead them."

On May 11, 1950, the first prayer meeting was held in the sanctuary, and on May 14, the first Sunday service. The dedication was observed on November 12, 1950. Five brethren took part in the service: Elder H. H. Flaming, who had been pastor when the previous building had been dedicated in 1920; Reverend J. J. Wiebe, Reverend J. W. Vogt; Dr. Lando Hiebert; and Reverend J. P. Kliever, the pastor in charge. All except Dr. Hiebert had served the church as pastor at one time or another. One member, J. P. Kroeker, wrote that he had been present at the building of each of the four different churches that were erected on the same plot of ground.

Seven months after the dedication, on June 8, 1951, a tornado roared across the little town of Corn, demolishing some twenty houses and the new public high school auditorium, doing great damage to the Home for the Aged, and removing the roof and creating havoc on the new Church building. Again on Sunday morning, thanks were offered to God for having kept the community from loss of life in the storm. Near Bessie, one young farmer, Eddie Megert, was killed by a bolt of lightning. The people faced a gigantic task of rebuilding, but with the indomitable spirit of their Mennonite forbears and by cooperation and community help the damage was repaired, homes were rebuilt, and the Mennonite drive to sustain spiritual nurture continued unabated.

The Corn M. B. Church, which for a while was the largest in the

southern district of the M. B. Conference, naturally was host to conventions, both district and general. The district conventions took place each year in the fall, and were hosted by the larger churches. The General Conference (not to be confused with the G. C. Church, which is a different branch of the Mennonites) met once in three years. Usually this was alternated between districts or between areas in Canada and the United States. These were ordinarily hosted only by the largest churches, for they drew several thousand delegates and visitors. Traditionally, the host church provided both room and board for all delegates, plus that of many of the visitors. Formerly this was done gratis, but in the last years the delegates are charged for their meals, at least those served at the conference sessions.

The first such conference in the Corn Church was hosted in 1902. Three thousand were present, coming from all parts of the United States and Canada. Since there was no railroad through Corn, the delegates went to Bessie by train. There they were met by the brethren of the local churches who transported them to Corn by wagon and buggy. Other such conferences were held here in 1911, 1917, 1924, and 1932. An even larger one took place in 1939. Since then there have been numerous smaller conventions, especially the district, which convened here in 1943, 1951, 1956, and 1964. The last General Conference held in Corn was in 1966, at which time a temporary addition was built on to the south parking lot to accommodate displays of various organizations and schools.

Workers (Arbeiter am Wort)

The Corn M. B. Church has been blessed with many workers. This was partly due to the use of the multiple ministry by which the burden of

preaching was shared by several men, either elected or ordained to the ministry. Following is a partial list of men who served at some time or other:

Elders: Isaac Harms, H. H. Flaming, and Jacob Reimer. The practice of ordaining Elders was discontinued in the early years of the twentieth century.

Leaders: First was Abraham Richert, who served in three different periods: November 9, 1893, to February 3, 1895; May 10, 1896, to May 13, 1900; and February 11, 1903, to December 6, 1914.

Peter Neufeld	February 6, 1895, to May 9, 1896
Isaac Harms	May 14, 1900, to February 11, 1903
H. H. Flaming	December 7, 1914, to November 13, 1927
J. J. Wiebe	November 13, 1927, to July, 1944
J. K. Warkentin	October, 1944, to November, 1947
J. P. Kliewer	November, 1947, to 1960
Albert Epp	1962 to 1974

Jacob Ewert and J. W. Vogt served as interim pastors after the last two named resigned. Among the others who have ministered with the Word through the years are: Jakob Reimer, P. K. Wohlgemuth, Jakob Richert, Henry Bergthold, Ferdinand Engel, Johann F. Duerksen, H. D. Wiebe, Daniel F. Bergthold, J. E. Schmidt, J. T. Ediger, J. B. Siemens, P. F. Wahl, J. J. Franz, Peter Bartel, David Strauss, J. P. Stobbe, G. P. Kliewer, and Johnny Flaming.

Among the missionaries and missionary families that have gone out from the Corn M. B. Church were: Elizabeth Neufeld, India; D. F. Bergthold's, India; P. A. Kiehn, China; P. D. Kiehn's, China; Pauline Foote, China; Kathryn Willems, Africa; Erna Funk, Africa; John Ratzlaff's,

Africa; John Hiebert's, Africa; Jacob Ewert's, India, as teacher; J. W. Vogt's, Europe and Mexico; E. B. Hinz, Arkansas; J. W. Gossen's. Evangelistic work, Europe; Dave Richert's, Arkansas; and Dan Poetker's, Mexico. Other ministers who have taken up the work after leaving Corn were: Paul W. Klierer, Lewis H. Boese, Vernon Duerksen, Robert Vogt, Vernon Wiebe, and Erwin Klaassen.

At the 60th anniversary of the Church, there had been a total of 1,546 baptisms, averaging nearly 26 per year. A list of the members of the Church from the years 1893 to 1900 is given in the first Record Book. Since there is no list of charter members as such, it may be well to include this list here as follows:

Abraham & Maria Berg	Franz & Susanna Hiebert
Heinrich E. & Margareta Bergen	G. G. & Anna Hildebrand
Jakob E. & Helena Bergen	Abraham & Helena Isaak
David & Maria Balzer	Cornelius H. & Maria Janzen
P. P. & Helena Bergmann	Jacob H. & Karolina Janzen
Gottfried & Elizabeth Berg	Ludwig H. & Agenetha Janzen
Peter & Katharina Bergmann	Heinrich T. & Helena Janzen
Johann & Kornelia Balzer	Abraham & Katharina Janzen
David B. & Helena Balzer	Heinrich L. & Anna Janzen
Heinrich H. & Agenetha Dick	Johann & Helena Kiehn
Heinrich & Margaretha Dyck	Heinrich P. & Susanna Klierer
Johann H. & Anna Dyck	Abr. J. & Helena Kroeker
Johann & Maria Dyck	Peter & Anna Kroeker
Abr. D. & Susanna Duerksen	Jacob J. & Anna Kroeker
Abr. & Katharina Duerksen	David & Katharina Kroeker
Peter D. & Maria Duerksen	Jacob D. & Katharina Kroeker
Cornelius & Anna Dalke	Heinrich H. & Maria Klierer
Johann J. & Anna Fast	Gerhard H. & Maria Klierer
Johann P. & Katharina Fast	Johann & Katharina Klierer
Heinrich A. & Kornelia Flaming	Peter F. & Aganetha Klierer
H. H. & Anna Flaming	Heinrich & Elisabeth Koop
Jakob & Helena Funk	Thomas & Maria Koop
Cornelius & Elisabeth Funk	Gerhard B. & Katharina Koop
Peter & Katharina Guenther	Cornelius H. & Elisabeth Klierer
Herman & Gertruda Goertzen	Peter W. & Maria Klierer
Martin & Anna Goertzen	Peter M. & Elisabeth Klassen
Heinrich & Wilhelmina Hiebert	Heinrich E. & Elisabeth Klierer
Isaak & Maria Harms	Abr. P. & Maria Klassen
Abr. & Helena Huebert	Peter & Katharina Neufeld
Peter & Maria Heubert	Peter F. & Maria Neufeld

Peter & Katharina Nikkel	Johann & Maria Schmidt
Peter K. & Susanna Nikkel	David & Anna Schapansky
Jacob & Helena Nikkel	D. D. & Mathilde Schapansky
Abraham & Helena Nikkel	Jacob & Sarah Sawatzky
Johann & Margaretha Nikkel	Heinrich & Justina Stobbe
Benjamin J. & Auguste Nikkel	Abr. Schapansky
Aron T. & Sara Neufeld	Peter K. & Elisabeth Wohlgemuth
Jacob & Anna Pauls	H. H. & Maria Wohlgemuth
Abr. J. & Helena Penner	Daniel D. & Katharina Wiens
Heinrich J. & Helena Penner	Benj. C. & Katharina Wedel
Johann & Maria Penner	Johann & Frederika Warkentin
Heinrich & Anna Penner	Peter & Anna Wiebe
Heinrich & Lisa Martens	Jacob E. & Trude Warkentin
Cornelius C. & Katharina Reimer	Franz & Susanna Wall
Jacob & Maria Reimer	Gerhard & Maria Vogt
David & Anna Reimer	Cornelius B. & Anna Vogt
Heinrich & Agatha Reimer	Franz F. & Regine Toews
Cornelius & Elisabeth Reimer	Friedrich C. & Tina Thomas
Peter P. & Maria Reimer	B. F. & Anna Nikkel
Johann K. & Eva Reimer	Peter & Susie Schapansky
Jacob M. & Margaretha Reimer	Cornelius C. & Susanna Vogt
Jacob J. & Helena Reimer	David & Helena Nikkel
Abr. A. & Anna Reimer	Johann J. & Katharina Nickel
Abraham & Elisabeth Richert	Franz & Carolina Nickel
Cornelius & Susanna Richert	Johann P. & Agnes Nikkel
Jacob & Anna Richert	Peter H. & Anna Bartel
August & Anna Rogalsky	Abr. G. & Maria Willéms
Abr. & Cornelia Sawatzky	Heinrich & Alvina Bergthold
Peter F. & Anna Fransen	Rudolf & ----- Fadenrecht
M. F. & Elisabeth Schlichting	Peter W. & Mary Kliever
Johann M. & Maria Schlichting	Bernhard A. & Tena Richert
E. E. & Aganetha Sudermann	Heinrich P. & Susie Kliever

Military Service

At the time of World War I, the federal government of the United States began registering all young men for service. This began on June 5, 1917, and involving all young men from 21 to 35 years of age. This was a very disturbing turn of events for the local church. It was the first time since the Mennonites had left Russia in 1874 that they had come face to face with this question. Quoting from the "Gemeinde Chronika":

Since we believe that God's Word, and also through our Confession of Faith, we cannot comply with military service, it placed a heavy burden upon those who had the leadership of our congregations. Many journeys were made to place our protests concerning military service before the government officials. Thus far our members have not been forced to carry weapons.

On October 4, 1917, the first draftees were drawn into service, and by the following October numbered 38 persons. At the beginning of the war, no provision had been made for conscientious objectors except in non-combatant service, which led to persecution and hardships for those who refused to don the army uniform. Many Mennonite men simply accepted the uniform and with it the weapons and training, leading to active participation in the fighting overseas. Many accepted the uniform but insisted on non-combatant work and training, while a smaller number completely refused both the uniform and every phase of participation under the command of army officers, even to refusing cleanup details in the camps. These were severely mishandled, often beaten, imprisoned, sometimes tortured in various ways. Later in the war, most of these objectors were allowed to do farm work in lieu of service under military direction. A second registration had taken place, June 5, 1918, and a third one August 12, 1918. In the last, the age limits were changed to 18 to 36.

On November 11, 1918, came the welcome news that the Armistice had been signed. At about the same time, the churches and schools, which had been closed by order of the government to prevent the spread of the dread influenza which took many lives, were allowed to reopen again, even though the epidemic continued until New Year.

Church Organizations

Nahverein (Ladies Sewing Circle, or Ladies Aid)

The sisters of the church had a deep conviction that a true Christian, after having experienced the saving grace of God, could not contain that grace to herself, but had a desire to help others to have a similar experience. Since money was scarce and crops were short in the early days, the sisters of the Nahverein decided to meet every other week at the farm homes of the various members. The mode of travel was either by horse and buggy or by wagon. Some came on foot if the distance was not too great. The host farmer would then put up and feed the horses of his visitors at noon. This could become an expensive chore.

The men would use this day for visitation and fellowship. They would gather in an adjoining room and have a Bible Reading and Prayer session while the women were quilting and sewing. But with the passing of the horse and buggy and the introduction of the automobile, the men remained at home, since many of the sisters learned to drive the family auto. No driver's license was required, so anyone could learn to drive. The older women, who were reluctant to learn the intricacies of driving, soon discontinued the sewing, but younger ones began to take part.

The work of the Nahverein was used at the annual mission sale, at which time the quilts, aprons, and other artifacts were sold, and all the proceeds given for the cause of missions. The only year this was not followed was when the Church was destroyed by fire, and all efforts were made to rebuild the sanctuary. The Nahverein is the oldest organization within the Corn M. B. Church.⁶

Jugendverein (Young People's Fellowship)

The Young People's Fellowship, often called the Christian Endeavor, of the Corn M. B. Church, came into being in 1902. It was organized for the purpose of building mutual Christian fellowship among the younger Christians of the Church. In those days there were no automobiles, and all travel was by horse and buggy or on foot, so all meetings were held on Sunday afternoons. Attendance at the meetings came from the district schools around the community. There the students were taught the 3R's, but most of the teachers were Christian and the spiritual aspect, stressed in these schools, helped to build a foundation for spiritual growth in the community. This mutual fellowship brought a desire in the Church to organize a Young People's Fellowship. This was begun in 1902 with C. C. Vogt as the first chairman.

Rules were needed for guidance, so a group was appointed, under the supervision of the Church, to draw up a constitution. This was presented to the Church in due time and adopted for the new organization.

In 1908 the young people asked the Church to change the time of the meeting from the afternoon to the evening. At first there was strong opposition. The older brethren would ask, "What is the matter with our young people? They seem to like the dark better than the daytime." The reason was the coming of the Model T Ford. The country roads were primitive, all-dirt roads, with wooden culverts over the creeks, but the young people were acquiring transportation.

The resume of the Constitution of the Young People's Fellowship adopted in 1906 was as follows:

Name: Christian Young People's Endeavor of Korn, Oklahoma. (Christlicher Jugendverein der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde zu Korn, Oklahoma).

Purpose: To fellowship one with another
 To sponsor a spiritual attitude one to another.
 To build up a moral and educational phase of life.
 To strengthen the faith and Christian activity among our youth.

Membership: All members of the church who are willing to abide by constitution.
 All members must be active.
 The majority vote of the membership is required for acceptance.
 Any member missing four meetings shall be admonished, and if to no avail, shall be taken from the roll.
 Any member moving away may receive a statement of membership.
 Any member causing shame and harm through misconduct will be stricken from the list by majority vote.

Rights: All members shall partake of all rights and voting privileges.

Duties: All members shall live a respectable Christian life; admonish one another, and receive admonishment.
 All members must pay a 5¢ admission fee to help defray expenses.
 All members are to make it their duty to attend every meeting.
 All members are to serve in office as elected.
 All members are to bring their assigned parts on the programs.

Officers:

Chairman	Treasurer
Vice Chairman	Program Committee (three members)
Secretary	Solicitation Committee (2 male, 2 female)
Vice Chairman	Pianist
Song director	Assistant
Assistant	Librarian
Organist	
Assistant	

All offices are to be filled by majority vote.

Offices are for a term of six months. (Elections are to be held at New Year and in the mid year).

Duties of Officers:

The chairman is to preside according to parliamentary rules.
 The chairman is to make the opening by--song, scripture, prayer.
 The secretary is to keep a record of every meeting, which shall be presented to the next meeting for acceptance, and recorded in a permanent record.
 The treasurer shall be responsible for all money collected, and dispose of the same as ordered by the Endeavor.
 The time of meetings--every second and fourth Sunday of the month.

The Endeavor shall conduct a special Missions program four times a year.

Amending:

The Constitution can only be amended at the close of a six-month term.

A two-thirds vote by all present is required for passage.

A change must be announced in a previous meeting.

Withdrawal:

All members who attain the age of 35 years may withdraw as active members and become honorary members.⁷

Evidently the founders of the Young People's Fellowship built upon a solid foundation, because in mid-1975 the meetings will have gone through 1,350 sessions, in the nearly three-quarters of a century that has elapsed since its organization.

Gospel Team

The Gospel Team was an outgrowth of a Young Men's Christian Association, which had been organized in 1921 to help young men grow in their Christian faith and life. This YMCA group met on the third Sunday afternoon each month. Eager to be of service to other communities, they went to Walnut Springs to conduct a meeting. Led by Reverend H.D. Wiebe, 80 young men attended the service. They immediately realized that this group was far too large to be effective, so the YMCA was divided into several smaller groups. J. W. Vogt, D. C. Fast, and P. B. Pauls were appointed to plan the activities of such groups and outline plans of those activities. The plans of three groups were presented: (1) The YMCA to remain intact and continue its functions and membership as before. (2) A Personal Workers Club to be organized of volunteers from the YMCA to work in the community and outreach as the Lord would direct. (3) That a Gospel Team be organized from volunteers of the

YMCA for the purpose of spiritual extension service. This plan was adopted.

The Gospel Team volunteers were to sign their names on a sheet of paper submitted to the YMCA. Prerequisites for team members were: (1) that each felt led of the Lord to do some special service for their fellowmen; (2) that each team member would be willing to set aside one night a week for a practice evening. This was not to be taken lightly, but quite a number of young men signed up for such a service. The organizational meeting was held in 1925.

The first chairman was C. C. Gossen, and the first chorister was J. W. Vogt. A new chairman and a new chorister was elected annually, but the chorister could succeed himself. Men who have served as choristers (music directors) have been: J. W. Vogt, A. G. Duerksen, Ed Megert, J. W. Gossen, John Fadenrecht, Wesley Dick, Ken Ratzlaff, and B. A. Vogt. The work of the team was to visit the outlying churches and communities, presenting the Gospel in songs, readings, musical numbers, testimonies, and sermon. Programs have been given in churches, in schools, and reformatories. Street meetings have been held, and assistance given in evangelistic services.

For years the team members supplied their own cars for transportation, but during World War II gasoline was rationed and travel became difficult, so the team purchased its first bus. This was more economical, and the team could enjoy fellowship together while traveling. In 1948 a larger bus was purchased, but it was destroyed in the tornado of 1951. A third vehicle was acquired, which served for many years.

The service of the Gospel Team was carried on for almost forty years. But times have changed, and there was less need for help in many

of the areas in which they served. However, the spirit and dedication have never died, but continue to the present. The group is presently known as the Men's Chorus and still carries on a work both in the home church and in extension work.

The membership has remained almost constant throughout all of these years. Members who retired were readily replaced by younger men. One charter member, H. W. Vogt, is still participating in the program. One of its founders, J. W. Vogt, who has given many years of service to the Church Conference as a beloved teacher, pastor of a number of congregations, missionary to several countries in Europe and Mexico, is presently serving as interim pastor in the home church (1975).

Many of the smaller school houses are gone, but many of the churches where the Gospel Team gave assistance and service are still being used for worship. Those who have sung with this group have been scattered over much of the world. Many have gone into fulltime service for the Lord and are serving in Africa, Europe, and other countries, as well as in the United States--still singing, and preaching the Gospel.

There is no way of knowing the exact number of programs, group services, and other work that the team has done. Some years they gave as many as twenty-five programs, although the average may be lower. All expenses were borne by the members themselves. Offerings were used in purchasing literature and for benevolent purposes.

In its years of work the Gospel Team has visited most of the small-town and rural churches in a radius of fifty miles, and many churches in the larger cities, as well as longer trips taken to the Panhandle, to the M. B. Churches in the Rio Grande Valley, in western Kansas, and in eastern Oklahoma.

The Bessie Mennonite Brethren Church

The beginnings of the Bessie M. B. Church, now the Bible M. B. Church of Cordell, was written as a Chronicle (Gemeinde Chronik) into the first Church Record book by several leading brethren of the Church. The following account is a condensed version of the "Chronik" to 1940, translated from the German script in which it was written. In the years of 1893 and 1894, a number of people belonging to the General Conference Mennonite, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and the Mennonite Brethren Churches, began to meet together in a schoolhouse where they conducted Sunday School and studied the Word of God.

In 1894 the K. M. B. and M. B. members joined the Corn M. B. Church, where Abraham Richert was the Leader and Jacob Funk was the Deacon. Others came to worship with them, including Baptists and some from other denominations. However, it was several miles to Corn, and crossing the Washita River often presented difficulties, so the residents of Bessie decided to build a church on the west side of the river. With this purpose in mind, a business meeting was held in 1905 (Bruderberatung), together with the Council of the Corn Church. At this meeting the Bessie M. B. Church was organized and an election held, at which the following were elected to these positions: A. B. P. Schmidt, as Leader and Minister; David Kiehn, as assistant Leader and Minister; and Johann Kiehn as Deacon.

On the 20th of January, 1906, the first independent business meeting of the Bessie M. B. Church took place. The people were courageous, for at the fifth business meeting they decided to build a meeting house. P. J. Schmidt, Heinrich Duerksen, and Gustav Jaworsky were elected as a

Building Committee. The new house of God was to be 36 feet long, 26 feet wide, and with the walls 12 feet high. This building was dedicated to the Lord on June 16, 1906, with hearts full of joy and thanksgiving.

At a business meeting on December 30, 1910, Andrew Boese was elected Leader, with David Kiehn continuing as assistant Minister. They also sent a request to the Corn Church to supply a Minister on the second Sunday of every month, which was done. In the following year, 1911, the Church had the joy of seeing seventeen souls find forgiveness of sins, being baptized, and received into the fellowship of the Church. At the same time, a number of Baptists and other believers affiliated with the Bessie M. B. Church.

The man serving as Deacon passed away, so in 1912 the Church elected P. J. Schmidt to that office. He served faithfully and well until 1940, when he asked to be relieved of his duties because of ill health, having been in the work for 28 years.

In 1915, the Brotherhood felt led to pray for an ordained Minister (evidentially this had been the reason why the Corn Church had been asked to send them a Minister once a month). Two months later, at a business meeting, they voted unanimously to extend a call to Jakob Reimer of Corn. With the blessing of the parent Congregation, Reimer accepted the call and moved to the Bessie Community. With the election of Jakob Reimer as Leader and Minister, David Kiehn as assistant Leader and Minister, and P. J. Schmidt as Deacon, the Bessie Church became completely self-sustaining and independent of Corn. The services of the visiting Minister were then discontinued.

On May 18-19, 1919, the Bessie Church was host to the Oklahoma M. B. Sunday School Convention and Song Festival. In connection with this, a

service was held at which Jakob Reimer was ordained as Elder. In 1922 Miss Pauline Foote was ordained as missionary, the service also being a farewell inasmuch as she left for the mission field in China soon afterward; there she served until that country came under the domination of the Communists in 1948. She endured many hardships and dangers in the course of her years in the field. Later, two more couples, the Peter D. Kiehns and the Peter Kiehns, also were ordained to serve in the mission field in China. This occasioned great joy in the church.

In 1923, Elder Reimer suffered a stroke (Schlaganfall), which made it difficult for him to carry on his work as Leader. Therefore, two young men, A. H. Schmidt and H. R. Wiens, were asked to prepare themselves for the ministry by further study. In 1926 a call was extended to Jakob J. Kroeker of Lehigh, Kansas, to serve as an ordained Minister. He accepted the call, and began his work in the Bessie Church on August 15, 1926. On the 29th, he baptized 14 persons and received them into the fellowship of the church. A few months later Elder Reimer laid down the leadership, which was assumed by Kroeker, with A. H. Schmidt as assistant.

The Church progressed and grew in numbers, so that the meeting house became too small. At a business meeting on January 1, 1929, the members decided to dismantle the old structure and build a new church. The Building Committee was composed of Adolf Klause, Heinrich Wedel, G. A. Wiens, Heinrich Bartel, and P. J. Schmidt. W. F. Kiehn was the construction foreman, with A. B. P. Schmidt as work supervisor. All members of the Church donated the labor necessary to do the work.

When the doors were opened on the completed building on September 22, 1929, the Building Committee submitted its account. The total cost

was \$7,055.80, but there was a deficit remaining of \$1,812.58. Brethren A. H. Unruh, a well-known and loved minister from Winnipeg, Canada, and J. H. Pankratz, who was an M. B. missionary, officiated at the dedication services. The writer of the Chronika related, "Many eyes were filled with tears of thankfulness and praise. At the close, the Congregation sang, 'Dank dem Herrn mit frohem mut; Er ist freundlich, Er ist gut.'"

It was a great joy to the Church when H. R. Wiens returned in 1934, having completed his studies for the ministry. Since Kroeker was often absent for evangelistic work in other churches, this provided another Minister to help in presenting the Word.

The membership of the Bessie M. B. Church stood at 150 in 1940. At that time, 210 persons had been baptized and received into the Church. Since then, the Church has seen a number of ministers and missionaries come from the Congregation. Missionaries included Pauline Foote, Peter Kiehn, Peter D. Kiehn, Ruben Wedel, and Edwin Schmidt. At the time of the Golden Anniversary in 1955, the roster of baptisms stood at more than 300. Ministers who came from the Church, besides those mentioned in the Chronika, were H. R. Wiens, Menno Harms, Jacob J. Reimer, Leonard Hinz, and Loyal Martin.

Other ministers who have served, especially after the Church began to salary its pastors, were John K. Siemens, 1946 to 1949 (this was in the transition period between part-time and full-time pastors; he also is the last pastor able to preach in the German language); Elmo Warken-tin, 1949 to 1954; Henry Heinrichs, 1954-1957; Lavern Loewens, 1957-1959; Allen Fast, 1959-1963; John Flaming, 1963-1969; Carl Chewning, 1969-1970; and Dennis Becker, 1970 to the present time (1975).

Other Avenues of Work

The Christian Endeavor

This was the Young People's Department, and since 1910 has been active in the Church. At first the programs were in the German language, and every member had to pay dues. Services were held on the second and fourth Sundays of the month.

The Church was host to the Oklahoma M. B. Sunday School Conventions and Song Festivals, which were always held on succeeding days. Later they were combined into one day. In 1919, 1930, 1941, and 1947 the services were held in a large tent which was owned by the Conference. In 1953, use of the tent was discontinued, and the Convention-Festival was held in the high school gymnasium. In 1962 the Bessie M. B. Church, now known as the Bible M. B. Church of Cordell, was host to the Southern District Conference in its new meeting house on North Market Street in Cordell.

A New Building

The new building, the third for the congregation, was built in the town of Cordell. Many members, especially the older ones, had moved to surrounding towns, particularly to Cordell. For some time they felt that the House of Worship should also be moved, enabling the congregation to extend its hospitality and invitations to many more people and to accommodate the older folks as well.

After much prayer the Church voted, on March 19, 1958, to relocate in the city of Cordell. Soon thereafter the members decided to gather funds for that purpose. Adolph R. Schmidt, Henry Wedel, and John A.

Kiehn were elected to serve on a Finance Committee. A monthly offering was then taken, and a special drive was made after harvest to gather the funds. On May 26, 1960, a special fellowship dinner was held at which the Building Committee presented plans and sketches for the proposed building. After a lively but wholesome discussion, the Church voted by a large majority to accept the plans as presented. A few modifications were suggested, and plans were completed to begin construction in the fall.

On Sunday, October 2, 1960, a special groundbreaking ceremony was held. The spiritual purpose was voiced publicly and the city gave the Church a warm welcome. The actual work of laying the foundation was begun on October 11, 1960. A unanimous decision was made to change the name to the Bible M. B. Church of Cordell. When completed, the building had cushioned pews, a new piano, a furnished rostrum, ten separate Sunday School rooms, a pastor's study, a library, and a sewing circle storage room; also there was a dining area with a completely furnished kitchen, rest room facilities, and central heating and cooling. The total cost was \$58,000. About 5,000 hours of labor had been donated by the members.

The dedication service was held on February 19, 1961, with H. R. Wiens, who had been called to preach many years before by the Church, speaking the dedicatory sermon. After this Pastor Allen Fast led the Congregation in the litany of dedication. A few years later, on March 18, 1964, the Congregation further decided to build a new parsonage adjoining the Church. This was soon accomplished, and they now have a spacious, comfortable, modern residence for their pastor.⁸

The membership of the Bessie Church rose to a maximum of 166 in

1947, then gradually declined as so many rural churches have done. The location was not accessible to many members, since it was three and a half miles east of Bessie, one mile south, then a half mile west. In the early sixties, membership rose momentarily, possibly as a result of the move to Cordell, but dropped again. Presently the roll stands at 118.⁹

The Sunday School was always an integral part of the Sunday service. This has been instrumental in teaching the young people the Bible truths, as well as the doctrines of the Church. Many people were involved in the work, and it has led to the salvation and baptism of many souls. In addition, the Bessie Church has been closely involved with the Corn Bible School, sending many students there, as well as being involved in its financial and spiritual support.

Young People's Fellowships

The Young People's Fellowships (Jugendverein) have been held since the early days of the Church organization. The young people, with the older ones, have taken part regularly and many programs have been given. On a recent evening, the secretary reported the 1,267th session of the organization. It meets on the second and fourth Sundays of the month, in the evening services.¹⁰

The Ladies' Sewing Circle (Schwestern Nhhverein)

The Ladies' Sewing Circle has done a tremendous amount of work in sewing quilts and other useful articles. These usually are sold and the money given to the Missions' treasury. Sometimes the products are given directly to the Mennonite Central Committee to be sent to those places that are in need for direct relief.

The Music Department

Like most Mennonites in the past centuries, the Bessie-Cordell Church has laid much stress on the department of music. The choir has played a prominent role in the services from the beginning. With but short periods of time, there has always been a standing choir. Other groups also have served from time to time--quartets, sextets, and trios. For several years these musical organizations carried on a radio ministry over Station KWOE in Clinton, Oklahoma. Others conducted extension ministries, such as jail services.

A work that will be discussed in further detail is the support of the Mennonite Central Committee relief and the Mennonite Disaster Service work. The Bessie-Cordell Church has been prominent in both of these enterprises.

The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church

This branch of the Mennonites originated in the Crimea of southern Russia, hence the word Krimmer, which was the German rendering of the name Crimea. These members had broken away from the so-called Kirchliche Mennonites, and become an independent body. This was the group that migrated to America as a body in 1874 under the leadership of Elder Jacob A. Wiebe, and settled in the Gnadenau community, near the present town of Hillsboro, Kansas.¹¹ Later a group of these K. M. B. people settled in communities along the Washita River area.

The K. M. B. Church held religious beliefs and practices similar to those of the Mennonite Brethren of the Corn Church. The main point of distinction between the two was in their mode of baptism. The Krimmer immersed the candidate forward into the water, while the M. B. Church

immersed backwards. In the later years even this difference has lost its significance, and the two branches merged in 1960.

In 1895, a new settlement of K. M. B. people was made north of Corn on the line separating Washita and Custer counties. In the beginning they were in deep poverty, but they always seemed to get by. Soon, as all Mennonites, they began to gather on Sundays for Sunday School and worship. When they saw that they would be able to prosper, they expressed a desire to organize a Church. For this, Heinrich Wiebe and Peter Wiebe came, evidently from Kansas, to assist in the work. On November 18, 1897, the organization was completed and a baptismal service¹¹ held. Peter K. Wohlgemuth was elected Minister.

More families moved into the area, so that the sod houses of the settlers became too small to hold them all for church services. As soon as a school house was built, they gathered there for worship. In 1899, J. M. Friesen was elected assistant Minister. Revivals broke out, and the little congregation grew larger, although Wohlgemuth and another family joined the Corn Mennonite Brethren Church.

In 1903 a plot of ground was purchased for a cemetery and as a site for a meeting house, which was built the following year. During this time J. M. Friesen was ordained to the ministry. On August 22, 1904, despite a poor harvest, the congregation was enabled to dedicate their new house of worship. The same day David E. Harder was elected to assist in the ministry, and P. L. Jantzen became a Deacon. The Church was named the Bethel Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church.¹²

The congregation increased in number until at one time its roll stood at 76 souls. Then some families moved away, others joined the larger M. B. Church at Corn, and the membership became smaller and

smaller. Eventually David E. Harder moved away, and P. L. Jantzen also joined the Brethren at Corn. Again the Church had to have an election. The lot fell to J. C. Duerksen as Minister. D. H. Buschman and Peter Friesen became the new Deacons. But then Buschman and Friesen both moved away, and the congregation again was without Deacons. Shortly after the election already indicated, J. M. Friesen was ordained an Elder.¹³

Further accounts of this church are fragmentary, but apparently the congregation grew smaller and smaller, with more members moving away or joining the much larger Corn M. B. Church, until finally the group dissolved in 1937. The building evidently was sold or disposed of, and the Church is now only a memory. J. D. Schlichting of Corn was the last member, and presently has the old Gemeinde-Chronik, which is often used as a reference to old baptism and membership records. He also has possession of the cemetery records, as this too is valuable in locating the graves of long-dead loved ones. Now only memories remain, along with a few old tombstones, to mark the place where once stood a church, a lighthouse of the faith and courage the pioneers brought with them over two continents, but now only a dim memory.

Other Mennonite Brethren Churches

Another early day Mennonite Brethren Church was organized at Gotebo under the leadership of Peter Richert. In the fall of 1903 the group which had been meeting in a school house erected a church building. By 1907 the congregation numbered sixty members, but drought, dust, and hail storms made farming difficult. Cattle raising did not seem profitable at the time, so eventually the settlers left for other areas where

they felt they would prosper more. The Church did not survive, and was closed when the membership became too small.¹⁴

The Weatherford M. B. Church

As the Mennonite people spread into surrounding towns with the passing of years, the need to meet together in fellowship again was felt. This led to the organization of another Church.

A group of Mennonite Brethren, along with some from other denominations, had been meeting for Bible Study in Weatherford. Soon a desire to form a Church was expressed. For this purpose, a business meeting was called on November 20, 1953. Approximately 20 persons responded. The meeting was chaired by Reverend Victor Becker, who had been working as a Conference missionary in the city, and the goal was formulated to change the Believer's assembly into a Church Fellowship. After a period of discussion, in which both the advantages and disadvantages of a new Church were discussed, they decided to call another meeting on November 25. At this time the arguments, both pro and con, again were reviewed. Those present finally moved, seconded, and carried to set January 17, 1954, as the date for formal organization.

At the organizational meeting, Reverend Elmo Warkentin, pastor of the Bessie M. B. Church, presented a message emphasizing the Missionary obligation of God's people. The afternoon session was under the direction of the Committee for Evangelism of the Southern District (M. B.), with Reverend B. W. Vogt presiding. Reverend David J. Wiens, pastor of the Fairview M. B. Church, presented a message, and the formal organization was begun by presenting the Fundamentals of Faith.

Charter members received by letter were:

Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Schmidt, LeRoy and Chester
Mr. and Mrs. Albert Schmidt, Marvin and Milton
Mr. and Mrs. Vester Kliever
Mr. and Mrs. Victor E. Becker

Charter members received by testimony were:

Mr. William and Mrs. Sophia Horst
Miss Clara Fisher
Mrs. Bertha Jean Bergman Vargo

The hand of fellowship was extended to each of these new members, and a communion service was celebrated, led by Reverend J. P. Kliever, pastor of the Corn M. B. Church.

A steady growth in membership followed. In July of 1956, there were 42 members; in October of 1957, 60; and by 1971, 98. The last recorded list was in 1974, when it stood at 96. At the first official business meeting officers were elected, and the Church expressed the desire that its pastor, Victor Becker, should be ordained. This was done on April 4, 1954, with the District Pulpit Committee in charge. Reverend J. P. Kliever of Corn presented the message. On May 23 the first baptism service of the Church was held, with six persons receiving the holy rite and being accepted into the membership of the Church.

In July the congregation by motion decided formally to request membership in the Southern District Conference of the M. B. Churches. The request was granted, and the Church was accepted at the Convention at Fairview, Oklahoma, on November 6-9, 1954.

In July of 1956, Reverend Victor Becker resigned, and B. W. Vogt was called to succeed him. Vester Kliever and Harvey Penner had previously been elected Deacons. The term of B. W. Vogt as Pastor came to an end in June of 1960, and Arthur Harder of Fresno, California, was called to take up the work. This call was accepted, and the installation service was held on June 23, 1960. Harder served until the end of

August 1966.

In 1963 the Congregation was still meeting in the building purchased from the Evangelical United Brethren at 700 North Broadway, but they felt a need for a new educational building as an addition to the sanctuary. On October 23, 1963, the proposal was formally accepted at a business meeting, with the structure to be built of brick veneer. In July, 1966, Mervin Dick became Pastor of the Broadway Heights M. B. Church. He served in that capacity until the end of August, 1968. At that time John D. Block took up the work.

At a Church business meeting in December of 1968, a committee was elected to find a location for a new building. On January 10, 1969, the congregation voted to erect a new sanctuary in another area where there would be adequate room to expand and have enough parking space. A site was acquired at 1321 Lark Street in the Pine Acres Addition, and on September 7 ground was broken for the new building, which was completed in mid-March, 1970. With 8,700 square feet of space, it contained eleven classrooms, library and office, pastor's study, a kitchen, and a fellowship hall. The dedication service was held April 5, 1970.

John Block resigned in 1972, and Reverend Elmer Ensz of Lustre, Montana, accepted the call to the pastorate. He is still serving at the present time (1975).¹⁵

The Clinton M. B. Church

The newest M. B. Church to be formed as an outgrowth of the Washita settlements was the church in Clinton, Oklahoma. Richard Gerbrandt had been sent to the city to investigate the possibilities of establishing a congregation. There already were M. B. members living in or near the

city, and they formed the nucleus of the new group. The first meeting was held at the Gerbrandt home on October 3, 1961, with seventeen people present. Reverend Gerbrandt presented a message, and they had a time of prayer. Thereafter regular services have been held. For a while they met at the home of Bob Derby, but before long a house was rented which served as a place of worship.

There on November 8, 1961, the first election of a Sunday School staff and officers was held. The same day the building was dedicated to the Lord, and the charter membership rolls were opened, with 23 people appearing to sign the roll that afternoon. Seven more were added before the roll was closed, with a total of 30. The ordination of Reverend Gerbrandt took place on April 29, 1962, with Dr. Lando Hiebert of Tabor College officiating. A few weeks later, on June 3, the first baptismal service took place.¹⁶

Progress then was made to obtain acreage on which to erect a new building. A groundbreaking service was held on January 20, 1963, at the new location at 1410 Shelly Avenue in a new development area of the city. There were delays in the work, for the arches arrived by truck and the decking did not come until the middle of November. Finally it was possible to proceed with construction, with the help of men from the Corn and Cordell churches. A tragic interlude came on one working day when the news came that President Kennedy had been assassinated. Work was suspended for a period of time while the pastor, Reverend Gerbrandt, offered prayer for the Kennedy family and for the government.

The Sunday of March 1, 1964, had been set as the date for the first service. Because of unforeseen delays, the benches and other furniture did not arrive until the Saturday preceding the first service. With

everyone helping, the furniture was in place by 8 o'clock that evening, the cleanup work was done, and the service could be held the next morning as scheduled. A month later, on April 5, the dedication took place, with Reverend William Neufeld as the guest speaker. Other ministers assisting were Reverend Albert Epp of the Corn Church and Reverend Arthur Harder of the Weatherford Church. Music was furnished by the Penner family and the Church choir.

The congregation was discouraged for a time when the pastor, Reverend Richard Gerbrandt, resigned, effective the end of March, 1965. However, a replacement was found in Reverend Elmer Goertz of Portland, Oregon, who was installed a month after Gerbrandt left. Goertz served the church through September of 1969. During his term of service the congregation adopted the name "Shelly Avenue Church of the Mennonite Brethren."

On the recommendation of the Conference,¹⁷ Reverend Alvin Epp of Corn was asked to serve as an interim pastor while the Congregation was casting around for a permanent leader. Epp served in this capacity until July 20, 1972, when Reverend Bruce Buller was installed and took over the leadership. However, two years later Buller also resigned, and Reverend Epp once again was called as interim pastor, a position he held until July 20, 1975, when Reverend Gary Dangerfield was installed.¹⁸

At this time the active membership is standing at 41.

The Calvary Baptist Church

At first glance, relating the history of a Baptist Church in the Mennonite communities on the Washita may seem outside the scope of this paper, but it is interesting and significant that many of the members of

this congregation can trace their parentage fo the original Mennonite settlers. For various reasons of their own, they have preferred to worship in a different setting. However, most of the basic Anabaptist beliefs have been preserved.

The following account is taken from a Church History written by Mrs. Martha Siemens for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Church. It has been edited somewhat for the purposes of this paper.

When God gives a burden and man acts on this burden, God can perform mircales. W. E. W. R. Dungan, superintendent of the Corn Public Schools, was burdened for the many young couples, especially the fathers who brought their children to Sunday School but they, themselves, seldom if ever attended Church services. Dungan acted on this burden, and on March 13, 1949, organized a Union Sunday School Class that met in the Corn Public School. This was the beginning of the Calvary Baptist Church. After several Sundays, a children's class was begun and also a worship service. The group was now meeting in the Corn Legion Hall. Reverend A. L. Drake, a Southern Baptist evangelist, held a week of evening services during Passion Week. Over fifty souls experienced a rebirth and many others rededicated their lives.

The first recorded Church Minutes were dated April 27, 1949. Sunday School officers were elected, also several committees to carry on the Church business. Marvin Jost was elected Business Leader. In August the first Church Council was elected with Marvin Jost, P. W. Leppke, and Ed Krewall serving. Krewall soon resigned and Herb Thiessen was elected in his place. The Council was to:

1. Look for a Pastor.
2. See that the Worship services continue.
3. Help plan for a baptism.
4. Write a constitution.

The constitution was adopted in September of 1949. On September 25 the first baptism was held with Reverend Neubert of the Bessie Baptist Church in charge. The congregation voted to affiliate with the North American Baptists and call themselves the Calvary Baptist Church. The first deacons were W. E. W. R. Dungan and Herb Thiessen, and the first trustees were Wes Litke, John Meget, and Bud Siemens.

In November of 1949, Reverend L. H. Smith accepted the call of the Church and took up the position of Pastor in December. About the same time, Al Schmidt offered to donate land on which to build a church. Ground was broken in January, and in June the cornerstone was laid. A Bible, a blue-print of the building, names of charter members and other members, and those of the committee were wrapped in plastic and placed within the cornerstone. The building committee was composed of John Rempel, W. J. Litke, E. J. Kroeker, Bud Siemens, and Reverend L. H. Smith. The latter also served as architect. The congregation moved into the building in the summer of 1950. In January of 1952 the lot adjoining the church on the east was purchased, and plans were drawn up by Reverend Smith for a new parsonage. Both the Church and the parsonage were dedicated on March 10, 1957, with Pastor Jack Block officiating. An education building was added in 1962, being dedicated in December of the same year, with Reverend Lyle Wacker in charge.

Pastors who have served the Church are L. H. Smith, Homer Boese, interim, J. K. Warkentin, Jack Block, Lyle Wacker, Alvin Auch, Helmut Michelson, Marlin Thomas, interim, and the present pastor, Albert Epp. The present membership stands at 107 (1974).

FOOTNOTES

¹Cornelius Bergmann, History of the M. B. Church of Corn. 60th Anniversary booklet. (No printer's name, or address given, 1953), pages were not numbered.

²Ibid.

³Agatha Funk, History of the Corn M. B. Church (Unpublished manuscript, no date given). English translation: The Congregation grew, and was accompanied by the blessing of God.

⁴J. D. Schlichting, Recollections, 1975 (Taped Interview).

⁵Funk, History.

⁶Bergmann, History.

⁷From the notes of a talk on the history of the Christian Endeavor, by A. G. Duerksen in 1974.

⁸Bulletin of the Dedication Service, February 19, 1961.

⁹Figures taken from the official Southern District Conference year-books.

¹⁰Golden Anniversary Booklet. No author given.

¹¹David V. Wiebe, They Seek a Country (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1959), p. 57.

¹²Gemeinde-Chronik Kirchenbuch der Krimmer Mennonite BrÜdergemeinde bei Weatherford, Oklahoma, 1894-1914.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Marvin Kroeker, The Mennonites of Oklahoma to 1907. Unpublished master's thesis, 1954.

¹⁵Taken from the Church Record Book and Organizational Minutes of the Weatherford Mennonite Brethren Church, 1953-1975.

¹⁶Taken from the Church Record Book and Organizational Minutes, Clinton Mennonite Brethren Church, 1961-1975.

¹⁷ Henry Reimer, Report of the first ten Years, 1961-1971. Given at the tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Church.

¹⁸ From the Church Record Book, Clinton M. B. Church.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE MENNONITE CHURCHES

The General Conference Mennonite Churches were established by settlers who came from communities in Kansas different from the Mennonite Brethren. Also, these Mennonites came from different areas of Russia, Poland, and Prussia. Today these differences are immaterial, for the people mingle freely with little regard for denominational lines, but at that time it was a serious matter. General Conference missionaries actually were the pioneer settlers along the Washita. Thus it may be well to trace the development of their mission stations in the Indian areas of Oklahoma Territory.

Early Missionary Endeavors

In 1875, the General Conference Churches appointed S. S. Haury, an ordained missionary, to open a mission field among the Indians of the southwest. In July of 1877, he began his contacts with the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribes in what is now southwestern Oklahoma. For two months Haury lived with them in a tent loaned him by Chief Powder Face of the Arapahos; then, after an interview with John Miles, head of the Indian Agency at Darlington, he reported to the Mennonite Mission Board as follows:

Next spring, perhaps in April, God willing, I shall again return to the Indians, there to settle among the Arapahos. First...erect a small building...then endeavor by the Lord's

aid to learn the language.... My reasons for selecting the Arapahos are these: More preliminary work has been done among the Arapahos; they seem to be more willing to receive a missionary than the Cheyennes. The Indian Agent here has also advised me to begin my work with the Arapahos. But above all I feel myself drawn more to this tribe....¹

His plan was approved, and on May 18, 1880, Haury and his wife left Halstead, Kansas, for the journey to Darlington, Indian Territory. It took four days to reach their destination, but, upon arriving, they settled in a government building and went to work. Plans called for a mission and an industrial boarding school. With the help of several volunteers from Kansas--Cornelius Duerksen, C. J. Wedel, and others--the project began. Building materials had to be found locally, the lumber sawed from native trees, for it was difficult and costly to buy and transport materials from other areas. By August of 1881 the building was completed. It was a large, three-story wooden building. Work began in the school in October of 1881 with nineteen Arapaho students enrolled. Only a few months later, in February of 1882, the building was destroyed by fire. Four children died in the blaze, including one of the missionaries' own children and an adopted Indian daughter. This was a terrible blow to the new missionaries, and it was difficult for the mother to overcome her loss.²

When the Mission Board was notified, it made immediate plans to rebuild. In a few months \$5,000 was contributed, and a new building was being erected. This time it was built of brick, and could accommodate fifty children.³ The work prospered, so that by Christmas there were fourteen workers in the field (1882).⁴ While the work of building was going on, Agent Miles offered the Board the use of Camp Cantonment, about sixty miles west of Darlington. This army post was being vacated,

and all of the buildings but one were being offered to the Mennonites for use as a school and mission. At first the Mission Board hesitated, for it was now short of funds, so Miles persuaded the government to appropriate \$5,000 to help rebuild the school at Darlington. This left the Mission Board with \$5,000 of its own money to develop the new station at Cantonment. More workers arrived on the field to help in the new project, including H. R. Voth, who was to gain prominence in working with the Indians in the years to come. Agent Miles held both Haury and Voth in high esteem. Voth remained at Darlington, while Haury moved to Cantonment to develop the work there. Eventually both a school and a hospital were in operation at this location.⁵

Darlington had as many pupils as it could accommodate, which was fifty. Cantonment had sixty-five in a short time. In addition to school subjects and religious instruction, the students were taught how to farm, care for livestock, and many other things they needed to know in order to live in the white man's ways.⁶

Not far from Darlington was a small Mennonite settlement of twelve families north of El Reno. In 1891 this group formed a congregation with twenty-seven charter members. After meeting in homes for two years, they moved into a new small church on what is now U. S. Highway 81. Early ministerial leadership was given by Joel Sprunger of Berne, Indiana, who was ordained on May 14, 1893. Later, Reverend J. S. Krehbiel of Geary traveled fifty-six miles by horse and buggy twice per month to serve the congregation. Since 1959 there have been no regular services in this church, but from the small congregation have come three ministers, one missionary, and one deaconess--a strong testimony to the spiritual life of the Church.

On June 8, 1975, more than 100 persons attended a commemorative service at the historic building, called the Mennoville Church, just a few miles from the old Darlington Agency. Reverend Willard Schrag, pastor of the Geary Mennonite Church, stated, "We are considering an ancient landmark that represents a community of people. This ancient landmark happens to be an old Church. But somehow the old Church is wrapped up in the founding, development and growth of an entire community. I dare not estimate how many people's lives have been touched...." A marker was placed to denote the historic site on May 28, 1972. The year 1976 marks the 85th anniversary of the coming of the first permanent settlers to this area. Because of the rolling terrain, the Church can be seen from great distances in all directions, and is in truth the "Silent Sentinal."⁷

Kroeker, quoting from the Cheyenne Transporter editorial of December 26, 1882, wrote of the mission work at Darlington: "Too much credit cannot be given the Mennonites for the energy displayed in their...work at this agency, under the able direction of Mr. Haury and his co-workers; every obstacle has been overcome and the good work continued."⁸ For many years the Mennonites were the only group carrying on religious activities at the agency, so Voth, who followed Haury in the work, made zealous efforts to minister to all who came.

One of the outstanding workers at the Cantonment Mission was Rudolf Petter, who specialized in the study of the Cheyenne language. His work made him internationally famous as a philologist, as he published a Cheyenne-English dictionary containing more than 50,000 words. He also translated the books of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into the Cheyenne language. Besides Cheyenne, Petter could preach in

French, in German, and in English.⁹

In 1886 Haury resigned in order to retire, and H. R. Voth became the principal of missions, while J. J. Kliewer was made the superintendent of the Cantonment Station. Under his leadership a large three-story building was erected, with A. T. Kruse of Halstead, Kansas, as architect and builder. Again, trees were cut down, lumber sawed at the government sawmill, bricks were made, and stones and lime for the foundations were gathered and prepared. When finished, the building housed seventy students in dormitories on the upper floors, and it had two large classrooms for the school and quarters for the missionary personnel on the lower floors.¹⁰

Because the movement of Indians to the west took them away from Darlington, which became nearly deserted, the Mission Board instructed Voth and Kliewer to move closer to their people. Large groups of Indians were living along the Washita River, and were moving about considerably because the government had decided to allot the Indians' land in severalty, thus opening the rest of the reservation to settlement by whites. In trying to find choice areas, the Indians were moving around so much that mission work came to a standstill.¹¹

The Shelly Mission

Voth and Kliewer, after a period of investigation, chose a site along the Washita River, and on July 18, 1889, set about establishing their new mission station. Henry Kliewer, brother of J. J. Kliewer, was asked to move to the new location until the work at Cantonment could be taken over by someone else; J. J. Kliewer thereby would be released to take up work at the new place, which was called the Shelly Mission.

Here was a task that would have daunted many men. The Board had allowed only \$800 with which to begin work. Wells had to be dug, trees cut down, and homes built. These men had tremendous energy and a willingness to work, so that by spring they had homes for their families.¹² Krehbiel is more specific in describing the work that must have gone into the building of these houses. Trenches were dug the size and shape of the house. Small trees were cut, and logs set upright in the trenches. The upper ends were fastened by laying a strip of wood along them, nailed into each post. The roof was framed with more logs, covered with sticks, long grass and branches, and over all was placed a layer of sod. Cracks between the posts were covered with clay. Simple doors filled the openings, and thus were the palisade-type houses finished and made ready for their occupants.¹³

The Shelly Mission Station lay in a pretty valley with 160 acres abutting on the river. But one who had evidently visited the Shelly Mission wondered at the courage of Missionary Kliewer, who had worked so hard to prepare the fine new building at Cantonment, and now was living in a hut of logs and sod, drinking the red, brackish water from a well he had dug, and doing the most difficult manual labor. Yet he was there for a purpose--to bring evangelization and civilization to Indian people.¹⁴

The story is told of an encounter between Kliewer and Big Jake, a huge Indian chief who lived on the Washita near the Shelly Mission. At a time when Kliewer was busy working on his house, Big Jake came to visit him. Knowing how the Indians like to tax the patience of the white man, Kliewer kept on with his work. That offended the big Indian, who threatened that if he were not given the respect due him, he would

not tolerate the mission on his land. With that he went away. Later, on the way to the village, Kliewer spoke to the chief as they met. Big Jake walked stiffly on. When they arrived at the village he came to Kliewer and politely said, "Now we are quits. You had no time for me, now I had no time for you. I have paid you back and now we can be friends."¹⁵

Before long, Kliewer was able to build a frame house for a day school for children, which at times was well attended. But the land was opened to settlement, and the mission personnel were forced to homestead the tracts on which the mission stood. J. J. Kliewer homesteaded the mission area; other workers also took up homesteads. The mission itself continued to function until 1897 when the surrounding area had been settled by Mennonites, and the Indians retreated from the territory, forcing the mission to close. This happened officially in 1900. However, a Mennonite Church had been organized, and the group carried on services at the old Shelly Mission. The settlement itself may be partly credited to Kliewer, who reported to the Mennonite communities in Kansas that the red soils of the Washita valley were fertile and rich, capable of being transformed by industrious Mennonites into productive and prosperous farms. Many others had surveyed the lands and felt they were too poor and droughty to be good farming lands, but with Kliewer's enthusiastic reports many Mennonites left Kansas and took up homesteads in what are now Washita and Custer counties.¹⁶ With the closing of the Shelly Mission on the Washita, J. J. Kliewer became the pastor of the group that later became known as the Bergthal Mennonite Church.

The Bergthal Mennonite Church

In the spring of 1892, when the government opened the reservation of the Arapaho-Cheyenne Indian tribes for homesteading, Mennonite settlers, many of whom were inspired by the glowing reports of Missionary Kliever, who spread the fame of the new area far and wide in Mennonite circles, came to take up homesteads. Among them were families from Kansas, from the Alexanderwohl (Goessel) and Hoffnungsau (Inman) communities. With them was Reverend Peter Pankratz and family, and some families from Nebraska. Pankratz soon appealed to the Home Mission Committee of the Western District, (G. C.) to organize a Church. The committee appointed Elder Dietrich Gaeddert of the Hoffnungsau Congregation, who carried out the suggested organization.

A business meeting (Bruderberatung) was called for August 24, 1894, and the decision was made to organize a Church. This was soon given the name of "Bergthal." Those present at the meeting were:

Reverend Peter Pankratz	Heinrich Ratzlaff
P. M. Pankratz	Benjamin Ratzlaff
Johann Flaming	F. J. Adrian
Emil Hinz	Johann Peters
Cornelius Krause	C. K. Dalke
Abraham Froese	Peter Nachtigal
Gerhard Schroeder	Gerhard Bekker
Heinrich Kliever	David Heinrichs
Abraham Reimer	Leander Jantz
C. F. Duerksen	P. J. Schmidt

The minutes of the first business meeting, translated from the German script in which it was written, is as follows:

First: To organize a Congregation within a narrower circle of fellowship, (Engerer Zusammenschluss) since the settlers who had been meeting for worship services were from different denominational backgrounds.

With this, the churches of Alexanderwohl at Goessel, and Hoffnungsau at Inman, were to be regarded as the mother churches which should provide spiritual leadership.

Second: A newly married couple, the Peter Bullers, requested the rite of holy baptism and acceptance into the membership. The Congregation decided to accept them upon their testimony and baptism.

Third: A date was to be set for the baptism and reception of the above mentioned couple. The date was set for Sunday, August 26.

Fourth: It was decided to celebrate the Lord's Supper on September 2.

Fifth: It was decided to have a service of Preparation for the Lord's Supper on the forenoon of Wednesday, August 29.

Sixth: Minister Pankratz requested that they have an election for a minister. But it was noted in addition, that if the Congregation felt the time was not yet ripe for such an election, he was willing to continue serving as before.

Seventh: The following brethren were elected as song leaders: (Vorsinger) Benjamin Ratzlaff, Heinrich Kliewer, Franz Adrian, and Peter Nachtigal.

Eighth: C. F. Duerksen was elected as Church Secretary.

Ninth: Franz Adrian was elected as Correspondent to the Bundes Bote (Evidently a Conference Organ).

Tenth: It was decided to adjourn. A song was sung and a closing prayer was offered.¹⁷

Peter Pankratz later was elected leader of the Church. The first recorded offering, January 1, 1895, totaled \$1.21. In August of 1895 the congregation petitioned the Foreign Missions Board to be allowed the use of the Shelly Mission as a place to worship. This was granted, with the stipulation that they pay a small rental fee. Services were held in the mission chapel every other Sunday; on alternate Sundays the meetings were divided, one group meeting in the Sihar school house and the other in Benjamin Ratzlaff's dwelling. Where Pankratz could not be present, the deacons took charge and preached.¹⁸

At a business meeting on February 24, 1896, during an examination

of candidates for baptism, some differences of opinion developed--just what occasioned it was not given--and after some discussion it was decided to divide the congregation permanently. The Record Book was to remain with the group that retained the Bergthal name. Other sources state that the cause of the division was the Washita River. Those who retained the Bergthal name lived east of the river, which was difficult to cross in times of high water, while the rest of the people lived west of the river.¹⁹

The division was carried out peacefully, resulting in two separate organizations. Reverend Pankratz and Deacon M. Klaassen were in the group that withdrew. They formed what was to be known as the Sichar Congregation. Nineteen business meetings (Bruderberatung) were to be held before the separation became final. Those remaining in the Bergthal group--the Sichar group will be taken up later in a separate section--were these men with their families:

Heinrich Kliewer, Deacon	Johann Peters
Benj. Ratzlaff	Abraham Reimer
A. F. Janzen	Peter Baergen
Heinrich Franz	Cornelius Krause
Emiel Hinz	David Heinrichs
Gerhard Schroeder	Heinrich Quiring
Gerhard Bekker	Johann Flaming
Heinrich Ratzlaff	Peter Nachtigal
P. J. Schmidt	C. F. Duerksen
Peter A. Martens	C. K. Dalke
Jacob Cornelson	F. J. Adrian
Heinrich Dick	

At the first business meeting after the division, Heinrich Kliewer was elected temporary chairman and F. J. Adrian secretary. Services were to be held in the Greenfield Schoolhouse, where the first order of business was to continue with the examination of candidates for baptism, which had been the order of business at the meeting where the division began to develop. The Hoffnungsau Church was retained as the Mother

Church, and Elder Dietrich Gaeddert again was asked to come to carry out the baptisms.

Some time later, on July 11, 1897, the congregation decided to extend a call to Missionary J. J. Kliewer of Shelly Mission to serve as its pastor. After careful deliberation, Kliewer accepted. Several years later, in 1899, under the direction of Elder Peter Balzer of Alexanderwohl, Johann Flaming and Johann Peters were elected Ministers, and Benjamin Ratzlaff Deacon. The two Ministers were ordained April 14, 1901, with Elder Peter Balzer and Elder Abraham Ratzlaff in charge of the services.

Discipline in the Church was strict. In the minutes of January 21, 1898, it was affirmed that no one would be taken into the fellowship of the Church if he were a user of tobacco, and if any member were found using it he was, by his action, regarded as having automatically excluded himself from membership. Later, it was noted that some applicants were refused the privilege of membership until they took care of their drinking problem. Other times, the minutes related the work done by Deacons and others in admonishing and correcting the ways and lives of members. There was a deep concern that each one should live a life according to the teachings and doctrines of the Holy Scripture. Sometimes it was noted that individuals would appear before the Church in repentance, humbly asking forgiveness and promising to live according to the Word. The congregation, with rejoicing, would then accept the erring ones back into full membership.

In November of 1898, notice was received from the Mission Board that the Shelly Mission was to be sold. The congregation did not feel led to negotiate for its purchase, possibly because it was on the west

side of the Washita. However, they continued meeting in the Greenfield and Sparta schoolhouses until 1901. The membership stood at forty-one, and the Sunday School included many more, for most families were large, with many small children that were not members. On August 4, they met in Sparta and decided to accept pledges towards a new meetinghouse. These amounted to \$405. Benjamin Ratzlaff offered to donate 1 1/2 acres of land for a building site. At the next meeting they decided to erect a building twenty-six feet wide by forty feet long, with twelve-foot-high walls. A Building Committee had to be chosen, with Johann Peters, Johann Flaming, Benjamin Ratzlaff, Emil Hinz, and P. G. Baergen serving as members. J. Peters was appointed to supervise the work. Stones for the foundation were quarried on the H. P. Kliewer farm.²⁰

The construction soon began with Henry Grause as carpenter and Peter J. Penner as assistant.²¹ Volunteer labor provided the rest of the work. By the 28th of October the treasurer, P. G. Baergen, gave an account of the financial status, showing the need for additional money. An additional \$150 were needed to finish the project, so the treasurer was authorized to borrow the amount at eight percent interest.

The dedication was held on November 17, 1901. A large tent was rented from the M. B. Church and erected on the church yard. The Herold, Sichar, Gotebo, and Geary Mennonite Churches were invited for help in celebrating the occasion. At the end of the year, at the annual business meeting, the total receipts of money were shown to be \$986.57, including the borrowed \$150. Of this, \$927 had been disbursed to pay for the construction, leaving \$21.55 in the treasury. A few other debts remained; after payment was made of those debts, a balance of .67 was left. However, at the same annual meeting, the report of the

missions' treasurer showed that \$179 had been gathered and sent to the Conference Missions. Thus the people were willing to continue their obligations in spreading the Gospel.

Emil Hinz had donated land across the road from the churchyard to be used as a cemetery. The day before the dedication of the new church, Peter Nachtigal died. He had helped to haul stones for the foundation, and now became the first to be buried in the new cemetery.

After a few years passed, it was felt that the church was becoming too small. On October 12, 1910, it was decided to enlarge the building as soon as \$500 could be pledged. At the next business meeting the additions were set at twelve by twenty-six feet, to be added to both sides of the main structure. The money came, and the work was done.

In 1911, Johann Flaming was ordained an Elder, by Elder M. Klaassen, and shortly thereafter J. G. Baergen was ordained a Minister. The same year the Western District Conference was held in the Bergthal Church. In 1926 the Church celebrated a Jubilee for Elder Flaming for having served the Church for twenty-five years. He continued for eight more, resigning in 1933 because of poor health. H. W. Fransen served as Minister and leader for a number of years. J. J. Kroeker served part time, but the Church had no Elder until Henry H. Hege, then a teacher in the Corn Public Schools, accepted the position. He was ordained an Elder on October 8, 1939, and led the Church for many years.

A great occasion for the Bergthal Church came on August 27, 1944, when, together with the Sichar and Herold churches, the members celebrated the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Mennonite Churches on the Washita. A large tent was erected for the occasion, which was filled, for it was a beautiful day. Visiting speakers were Reverend

John H. Epp of Kingman, Kansas, Missionary J. B. Ediger, and Reverend H. R. Wiens. Messages were also given by Reverend Janzen of the Herold Church and others. Music was provided by the choirs of the three churches and by smaller vocal and instrumental ensembles. The account in the Gemeinde-Buch closed with these words: "So ended a day of great blessing for the Church, and in praises and thanksgiving to Almighty God, who guided the Church through the past fifty years."

An interesting side glance is that the first entry in the minutes of the Gemeinde-Buch in the English language was made in December 26, 1945. All previous entries were in German script. The English entry was on page 259 of the large, leather-bound Account Book that had been in use since 1894, and had been the occasion of the first collection of money when the Church was organized--to purchase the book.

At the end of 1952 Elder Hege resigned from the pastorate of the Bergthal Church, thus ending the service of the last person ordained to the position of Elder in this organization. However, on November 26, 1958, Evelyn Heidebrecht was ordained a missionary by the pastor, Dr. J. K. Warkentin. The Church also agreed to contribute approximately \$100 per month for her support, which was continued until the Church was disbanded.

On January 31, 1960, it was decided to remodel the building. Henry Wiebe of Corn was given the contract, and the work proceeded so rapidly that on March 20 the dedication of the renovated building was held. The service was led by Dr. Warkentin, with Dr. Howard Nyce of Kansas giving the dedicatory address. Other churches sharing in the services were Calvary Baptist of Corn, Mennonite Brethren of Corn, First Mennonite of Geary, Bethel Mennonite of Hydro, and the Herold Mennonite of Cordell.

The cost of the project was given at \$8,100 in the treasurer's report of the Building Committee, of which Arnold E. Krause was the chairman. Members were Alvin C. Hinz, Jake Vogt, Allen Flaming, and Erwin Duerksen.

Pastors serving the Bergthal Church after Elder Hege resigned were:

W. Harley King	September, 1952 to September, 1954
Walter Siemens	September, 1954 to September, 1955
F. L. Nussbaum	October, 1955 to October, 1957
Dr. J. K. Warktntin	May, 1958 to August, 1961
Albert Epp	November, 1961 to December, 1962
Rev. ---- Lohrentz	February, 1963 to July, 1965
Lloyd C. Penner	August, 1965 to June, 1967
Dr. J. K. Warkentin	June, 1967 to September, 1969

On September 10, 1969, the minutes of the last business meeting were entered in the record book, and official meetings ceased. However, in 1971, the Lloyd Penner family again moved into the community, and Reverend Penner was asked to resume services in the Bergthal Church. On August 22, 1971, a small group began to conduct both Sunday School and worship services under the leadership of Reverend Penner, and continued until November 17, 1974, when due to the deaths of several of the leading members, and with others in failing health, services were terminated. Thus ended the many years in which the Church had served the community near the Washita River as a lighthouse of faith. It served from August 24, 1894, to November 17, 1974--a period of eighty years. Now the building stands lonely, with its rich and varied memories, having known rejoicing and sorrow, having seen the community grow from the sod dugouts of pioneer settlers to the prosperity of large-scale farming, which in the end spelled the doom of the rural church. The land, once peopled by busy settlers with large families, now has few people and fewer dwellings, and the churches that once were the centers of the community life now stand victims of the progress and prosperity

that was the goal of the settler.

It is worthy of note that the older sisters of the Church continued to meet regularly, even during the years when no formal services were held in the Church. They continued their work as a Sewing Circle, as they had done for so many years, particularly specializing in the making of hand-crafted quilts. Some of these had intricate designs and needlework and required many hours of painstaking labor. While the Church had been in full operation, these quilts and other articles, such as beautiful aprons and tea towels, were sold at auction, with the proceeds, which sometimes amounted to hundreds of dollars, going to support the Conference and Church mission projects. Some of those who continued the longest with this work were Mrs. Dan Heidebrecht, who designed the intricate patterns on the quilts, Mrs. Arnold Krause, Mrs. Henry Hinz, Mrs. P. R. Ratzlaff, and Mrs. John Ratzlaff.

A number of the members and former members of the Bergthal Church recently decided to paint and refurbish the old building which was becoming delapidated. This has been done, and it now is a monument to the enterprising and energetic pioneers, a place where community gatherings can be held, and possibly also the place where those yet remaining will begin their last short journey on earth--just across the road to the well-kept little cemetery where so many of their friends and relatives sleep on the knoll that overlooks the Valley of the Washita.

Some of the people whose names appear so frequently in the minutes as leaders of the congregational activities are:

Leonard Abrahams	Deacon, Church and Choir Leader
Elmer Quiring	Deacon and Church Leader
Emil A. Hinz	Deacon, Treasurer
Henry H. Hinz	Church and Sunday School Leader, Teacher
Alvin C. Hinz	Trustee, Treasurer

Henry Fransen, Jr.	Prominent in many areas of work
H. A. Unger	Writer, Correspondent
Jake Vogt	Prominent in many areas of work
Jim Hinz	Prominent in many areas of work
Allen Flaming	Committee work, Sunday School Leader
Erwin Duerksen	Committee work, Sunday School work ²²

Many other people worked behind the scenes, unknown and unheralded; without their aid, the services would not have been as beautiful and worthwhile.

The Sichar Mennonite Church

In the early days of settlement on the Washita, the river itself posed a problem. The membership of the Bergthal Church, in its early years, was on both sides of the river. The problem was in crossing in times of high water when the stream was turbulent and swift. Even at best, crossing was difficult, for the banks were steep and often muddy and thus slippery. Bridges were few, at the beginning non-existent. Finally in 1896, the membership agreed to separate, with those living on the east side of the river retaining the name of Bergthal, while those on the west side of the river were to call themselves the Sichar Mennonite Church.

Elder Jacob Toews helped the group organize a Church. Their first minister was Peter Pankratz. In 1897 the first building was dedicated on a plot of land donated by Jacob Jantzen. Two years later, in 1899, the congregation again divided because of dissension, one group retaining the building upon payment of \$325. They promptly renamed it the Herold Church. The remainder of the congregation retained the name of Sichar and erected a new building two and a half miles south of the original, which was now the Herold Church (six miles northeast of Cordell).

Under the leadership of Menno Kliever, the Sichar Church reached its greatest membership, 103, in 1935. A few years before it closed in November of 1947, it still had a membership of eighty-nine. A total of seven ministers served the church in the nearly fifty years of its existence. All of the ministers lived within six miles of the church.

From the beginning the Church was self-supporting financially, and offered services to all ages. It made the transfer from the German to the English language in 1933-1935. As so often happened, many members moved away. At one time over thirty members were living in California. The original differences that had caused the division were forgotten by the second generation, and many were eager to join the larger Herold fellowship which was nearby. When services were discontinued in November of 1947, the building was moved to the Indian Mission at Clinton, Oklahoma.²³

The Salem Mennonite Church

Details of this Church are scarce. Even the date of its organization is uncertain, estimated at approximately 1904, but possibly as late as 1911. This group first met in the McKinley school five and a half miles northeast of Cordell and one and a half miles from the Sichar Church. It was accepted into the Western District and General Conferences, with Heinrich D. Schmidt serving as Minister for the entire time of its existence. Schmidt was a farmer, as were most of his contemporaries. All services were held in German. The membership rose to its maximum of twenty-six in 1914. As with some of the other churches, members moved away. Some joined the Sichar Church, and in 1919 those remaining also expressed their willingness to unite with the larger group.²⁴

The Springfield Mennonite Church

In the Historical Library of Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, is an old record book entitled Protokol-Buch der Springfeld Gemeinde. The entries do not state where the church was located or where its members met, but questioning revealed that a group of Swiss Mennonites (Schweitzer) settled in the Washita area; because they were of a different European background, they kept to themselves. They met in the Springfield schoolhouse.

The first entry in the Protokol-Buch is dated September 13, 1899. The business meeting was led by C. Ramseier. The next day a Vorstand (Council) was elected, consisting of Sol Swartz, chairman, C. P. Stucky, and J. P. Stucky. The secretary was P. R. Kaufman, and treasurer was H. Merk. A Jugendverein (Young People's Fellowship) was begun on March 29, 1900. This organization was to meet every second Sunday. The names occurring most frequently were Kaufman, Albrecht, Stucky, Zerger, Swartz, Merk, Holly, and Ewy. Some of these people evidently intermarried with the other Mennonites in the area. In the family book of the Kliever family, owned by Vester Kliever of Weatherford, one of the persons bore the name of these Swiss Mennonites. The group apparently moved to Caddo County and there founded another church. The Protokol-Buch states that in 1919 all remaining members were given their Church membership letters, giving them freedom to join other churches.

Different Backgrounds of Settlers

The Mennonite settlers of Oklahoma had shared a common heritage for centuries, yet in the last decades before coming to America their paths had become widely separated. These met again as the streams of

immigration converged on the Washita. This fact, plus the strong, uncompromising spirit that was imperative in sustaining their faith, and the determination that no human being, not even the Czar himself, would keep them from living out the doctrines that motivated their centuries of migrations perhaps was conducive to some of the divisions that came into the Churches. However, it is a tribute to their faith and concern that these divisions could be carried out without permanently damaging the framework of the Church.

One of the groups with an unusual background consisted of a number of families from the Mennonite settlements of Asia. As the Mennonite settlements of southern Russia had become overpopulated, they had sought out areas where land was cheap and settlers few. The older colonies then had financed landless families so they could build up farmsteads for themselves.²⁵ One of these daughter colonies was at Samara. There Claes Epp, who had been influenced by the writing of Jung-Stiller,²⁶ a German Pietist, felt led to write a book of his own explaining the mysteries of Revelation (the last book of the Bible). According to Epp, Christ was to appear on earth in 1889 at a place in Asia where the "faithful" were to gather to await His coming. Since the Czar's Ukase revoking the military exemption of the Mennonites had been made known, there was added impetus to Epp's followers to find a haven from the worldliness which seemed to be pressing in on every side.²⁷ But while thousands were turning westward towards America, Epp turned eastward, and by 1880 had persuaded a hundred families to join him in his quest for the place where they were to meet the Lord.²⁸

Turkestan had recently been acquired by Russia, and the governor, General Konstantin von Kaufmann, was eager to get Mennonites as

colonizers. He promised freedom from conscription and abundant land. These pilgrims sold their possessions and started the trek east. After incredible hardships, including a 250-mile journey through the Kyzyl Kum desert, they arrived at Tashkent in December. Cold weather, poor quarters, and disease thinned their ranks. Kaufmann suffered a stroke, and his successor ordered the Mennonites to leave. Fifty families broke away from Epp's leading and settled at Aulie Ata, about 150 miles north-east of Tashkent. These remained at this settlement, and it is a matter of interest that this area has had the greatest concentration of Mennonite Brethren in the Soviet Union after World War II.²⁹

Epp's group, with only twenty-five families, made its way to the Khanate of Bukhara, but were expelled immediately. Joined by another caravan of forty families, and under the uncompromising leadership of Claes Epp, they rejoiced when the Khan of Khiva offered them a tract of land. To reach this, they had to cross the Kara Kum desert. Women and children were loaded on camels, while the young men took the cattle and horses by a different route.³⁰ Eventually they settled on a tributary of the Amu Darya River, hoping to have reached their Bergungsort (a place of refuge). Their first crop was a failure because of locusts and drought. Robber bands stole their stock, sometimes boldly invading their homes, especially after they found the Mennonites had no guns. Finally two Cossacks were hired as guards. These were not hesitant to use weapons, and the raids ceased.³¹

Eventually the Khan invited the small band to settle at Ak Mechet, where they remained until the Soviets scattered them again. Claes Epp became more and more fanatical. Some twenty families left the colony, traveling back through the desert. At the Mennonite settlements they

paused for only a short visit, then continued on to America, arriving in Kansas and Nebraska in October of 1884.³²

Without money after four years of wandering, they found it difficult to become landowners, for the Mennonite communities in Kansas were thickly populated. When the Cheyenne-Arapaho Reservation was opened in 1892, this gave a welcome opportunity to the wanderers to strike their roots into the soil of Oklahoma. Thus many of the Mennonite settlers had been world travelers, having crossed Asian deserts on camels, Europe by rail, and the Atlantic by steamer to settle at last in communities along the Washita River.

The Herold Mennonite Church

After the Sichar group had separated from the Bergthal Church, which was discussed under the origins of the Bergthal Church group, they continued meeting in a schoolhouse just west of Shelly. These people lived west of the Washita River, which was the dividing line between the Sichar and Bergthal congregations. Jacob Klaassen was quoted in the Anniversary Book as saying:

The life in our congregation had gradually become more stable. Already in the summer of 1895 my brother had been elected deacon. Soon after that the Bergthal congregation separated. Our section took the name 'Sichar'. In the spring of 1896 my brother was elected minister. Brother-in-law Jantzen and P. Quiring were chosen as deacons. By this time there were already eight families there from the Trakt and we of course had much to do with each other. Again in the fall of 1896 we built a church, 26X40 feet, on land of my brother-in-law Jantzen. The lumber had to be hauled from El Reno for 75 miles. The church was built during the course of the winter.³³

That church was on the same site as the present Herold Church. Two years later a division developed in the congregation. Klaassen says that "mistrust and intrigue were the cause". One group was sent out of the

church and worshipped in a schoolhouse south of there. Of this,

Klaassen writes:

Ohm Pankratz and his supporters had called the Committee for Congregational Concerns of the Western District Conference. The Committee came and we had several uncreative meetings of the brotherhood.... The Committee came to the conclusion that it would be better if the division were made permanent The Committee also came to our help to enable us to buy the church building for \$325 which was nearly as much as it had cost in the first place.... That was on the 13th of September (1899), and on the 14th, we--20 families--organized with the help of the Committee as the Herold Church and from that time forward had our services of worship in the small church. From that point onward congregational life developed in a healthy manner and under the blessing of God. Brother Michael (Klaassen) was our minister, while Brother-in-law Jacob Jantzen and Peter Quiring were deacons. In 1904 the Western District Conference was held in our church. We had already joined the Conference in the year 1902.³⁵

In the official record of the Church, the following statement is made concerning its organization:

The Herold Church was organized September 14, 1899, with the help of three Elders, namely: Elder Christian Krehbiel, Halstead, Kansas; Elder Peter Balzer, New Alexanderwohl, (Goessel) Kansas; and Elder Jacob Toews, Newton, Kansas; and also Rev. Jacob Penner, Hillsboro, Kansas. Upon request of the brotherhood, Elder Jacob Toews took over the responsibility as Elder for the young Church.

The organization took place in the home of our brother, then deacon, Jacob Jantzen. The same day, September 14, the church of the Sichar Congregation, which had been built on the land owned by Jacob Jantzen, was purchased by the Herold Congregation for the sum of \$325. (The Sichar Congregation then built another church building at another place.)³⁵

The people named the church 'the Herold Mennonite Church'. There was a postoffice by the name of 'Herold' approximately three miles northwest from the church. Therefore, they chose this name. This postoffice was later moved and became the Bessie, Oklahoma office. The Church name, however, remains as it was. We trust that yet this name will have a real meaning--that of each member being a 'Herold' of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Photographs of some letter postmarks stamped "Herald, Okla." proved

that such a postoffice actually was in existence at one time, although the historicity had been doubted by some.

The charter membership numbered forty-six persons, twenty-four male and twenty-two female. Practically all of them were listed as born in Europe, mostly in southern or eastern Russia or in Prussia. Twenty-nine had migrated to America from Asia, giving evidence of the strong influence of the group that had followed Claes Epp to Asia in search of his Bergungsort (haven or place of safety). One of these charter members is still living and is worthy of mention. Henry Horn, who made the "Östliche Reise" with his parents in 1881-1884 as a boy of twelve to fifteen years of age. This places his age (1975) at ninety-six--and a life beginning in eastern Russia (his parents were from Prussia) traveling into Asia, migrating to America, and the final settlement on the Washita River, there to spend the rest of his life.

The charter membership, place of birth, date and place of emigration, and the date on which they arrived on the Washita. First males, then females.

1. Franz Froese	W. Prussia (Markushef)	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
2. Franz J. Froese	E. Russia (Hohendorf) -	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
3. Heinrich Froese	E. Russia (Hohendorf) -	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
4. Jacob Froese	E. Russia (Hohendorf) -	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
5. Johannes Fieguth	W. Prussia (Neu Teichsdorfhinterfeld)	1892 Lysanderhth	1895
6. Johann Gaeddert	S. Russia (Liebenau)	1879 Friedensdorf	1894
7. David Gaeddert	S. Russia (Wernersdorf)	1879 Friedensdorf	1894
8. Heinrich Gaeddert	S. Russia (Friedensdorf)	1879 Friedensdorf	1894
9. Peter J. Gaeddert	S. Russia (Wernersdorf)	1879 Friedensdorf	1894
10. Peter Horn	W. Prussia (Augustwalde)	1885 Aulie Ata, Asia	1894 ✓
11. Peter F. Horn	E. Russia (Hahnsau) -	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
12. Heinrich Horn	E. Russia (Hahnsau) -	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
13. Heinrich Hinz	S. Russia	1874 ?	1898
14. Jacob Jantzen	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1884 Lansau Asia	1895 ✓
15. Michael Klaassen	E. Russia (Koeppental) -	1884 Lansau	1894 ✓
16. Jacob Klaassen	E. Russia (Koeppental) -	1884 Lansau	1894 ✓
17. Johannes A. Klaassen	E. Russia (Koeppental) -	1884 Lansau	1895 ✓
18. Cornelius H. Krause	Kansas		1893 ✓

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19	David H. McMichel	Ohio		1895
20	Gerhard Nickel	E. Russia (Hohendorf)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
21	Peter A. Quiring	S. Russia (Petershagen)	1893 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
22	Abraham Regier	W. Prussia (Altebabke)	1889 Furstenwerder	1895
23	Gerhard Sawatzky	S. Russia (Burwalde)	1878 Burwalde	1894
24	Peter B. Wedel	S. Russia	1875 ?	1894
25	Mrs. Franz Froese	W. Prussia (Markushof)	1892 Ak Medsched	1894 ✓
26	Mrs. Franz J. Froese	Kansas		1897
27	Miss Maria Froese	E. Russia (Hohendorf)	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
28	Mrs. J. Fieguth	W. Prussia (Orloff)	1884 Lansau	1895 ✓
29	Mrs. J. Gaeddert	S. Russia (Wernersdorf) †	1879 Friedensdorf	1894
30	Mrs. P. Gaeddert	E. Russia (Koeppental)	1884 Lansau	1895 ✓
31	Mrs. P. Horn	W. Prussia (Schulwiese)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
32	Mrs. P. F. Horn	S. Russia (Kontieges Feld) †	1884 KontiegesFeld	1893
33	Mrs. H. Hinz	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
34	Miss Elisabeth Horn	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
35	Mrs. J. Jantzen	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1884 Lansau	1895 ✓
36	Mrs. M. Klaassen	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1885 Chiva, Asia	1894 ✓
37	Mrs. J. Klaassen	E. Russia (Lysanderhüh)	1884 Lansau	1895 ✓
38	Mrs. A. Klaassen	W. Prussia (Broeskerfelde)	1895 Lansau	1895 ✓
39	Mrs. M. Klaassen	W. Prussia (Orloff)	1884 Lansau	1894 ✓
40	Mrs. C. H. Krause	E. Russia (Hohendorf)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
41	Mrs. D. McMichel	E. Russia (Hohendorf)	1892 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
42	Mrs. H. Nickel	W. Prussia (Türichthof)	1885 Aulie Ata	1894 ✓
43	Mrs. G. Nickel	S. Russia (Landskron) †	1874 Landskron	1894
44	Mrs. P. Quiring	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1893 Ak-Medsched	1894 ✓
45	Mrs. A. Regier	E. Russia (Hahnsau)	1885 Aulie Ata	1895 ✓
46	Mrs. P. Wedel	S. Russia (Friedensdorf) †	1879 Friedensdorf	1894

Among the special occasions of outstanding importance in the lives of the settlers were Christmas programs in the churches. Traditionally observed on Christmas Eve, with a Christmas tree, a program of recitations and dialogs by the children that ended with a distribution of sacks of candy, nuts, and fruit. The treats were always given to the children. In some churches even the adults shared in receiving the sacks. This is a practice that is still in existence in rural Mennonite churches, though possibly appreciated more by the older people than by the children to whom a handful of candy is too commonplace to get excited about. In the early days, a little candy or exotic nuts were rare. Some of the children--or adults, for that matter--may well have gone all year without a taste of sweets except for the homemade molasses and a

tiny amount of expensive sugar. Thus a few pieces of hard candy (or dare they think of them--chocolate drops) were things to be treasured and leisurely consumed to make them last as long as possible.

The newly organized Herold Church was no exception. Beginning with the first Christmas, 1899, the traditional program has been held every year since. In 1903 the entry in the Church secretary's book is as follows:

For the Christmas Eve celebration of 1903, four dozen candle lights were placed on a tree given by Gerhard Nickel. Also obtained for the evening was a barrel of apples, two buckets of candy, \$.75 worth of penny goods, twenty-two pounds of nuts, 65 oranges, and \$.53 worth of bought cookies. 120 sacks were filled, but were barely enough, for some of the children who were not present because they remained at home did not get any. After the sacks were filled, one-half of the barrel of apples was left which were then distributed.³⁶

After having purchased the original church building from the Sihar Congregation for \$325, the members soon realized that repairs and renovations were needed. After this it continued to serve the needs of the congregation until in 1915 when the building was sold to Abraham Regier. Meanwhile, a new structure had been built, "larger, more beautiful, and more practical than the old one." A number of men from the congregation hauled rock and sand from the Washita River to make the foundation. The construction was under the direction of Henry Schmidt. The building was dedicated on December 5, 1915. As so often happened, the church was paid for at the dedication. It was a matter of pride for those congregations building new churches not to "owe any man anything," as the Scripture advises, especially in the matter of building the Lord's House. The new Herold church cost \$4,000.

Concerning the new structure built by the Herold Church in 1915, Mrs. Ferd Harms wrote in 1916:

Because the old church was too small, the congregation decided to build a larger one. To direct the construction, the congregation chose three men. And so, in the last part of February (1915), they started with the 'dirt work.' The materials used were wood, nails, cement, sand, and iron, which were purchased in Cordell.

The church building is 54 feet long and 36 feet wide with 10 foot high walls. It stands on the same place where the old building stood. At the east end is an annex 12 feet long by 10 feet wide. At the southeast corner is a small preacher's room with a concrete stairway descending from its outside door. On the west end is the large porch with concrete steps.

The church is painted white, and there are 17 windows that have their upper part in stained glass of several colors. For the heating system there is a small cellar under the church with a big coal furnace. On the outside of the church there are four doors, and on the inside, five.

In the church there is a partition 10 feet wide and this partition makes two rooms; a baby room and another larger room for coats. From the larger room a stairway ascends to the balcony. On the balcony are the old benches (the ones from the old church), and a library cabinet. The balcony has room for about 100 people. From the larger room swinging doors lead into the sanctuary. Across the east end of the sanctuary is a stage 8 feet wide and two steps high. On this stage stands the pulpit and the organ, and on each side stands three benches and a small table.

In the church there are twenty-four 13 foot benches which are varnished brown and are very comfortable. The walls are plastered and painted white. The wainscoting is varnished brown and the floor is also brown. The ceiling is vaulted, nailed with tin and is light blue with a brown border.

The whole church and all that is therein cost \$4000. 500 persons can be seated comfortably in the church. We are very happy with the new church, where we meet every Sunday to hear of Jesus.³⁷

In 1944, a decision was made to build a basement under the existing structure. The excavation began in November of 1945 and was finished the following spring. Another eight years passed before a new forced-air heating system was installed and the basement completely finished.

In the 1940s a change was made in the system of the ministry by calling a pastor from outside the congregation. This, of course, necessitated paying a salary, which had not been done before. Reverend John R. Duerksen was the first to receive such a stipend, being paid \$50 per month in 1940. At the same time it became necessary to provide housing so a parsonage was secured. The language change, which had already begun in the 1930s with Sunday School classes for children in English, was completed by 1946 when all services were conducted in this language under Reverend Dahlenburg. One of the members, Leonard Harms, said of these transitions:

With the new era and transition gaining momentum it opened new horizons to the congregation. No more were we the isolated 'German' church. We began to communicate with other denominations and participated in community-wide evangelistic meetings and in the community-wide Daily Vacation Bible School program. These added to the spiritual growth of the congregation and an open mindedness toward those about us.

In 1949 the church was remodeled on the inside, with acoustical tile on the ceiling, mahogany panels and celotex planks on the walls, and the floor, woodwork, and benches refinished. In later years other changes have been made and rugs placed on the floors, so that the building is still in a well-kept and highly servicable condition.

When the new meetinghouse was built in 1915, the congregation also decided to use an organ to accompany song services. A reed organ was ordered for \$85 and remained in service until 1928 when a piano was purchased and the organ sold. Previously, no musical instruments had been used in the church.

Other Activities

One of the most outstanding of the special services held in a

Church is the ordination of workers. The Herold Church is no exception, and has ordained the following:

Jacob Jantzen	Ministry, 1900	Elder, 1921
Michael Klaassen		Elder, 1901
Jacob Klaassen	Ministry, 1904	
Ernest Baergen	Ministry, 1946	
Richard Tschetter	Ministry, 1951	
Norman Schmidt	Ministry, 1954	
Harold Jantzen	Ministry, 1957 ³⁸	

A number of others have been called into the ministry or are in preparation, including nearly a dozen women who are engaged in different facets of church work, Christian Service, and as wives of missionaries and pastors.

Library

Realizing the need for reading material, the Church began building a library as early as in 1904. However, especially in the early years, all the books and other materials were in the German language. With the passing of years, fewer and fewer young people were familiar with that language, resulting in less and less use of available material. In 1949 the congregation decided to send the entire collection of reading material to the South American Mennonites, who were still using the German, and began collecting a new library in the English language.

Mission Society

The ladies of the Church organized themselves into the Ladies' Mission Society of the Herold Mennonite Church in 1906. While not in continuous existence since then, the women have labored many long hours to demonstrate Christian love and compassion for the needy, as well as in visiting the sick and those that are bereaved.

Young People's Society

The Jugendverein, now called the Christian Endeavor, was begun in 1912. A young girl, Marie J. Jantzen, attended the Gotebo Preparatory School, becoming acquainted with the idea of services for the young people. As a result, the organization was formed, has continued its existence ever since, and has contributed to the enjoyment and spiritual uplift of many in the intervening years.

Serving the Church

During the years the lives of many persons were touched by the leaders of the Church. By 1969, 333 persons had been baptized upon their confession of faith and received into the membership of the church. Due to the Mennonite custom of electing and later ordaining their Ministers and Elders, the first forty years of the Herold Church saw only three Ministers as outstanding leaders. They were:

Michael Klaassen, total ministry, 19 years.
 Jacob Jantzen, total ministry, 40 years.
 Jacob Klaassen, total ministry, 14 years.

These were overlapping, since Jacob Jantzen served as Minister while Michael Klaassen was Elder, and Jacob Klaassen was a Minister while Jantzen was an Elder.

After a salaried ministry was adopted, six ministers have served this congregation:

John R. Duerksen	1940 - 1943
Cornelius B. Friesen	1943 - 1946
Paul W. Dahlenburg	1946 - 1951
Richard Tschetter	1951 - 1962
Cornelius B. Friesen	1962 - 1965
John W. Arn	1965 - 1975
Robert Coon	1975 -

Clinton First Mennonite Church

In 1949, shortly after the Sichar Church was discontinued in November of 1947, it became apparent that there was a need for an organization to be formed for those who were left without a church home, as well as for those who were too far away from their former one. So Reverend B. H. Janzen, secretary of the Western District Conference, came to Clinton to make a survey of the possibility of opening a new church. Together with A. P. Schmidt and others, Reverend Janzen found a place that seemed to be an answer to prayer. This was a basement walled with cement blocks, approximately 28 X 40 feet in size, with some benches and a piano. It was on two corner lots, and with two nearby lots available for a parsonage. All of this could be had for \$2,000.

A meeting was held, and a number of families expressed interest, but it took over a year before a real beginning was made. Finally it was announced that services would take place in the Music Hall, an old Army barracks, on Sunday evenings. The turnout was encouraging, so the meetings continued with ministers from Geary, Hydro, and Gotebo serving with the Word. Then it was decided to begin with Sunday School and morning worship services, with student preachers from Bethel College in charge.

Finally, in February of 1951, a pastor, Henry D. Penner, was called, and on September 30 he was ordained to the Gospel ministry. On the same day the First Mennonite Church was organized, with nineteen charter members. A constitution was drawn up, and the Church was received into the membership of the Western District Conference (later into the General Conference).

Evidently the purchase of the basement did not materialize, so a

country schoolhouse was purchased from a district southeast of Custer and moved into Clinton. It was remodeled and served to house the Congregation until November 30, 1958. Some of the original charter members still in the Church in 1974 were Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph A. Pankratz, Irvin Schmidt, Mrs. W. T. Schmidt, and Mr. and Mrs. Carl Holliman.

Pastors who have served the Church are:

Levi D. Koehn	About five or six months
Henry D. Penner	February, 1951 to July, 1954
Walter H. Regier	September, 1954 to June, 1965
Palmer Becker	August, 1965 to June, 1969
Lawrence Hart	Interim Pastor
Daniel G. Regier	August, 1970 to July, 1975 ³⁹

In 1955 the church decided to begin gathering funds for a new church building. In October of 1957 a ground-breaking service was held, after which construction immediately began, taking approximately thirteen months to completion. The new building was 34 X 90 feet, with two 30 X 30 foot wings constructed of block and brick. The total cost, including furnishings, was about \$30,000. One unique feature of the financing was that it was entirely voluntary. No assessments were made at any time. About 2,000 hours of donated labor also were given. The Building Committee consisted of H. E. Nickel, A. P. Schmidt, and A. Klause. Otto Meyer was the masonry supervisor and J. D. Klassen the finish supervisor. At the dedication service, which was led by the Pastor, Reverend Walter Regier, the dedicatory address was given by Reverend Ben Rahn. A special program of music was presented at the evening service by the Oklahoma Bible Academy of Meno, Oklahoma. Levi Koehn represented the Conference Home Missions Committee.

FOOTNOTES

¹H. P. Krehbiel, History of the General Conference (St. Louis, Missouri, 1899), Vol. I.

²Ibid.

³Marvin Kroeker, The Mennonites of Oklahoma to 1907 (Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1954), p. 19.

⁴Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 203.

⁵Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, p. 297.

⁶Ibid., p. 304.

⁷Andrew R. Shelly, "Pay Tribute to Oklahoma Pioneers," Mennonite Weekly Review, June 12, 1975.

⁸Kroeker, Mennonites, p. 23.

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰Mennonite Life, July, 1955, p. 112.

¹¹Kroeker, Mennonites, p. 27.

¹²Mennonite Life, July, 1955, p. 112.

¹³Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, p. 311.

¹⁴Mennonite Life, July, 1955, p. 112.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Kroeker, Mennonites, p. 40.

¹⁷Gemeinde Buch der Bergthal Mennoniten Gemeinde, 1892-1951.

¹⁸Yearbook of the Mennonite Church (Newton, Kansas, 1945), p. 7.

¹⁹John Arn, Herold Mennonite Church (70th Anniversary Booklet), p. 3.

²⁰Mennonite Yearbook, p. 8.

- ²¹Ibid.
- ²²Arn, Herold, p. 5.
- ²³Gordon R. Dyck, Extinct General Conference Mennonite Churches in Oklahoma 1847-1959 (Unpublished Thesis, 1959), p. 56.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 52.
- ²⁵C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 402.
- ²⁶Fred Richard Belk, The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, 1973).
- ²⁷Smith, Story, p. 456.
- ²⁸Douglas Hale, "From Central Asia to America," Mennonite Life, July, 1970, p. 133.
- ²⁹John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), p. 82.
- ³⁰Hale, "Great Trek," p. 136.
- ³¹Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus (Altona, Manitoba, 1966), p. 85.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Arn, Herold, p. 3.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 4.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 5.
- ³⁶Ibid., p. 7.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 15.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 10.
- ³⁹Art Nickel, Report of the History of the Clinton Mennonite Church, Given March 24, 1974.

CHAPTER IX

EDUCATION AMONG THE MENNONITES

One of the basic reasons for the Mennonite migration to America in 1874-1880 was the Russian government's demand that instruction in the schools be conducted in the Russian language instead of the beloved German. To the Mennonite, in a sense, Russian was a profane language in contrast to German, which was regarded as almost sacred. The Low German dialect, or Platt-Deutsch, was the language used for conversation in the home or on the street--the everyday vernacular. High German was the language of Bible and books, thus used for the sacred and cultural communications. Therefore the schools must perforce also be conducted in German in order for students to be able to read and study the Bible.

Actually there was a similarity between the Mennonites and the Puritans of New England, who founded the American educational system for the sole and express purpose of teaching Reading--so the young people could read the Bible. 'Riting and 'Rithmetic came as an afterthought, added to help communication and to keep the city slickers from cheating the country farmer in figuring. So in Russia the basic reason for education was reading the Bible. Actually there was little else to read in most homes. Some of the community leaders might have some books, but the average home had few. However, it was constantly and consistently recognized that in education lay the only hope that they could retain their consciousness of the Bible and their Anabaptist principles. J. E.

Hartzler, in speaking of this consciousness, says:

Mennonites must be conscious that only as long as it (Mennonitism) retains its foundation principles will it remain necessary in the world. These principles are: Faith in an open Bible with freedom of interpretation. Freedom that urges freedom of conscience, yet honors divine authority. Faith that urges religious toleration and brotherhood, both to those within and without the group.

To the degree that Mennonites depart from the faith, they become unnecessary and useless in the world. Aside from effective and efficient education, this consciousness cannot be produced.¹

This striving for education goes back to the days of Menno Simons, who urged, "...that children should be taught to read and write, spin and do necessary and proper work."² In Russia this urge and desire for education was so powerful that the churches supported some 400 elementary schools, thirteen high schools, two teachers colleges, a theological seminary, a school for the deaf and dumb, and two trade schools.³

Stucky quotes a writer as saying further:

Nor did the Mennonites deprive themselves of the richer things of life. They had their public schools, their high schools, their commercial schools, and agricultural colleges and their universities. Their children journeyed to France, and Germany, and England to study agricultural and industrial methods in other lands. The Universities of Odessa and Moscow, the German universities of Bonn and Leipzig knew them.⁴

Education and literacy among the Mennonites of Russia was immeasurably higher than that of their native Russian counterparts, for most of the natives had no opportunities for learning of the most rudimentary sort. This desire for literacy and education was carried to Kansas and then into Oklahoma, and schools were established to meet these needs. Toews stated, "...the basic motivation to establish and support Christian Academies [high schools], Bible Institutes, the Bible College[s],

Christian Liberal Arts Colleges, and the seminary, has been the conviction that 'school and mission' are inseparably linked in the redemptive purposes of God."⁵ Therefore when the settlers came to the wide, dusty prairies along the Washita in southwestern Oklahoma, schools and churches were uppermost in their minds--after building their own dugouts or sod huts for their families. There were no schools of any kind the first few years, so they had to make do with what was at hand.

Early Schooling

In the beginning, the only schooling that could be obtained was at the yearly German School, which met for about two months of the year. One of those who related his experiences was staying with an uncle while his parents were preparing to move, and thus was able to attend school for a short while.⁶ Another spoke of two or three months of school in a sod dugout. After about two years, according to several sources, the district schools began to be built, and thus formal education could be had. However, this instruction was not in the German, but in the English, language, and this was not what the Mennonites had in mind. Neither was the Bible taught as the main subject. Besides, the family needed all the help it could get to take care of the fields and livestock, so for many of the children schooling was erratic.

Most likely there was a school for the Indian children at the Shelly Mission, for Missionary J. J. Kliever had been connected with schools at Cantonment and Darlington. There is a record of a German Religions Schule having been started by Elder Michael Klaassen of the Herold Mennonite Church. The school was held in one room of Elder Klaassen's two-room house. Anna Klaassen, a daughter of the Elder,

described a day in the school:

In the morning we get up early and do the chores and then get ready for school. At 9:00 AM the school starts. At first we sing and pray, then follows Biblische Geschichte, then we have all the Fibel classes, and then a Mittelstufe class followed by recess. After recess are the rest of the reading classes, Sprachlehre, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Geographie. Then follows a one hour noon recess. After the noon recess comes Rechtschreiben, followed by the Fibel classes and then recess again. After recess we have Kirchen Geschichte, Bible Lesen, Singen, and then for closing we pray a song. After school I sweep the schoolhouse and help with the chores. After supper, we study for the next day, if there is time and we feel like it.⁷

This Religions-schule was continued for a number of years. All classes were taught in German, although district schools were already in existence. In 1903 the people of the Herold Church built a new schoolhouse on Elder Klaassen's yard, and later (1910), the building was enlarged. The curriculum was similar to the one given in Anna Klaassen's composition, and included the following classes:

<u>Biblische Geschichte</u>	-- Bible in story form
<u>Kirchen Geschichte</u>	-- Church History
<u>Welt Geschichte</u>	-- World history
<u>Fibel</u>	-- Reading and alphabet books, in grades
<u>Lesebuch</u>	-- Reading books
<u>Schönschreiben</u>	-- Penmanship
<u>Singen</u>	-- Singing, including reading notes, sight reading
<u>Dictando</u>	-- Learning to take dictation, translating hearing into writing
<u>Aufsatz</u>	-- Compositions, writing themes
<u>Sprachlehre</u>	-- Grammar

For a number of years, some of the teenagers of the community attended a German-English preparatory school at Gotebo conducted by Elder Heinrich Riesen. This would continue the elementary studies of the Herold school.

In 1918, because of the war with Germany, anyone who spoke or taught in the German language was suspect. Citizens and officials of

Washita County placed such heavy pressure on both of these schools that they were permanently closed. However, because these schools were forced to close, the Western District Conference (G. C.) took up the task and began financing a high school at Meno, near Enid, known as the Oklahoma Bible Academy, which is still carrying on the Bible instruction that the Mennonites have for centuries regarded as being a necessity in retaining the young people in their faith.

For a few years, 1922 to 1925, Albert G. Schmidt conducted short-term German schools of six to eight weeks in length after the public schools closed in the spring. Encouraged by the success of these schools, other teachers took up the work, although as the term of the public schools lengthened from the original six or seven months to eight, the term of the German schools shortened until they only lasted for two weeks. When World War II came, the work changed to the Daily Vacation Bible Schools, which are still being conducted by the various churches after the close of public schools.

The Mennonite Brethren were just as determined that their children should be educated in their schools and in their way. Their major institution has been the Corn Bible Academy.

The History of the Corn Bible Academy

When Washita County was opened for settlement, many families of the Mennonite Brethren faith homesteaded in the area, beginning in 1883. Most of them were poor financially, but frugal and industrious. Above all, they were deeply religious, so they immediately gathered together to organize a Church. The following year a meetinghouse was constructed, a half-dugout, with the remaining sides and roof of sod.⁸

Reverend Isaac J. Harms, who became the pastor of the small congregation in 1900, was concerned about the lack of educational facilities in the community, as there were no public schools in the immediate area. This concern was dramatically emphasized in 1902 when a young man, Jacob Penner, 17, was shot in the hand in a hunting accident. Parents, in discussing the event, came to the conclusion that if the young people could be kept busy in a school, such accidents could possibly be averted, for many of the young men spent the long winter days hunting. Pastor Harms met with his assistant, Reverend Abraham Richert, and six ex-teachers of the community, and together were instrumental in moving the Church to establish and support a Bible school.

The Church, having reached a decision, immediately made plans to implement the work. Bernhard Harder was chosen as chief carpenter; Ben Balzer, F. F. Hiebert, and Jake Quiring were his helpers. Fred Fink was the painter; he painted the building a gray color on the outside. Other men of the Church volunteered their services for hauling stone for the foundation and lumber for the building. A site, just across the street from the Church, was secured from J. F. Fast. Here construction was begun on the Washita M. B. Bible School.

The first school house was a two story wooden building, twenty-six feet long by twenty-eight feet wide.⁹ The front entrance hall was fourteen by fourteen feet, with double doors facing south. The lower floor consisted of one large room. A stairway led from the entrance to the upper floor, with one large class room and two smaller rooms--one used as a library, the other for study. An interesting note in the construction was that the spaces between the inner and outer walls were filled with straw to provide insulation.

A fund of \$260 was set aside by the Church. \$516 was donated, and \$1,500 was borrowed from John Gossen of Nebraska. The following year some brethren set aside an acre of wheat each. Others donated \$25; still others did both. The Lord blessed them with a bumper crop so that the financial needs could be met. In 1903, thirty-nine acres of wheat were set aside, and \$321.30 given.¹⁰ The money borrowed from Gossen was repaid by 1908.

On January 4, 1903, the Washita Church School opened for its first term, with an enrollment of fifty students. Twenty-five were on the lower floor, and twenty-five upstairs. The ages ranged from beginners up to twenty years. The elementary or lower grades met upstairs, while the upper classes met downstairs. Classes were all conducted in the German language with the Fibel (primer) for the beginners. Basic reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught, as in a public school, except that a course in Bible History (Bibelgeschichte) was included. Tuition was \$1.75 a month for older students, \$1.25 for elementary grades, and \$.10 a month each for fuel for heating the rooms.

For the first school term Dietrich J. Klassen and his wife Lena were engaged as teachers. Mrs. Klassen taught the lower grades while Klassen taught the upper grades. The first school term was for four months; the second term was for five months. The Klassens' had both attended McPherson College, in McPherson, Kansas, where Mrs. Klassen's brother, Professor J. F. Duerksen, was head of the German Department. Before this, Klassen had attended the first Bible School of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, located one and a half miles east and north of Butler, Kansas, where Professor Duerksen had also been a teacher. The third term of the Washita Bible School (1904-05) was taught by D.L. Schellenberg. He also had received his education under the instruction of Professor Duerksen. The one individual who was destined to exert a tremendous influence on the Bible School and the community was J. F. Duerksen, whose entire life

was devoted to the teaching and preaching professions. Duerksen was a native of Russia. While yet a young student, he was so outstanding that his home church offered to finance his attendance at an institution of higher learning, as well as a seminary. This offer was accepted, and after graduation he returned to his home village where he taught in the Central Schule until his debt to the home church had been repaid. Immediately after discharging his financial obligations, which took him five or six years, he made his way to America. Here he met his wife, married, and entered the teaching profession.

For several years the M. B. Conference subsidized the Department of German at McPherson College, with Professor Duerksen as the instructor. In 1904 the Conference concluded that this undertaking was too expensive to support and terminated the arrangement. This left Duerksen without a school. At the same time the thought was expressed that there should be an Academy provided by the Conference. The Dallas, Oregon, M. B. Church desired the Academy for their area, but Corn was also interested and invited the Duerksen family to accept a position there.

On July 5, 1905, the family arrived at Corn and moved into the school building as a temporary residence. A farm adjoining the town on the northeast was purchased, and the family later moved into the semi-sod house on the farm. The school house was well scrubbed with soap and water, and by October they were ready to begin the school year.

The curriculum was revised, with three years of high school-level work offered. Instruction in the English language, grammar, geography, and other work was added. In time the course offerings included American history, Oklahoma history, psysiology, and psychology. The psychology class used a text on a college level, called Seelenlehre,

utilizing the most modern studies of the German psychologists. The German language text also was one used in the University of Leipzig. In the Erziehungsgeschichte, a third-year course, the influence of the philosophers Kant, Rousseau, the Pietists, Fichte, Herbert, and others was studied and compared. All classes were given instruction in music, with sight-reading and voice especially emphasized. This has been the prevailing policy all through the years--to emphasize music, especially voice.

The teachers sacrificed much for the school. Duerksen spent his time advancing the interests of the school, in winter teaching, in summer soliciting students and funds. Since he owned a farm, this left his wife and sons to carry on the work of managing and operating the farm. Mrs. Duerksen also aided financially by boarding students at \$8 per month.

During the early years there was no organized athletic activity, nor interscholastic competition. The students would spend some play time with baseball and tennis. However, Duerksen stressed physical culture. Often when a class would become drowsy, he would order them to lay aside their books and engage in a period of rhythmical body exercises. This, of course, was always welcomed by the students as a break in class routine. Every Friday evening after classes were dismissed, there would be a period called a "literary." While it was greatly enjoyed, it was not primarily for the purpose of entertainment, but for the practical opportunities to acquire experience in public speaking: to read or otherwise present the theme or Deklamation which the student has so painstakingly prepared. Once a month a program was given to which the parents were invited. Usually a feature of the evening was a debate

to promote the ability to speak and think logically and extemporaneously. These programs were very popular.

The graduation service, now known as Commencement, was, of course, the highlight of the year. A corner of the largest school room was covered with lace curtains and sheets and decorated as a back-drop for the stage. Each class had its motto and was expected to write its own class song, both words and music. Each graduate also was required to write a theme on a topic assigned by the instructor. On graduation evening, this theme had to be presented as a Deklamation. Like a thesis, this was the climax of their work in the school.

After each graduate had spoken, the instructor would give the graduation address and present the diplomas. These important documents, in the early years, were carefully hand-written in beautiful script. Several of these are still in existence, including the first one which was awarded to the one graduate of that first class, Cornelius Bergmann, in 1906 (Mr. Bergmann passed away in the fall of 1966).

In 1912 a public grade school was built in Corn, and the Church school discontinued teaching the lower grades, as there was no longer any need for this. The instruction in the Academy was then entirely on the high school level. After Duerksen retired from teaching in 1916 due to ill health, Reverend D. F. Strauss taught the school from 1916 to 1918, the last terms in the original building.

The Academy did not open its doors to students in 1918. The old building was badly in need of repairs. The suggestion of erecting a new building was presented to the Church, and after several business meetings the Church authorized a committee to establish costs of the undertaking. On July 27, 1919, Duerksen, treasurer of the project,

presented the following figures: brick, \$2,180; lumber, \$1,892.95; paint and nails were not included. Henry Grause offered to contract the labor for \$1,400.¹¹ A total of \$2,880 was pledged and available. A new building site was offered to the school, two blocks east and two blocks north of the original site. J. F. Duerksen donated one acre of land and sold one-half acre for \$90. J. W. Duerksen sold another one-half acre less five feet, for \$150, making a total of two acres less five feet, for the campus. The plot that was donated was specifically required to be used for school purposes only.

The new building was fireproof. It had a west front, opening into a central hall which led to the two classrooms. The center walls of the classrooms were constructed of two sliding panels, which when opened, combined the rooms into one large auditorium. On the front, or west, side of each classroom was a smaller room. One was used as a library, the other as a study room. The dimensions of the building were: width, twenty-six feet; length, forty-eight feet; height, fourteen feet. The entrance hall was eight feet by fourteen feet.

The building was completed on October 7, 1920, and was given the name of Corn Bible School and Academy. The building was dedicated with an appropriate service on October 17, 1920, with the Bessie M. B. Church taking part. Its pastor, Reverend Jacob Reimer, was one of the speakers at the dedication. The building committee was composed of the brethren Dave Reimer, D. K. Heubert, and J. L. Martin. In the list of those contributing to the building fund, sixty-seven gave cash in varying amounts, and three donated several acres of wheat each. The total contributions were \$4,727.50 in cash, and thirteen acres of wheat.¹²

The term of 1919 was taught in the basement of the M. B. Church

while the new building was under construction. At the beginning there were only fourteen students, six from Corn and eight from Bessie. But by the close of the school term forty-four were on the list. The length of the school term was changed to six months, later to seven.

During the term of 1919-1920, a young evangelist, H. D. Wiebe, was the teacher. The following year, in the new building, Miss Nellie Fleming was added to the faculty. Reverend Wiebe remained as teacher until 1937. His influence on the school was almost immeasurable. At first, the school still offered only the three-year course. Students then attended Southwestern State College at Weatherford to receive full credit for their high school work. In 1929 the course of study was changed and classes were re-arranged into 45-minute periods. Part credit was also obtained. The school day began at 8:00 A.M. and continued to 5:00 P.M. The term was lengthened from seven to eight months.

A few years later, in 1935, Dr. H. W. Lohrenz of Tabor College, and P. W. Duerksen were added to the faculty. These men, with Reverend H. D. Wiebe, were instrumental in achieving a full four-year accreditation. That same year, another building was moved to the campus, being placed just to the south of the brick building. This addition was used to house the science department. Typing was added to the curriculum shortly afterward with P. W. Duerksen as instructor.

When Reverend H. D. Wiebe and P. E. Friesen went to Oklahoma City to work out the final details for accreditation, Friesen remarked to Wiebe, "You go into the State Superintendent's office to transact this business. I will remain in the car and hold you up before the Lord in prayer." This was done--Mr. Friesen in the form of Aaron and Hur of old, who sustained the hands of Moses so that Israel could gain the

victory over Amalek (Exodus 17:12). Reverend Wiebe came down to the car rejoicing. Accreditation was assured.¹²

Thus has it ever been with the Bible School. Everyone closely connected with the operation and maintenance of the School reiterated the statement that it had always taken much prayer and sacrificial giving, making it possible to keep the school in operation continuously for these many years, three-quarters of a century.

Teachers serving in the second building:

- 1920-21. H. D. Wiebe, Nellie Flaming
- 1921-28. (for seven years) H. D. Wiebe, J. J. Wiebe
- 1928-34. (for five years) H. D. Wiebe, J. W. Vogt
- 1934-35. H. D. Wiebe, H. W. Lohrenz, P. W. Duerksen
- 1935-36. H. D. Wiebe, P. W. Duerksen, P. F. Wall
- 1936-37. H. D. Wiebe, P. W. Duerksen, L. S. Wiebe
This was the final year for H. D. Wiebe, who had served so faithfully for sixteen years.
- 1937-41. (for four years) L. S. Wiebe, P. W. Duerksen, J. J. Franz
- 1941-42. H. R. Wiens, P. W. Duerksen, Miss Ruby Kroeker
Reverend Wiens was pastor of the Bessie M. B. Church. P. W. Duerksen only taught the first semester. He then left, and his place was taken by Arthur Wiebe
- 1942-43. H. R. Wiens, Ruby Kroeker, Arthur Wiebe
Wiebe was called to the service, and Abe Peters took his place.
- 1943-44. H. R. Wiens, P. B. Pauls, J. W. Wiebe, Ruby Kroeker
A department of woodworking had been added to the curriculum.
- 1944-45. H. R. Wiens, P. B. Pauls, J. W. Wiebe, Ruby Kroeker
- 1945-46. H. R. Wiens, P. B. Pauls, J. W. Wiebe, Laura Wall
- 1946-47. P. B. Pauls, Abe Peters, J. W. Wiebe, Mrs. Laura Boese, Paul Ratzlaff
The second semester Esther Bartel took the place of Mrs. Boese.
- 1947-48. J. P. Kliewer, Esther Bartel, Leonard Reimer, Robert Wiens, Jacob Ewert.

The school continued to expand until its facilities became inadequate. At this time Tabor College announced that it would discontinue its academy department. It was anticipated that this would increase the

enrollment at the Corn Bible School. With this in mind the school board, faculty, and the pastor of the Church met for prayer. Following this, a letter was written, dated August 1, 1947, explaining the need for more classrooms, and planning how to erect at least one wing of a new building.

More than two years previously, on April 11, 1945, a recommendation had been passed by the Church giving the board permission to collect money for a new building to be erected as soon as circumstances would permit. The following is a report by the chairman of the building committee outlining the steps by which the work was accomplished:

It became clear, during and immediately after the past war, that something had to be done with the Academy building situation. State officials questioned the future accreditation of the school. Something had to be done about the worn out furniture and inadequate classroom space.

On a quarterly conference April 11, 1945, the recommendation was read to the church. It read as follows: 'We would like the Church to grant us permission to collect money for new buildings for the Bible School which are to be erected as soon as circumstances permit.'---(School Board.) On a motion this recommendation carried.

This recommendation in 1945 was again brought to question by the Board of Directors at a Quarterly Conference on August 4, 1947. Solicitory letters had been sent out upon authority of the recommendation granted in 1945. In this quarterly conference, in 1947, the church again granted permission to build on the basis of the recommendation which was passed in 1945.

Soon after, the church council, the board of trustees, the school board, and several of the carpenters met in order to nominate a building committee. Three brethren were taken from the church trustees and two from the school board. The Church gave approval to these brethren on August 17, 1947.

Thus the building committee received full authority to solicit funds and build. The ground breaking ceremony took place on Monday morning, September 29, at 9 o'clock. Rev. J. P. Stobbe made the opening. Rev. J. K. Warkentin spoke. He read II Timothy 2:15 and gave the message. Rev.

J. P. Kliever who was superintendent of the school at that time, dug the first spade-full of dirt. This meeting was well attended by school patrons and friends. Work at this time centered about the South wing, which was finished for the second semester of 1947-48. The main center structure was finished for the beginning of the school year of 1948-49.

Realizing that the Corn Church should not carry this responsibility alone, permission was asked of the other Mennonite Brethren Churches to solicit funds from among their members. The Corn Church was also willing that this should be done.

These other Mennonite Brethren Churches in Oklahoma and Texas have done admirably. They should be praised for their outstanding efforts. When we think of the distance which they sent their students, we can better appreciate their sacrifices. All of them have contributed in funds and some with labor.

We as Building Committee voice our sincere appreciation for the willing co-operation from the Brethren and Sisters. We know they love the school and that for which it stands.

Because of the financial burden of the brethren at Corn, due to the burning of their sanctuary, we as building committee would like for the other churches to assume a greater responsibility in furthering the completion of the north wing. Yet this is again in their hands and as the Lord leads them.

So far God has richly blessed and provided. The Lord has built the house and they have not labored in vain that builded it.

Chairman, P. A. Schmidt.

The proposed building, when completed, would be 165 feet long by fifty wide, with a sixty-foot auditorium on the east side, forming a "T".

The dedication service for the new building was held on October 16, 1949. A large tent had been erected for the occasion on the school campus. Reverend Elmo Warkentin, pastor of the Bessie M. B. Church, led in the Invocation. Reverend J. P. Kliever, superintendent of the school then introduced a number of special guests who had come for the occasion. Prominent among them were Dr. and Mrs. Hubbard, Mr. and Mrs.

Leftner, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown, from Oklahoma City. After P. A. Schmidt read the report of the Building Committee, Dr. Hubbard was called upon as a representative of the State Board of Education. He brought greetings from the board, and from his immediate superiors, Standefer Keas and Oliver Hodge, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Dr. Hubbard emphasized further that Christianity and education go hand in hand. Education without Christianity was a dangerous weapon. Without Christianity civilization and our nation was doomed. The careful training of our youth would save our nation.

Reverend J. W. Vogt was the next speaker. He pointed out that this was the third building and the third dedication. His message was based on Phillipians 4:11-13. Among his remarks were: "Knowledge includes the fear of God. Men and women learn to do evil, or to do good, by the way they are instructed. Therefore, the right home training, the right secular instruction given in Christian institutions of learning, coupled with Christianity will produce men and women who make good citizens of a nation and willing workers to serve God and man."

The dedicatory address was given by Reverend J. J. Toews, pastor of Buhler, Kansas, M. B. Church. His message was based on Psalm 73:2-17. "The way of the ungodly seems to be the most advantageous, until we consider their latter end. In secular education the emphasis is upon the materialistic point of view. The philosophy, that there is nothing to life except that which man can perceive, discover, and prove with his five senses. But the Way of Christ is the way revealed to us in God's Holy Word. This is the Way we want to impress upon our youth.... Further, dedication means a setting aside for a definite purpose unto God. This is a place where:

God shall lay hold of young lives.
They shall be blessed with divine guidance.

From whence they shall go forth with the great charge of
declaring the unsearchable riches of Christ.

At the close of the message the brethren Reverend Kliever, Reverend Vogt, and Reverend Toews offered the dedicatory prayers.

The support of the school was weighing heavily upon the Corn M. B. Church, for its sanctuary was destroyed by fire on January 14, 1949. This necessitated building a large, modern sanctuary and a correspondingly large expenditure of money. The Bessie M. B. Church had already been asked to assist in the support of the school. Now on December 16, 1949, letters were sent by the Board to the other Mennonite Brethren Churches in Oklahoma and Texas stating that since half of the students were from outside of the Corn-Bessie area, the other churches were to be offered a share both in the supervision and management of the school. With this in mind, all the Churches were asked to send representatives to a meeting to discuss how this might best be accomplished.

At the meeting that was called on January 19, 1950, the following resolution was passed. "Resolved, that an advisory Board be created, consisting of one member from each Church, elected by the Church for a term of one year, anticipating that such Churches later come in with full participation. This resolution does not bind any Church in any way financially." An Advisory Board of seven members was elected with the following members:

D. A. Toews, First M. B. Church. . . .Enid, Oklahoma
Menno Flaming, Enid City M. B. Church. . . .Enid, Oklahoma
A. A. Balzer, Hooker M. B. Church. . . .Hooker, Oklahoma
J. J. Ratzlaff, Balko M. B. Church. . . .Gray, Oklahoma
P. V. Bartel, South Fairview M. B. . . .Fairview, Oklahoma
Rev. A. Elmer Jantz, Fairview City M. B. . . .Fairview, Oklahoma
Ruben Kliever, Okeene M. B. Church. . . .Okeene, Oklahoma

Under the system outlined above, the member Churches had the following responsibilities:¹³

1. Bible Academy -- 'Member' Church Relationships.
 - A. The Relationship of the School to the Churches.
The school is to regard itself as an intricate (sic) part of the churches and their work in that the school accepts a major share in training the young people of the churches. The administration and staff of the school are to seek to work in close cooperation with the programs of the member churches and under the direction of the school board which represents the various member churches.
 - B. The Relationship of the 'Member' Churches to the School.
Each church which has joined in the administration and operation of the school shall consider the school as an important phase of the total church program. Each church shall support the school not only by finances and representation in the board, but also shall obligate itself to pray for and support the school in a spiritual sense and bring before its young people the advantages of attending a Christian Bible School such as Corn Bible Academy.

The Lord blessed this endeavor with a steady program of expansion and growth in the Bible School. On March 23-25, 1952, a Golden Jubilee was observed, the fiftieth year since the founding of the school. A three-day celebration was planned, beginning with a program on Friday afternoon, March 23, with Superintendent J. W. Vogt presiding. The Jubilee Address was given by Reverend Orlando Harms, the chairman of the Southern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches. At the evening services the speakers were Reverend C. E. Fast and Missionary Frank Buschman, both graduates of the Corn Bible Academy.

Saturday evening the alumni program was given. A reminiscence of the earlier years was given by Cornelius Bergmann, the first graduate of the school in 1906. A roll call of classes revealed representatives for almost every graduating class of this entire period of fifty years. Some of the amazing facts revealed by the historical data were:¹⁴

That C.B.A. is the oldest parochial school in western Oklahoma.
That C.B.A. was the largest parochial school in Oklahoma.
That in 1952 C.B.A. had over 600 alumni members.

On Sunday evening, March 25, the chorus of the school, under the direction of Allen Grunau, presented a concert as the students' contribution to the Golden Jubilee. Reverend J. W. Vogt presented the evening message. Greetings and best wishes were received from many friends of the school. Among them were Oliver Hodge, State Superintendent; Dr. G. W. Peters, president of the Pacific Bible Institute, a Conference supported school; Reverend H. D. Burkholder, president of Grace Bible Institute of Omaha, Nebraska; Reverend J. N. C. Hiebert, president of Tabor College, of Hillsboro, Kansas, another Conference school.

A large two-story house a block west of the school was acquired in 1945. This was converted into a girls' dormitory. Later a large room was added which, with changes in the kitchen, provided for a cafeteria, enabling the school to come under the State school lunch program. In 1955 the north wing of the main building was finally constructed as the last addition to the work that was begun in 1948. This gave the plant sufficient room, with the nearly 300-seat auditorium added to the east side, to meet the requirements of a modern school. The building, as completed, gave the school a science laboratory and a large library with a reading and study room, a large commerce and typing room, a music room with a small recording room, several other class rooms, a complete home economics room with kitchen and sewing facilities, and a large, well-equipped social room, offices and book room.

For many years the state accreditation officials had been pressing for improved indoor athletic facilities because the only ones were the outdoor playing fields: baseball diamond, tennis courts, and basketball

court. This of course prevented any kind of athletic or physical education program when it was cold or in wet or inclement weather. Suggestions had been passed to the member Churches and patrons at the annual meetings. Finally the idea began to create interest, especially in view of the increasing difficulty of accreditation. At the annual school meeting in 1956 a motion was passed to enable the Board to investigate the cost of a building for the athletic department.

Not until 1961 did negotiations begin for a steel Butler Building. This gymnasium was finally completed in 1962, with the erection of a 70 x 96 x 20 all-steel, insulated building. Since the acquisition of an adequate gym, the athletic department has been broadened and is now playing a regular schedule of basketball games, with A and B teams (boys), and a team of girls. Also, regular physical education classes can now be held in comfort year round.

Another building in the expansion program was the construction of a modern, well-equipped dormitory for boys. In 1956-1957 it was recognized that more space was needed than the original campus provided. The school was now almost surrounded by homes, and the only possible outlet was to the east. The challenge was accepted and a plot of ground acquired. Two years later, in 1958, the boys' dormitory became a reality. It was dedicated to the Lord's Service on February 8, 1958, and is serving as a home for a number of boys, with a two-bedroom apartment for the dormitory parents.

Besides the choir and ensembles that regularly visited the Mennonite Churches within a radius of several hundred miles, the school carried on a weekly radio program over Station KWOE, Clinton, for a number of years. In this ministry, the musical talent that has

characterized C.B.A. from its beginning could be utilized to bring joy and listening pleasure to many people within the reach of the radio station.

In the spring of 1967, the Board perfected plans to build a new band room and a cafeteria. At the time, lunches were being served in an annex to the girls' dormitory, which was nearly two blocks from the classroom building. This created difficulties, especially in rainy or inclement weather. Because the main building was in the form of a "T", and the addition of the gymnasium had crossed the stem of the "T", making it more in the form of an "H", the plan was to enclose the space between the legs of the "H." This enabled them to extend the bleachers of the gym into one side of the new addition, giving a greater seating capacity as well as a new cafeteria and band room. The new addition measured 82 x 44 feet, and the cost was estimated at \$15,000.¹⁵

Work was progressing quite well. The new addition was nearly complete. Then in the early morning hours of December 14, 1967, a fire of undetermined origin completely destroyed the main classroom building and the auditorium. There had been a freezing rain, and the streets and sidewalks were coated with ice. Just before 6 A. M., the Alvin Schmidts, living just west, across the street, were awakened by the glare of fire and turned in an alarm. About the same time, the Charles Regiers, the parents of the boys' dormitory, were also awakened, and together with some of the boys rushed to the school. Regier was the music instructor, and was able, with help, to save an organ, piano, and other instruments.

The volunteer fire fighters arrived and mounted to the roof to find and contain the blaze, but were soon forced to leave because of danger

of the roof collapsing under them. The Cordell fire unit was called, but stalled eight miles east of that city because of ice on the roads. The Clinton unit was at another town, Putnam, but returned via Weatherford, and together with a truck from that city assayed the trip to Corn. By the time they arrived, there was little they could do except keep the fire from spreading to the adjacent buildings such as the gymnasium, the new cafeteria, and nearby dwellings.

The entire classroom building, with the auditorium, was a total loss. The library, science laboratory, home economics room, and all furniture and equipment were completely destroyed. Only the office safe came through intact. Fortunately the grade transcripts were in the safe.¹⁶ The county sheriff was called immediately, and the state fire marshal. Thorough investigation showed that the heating system was not responsible, but it was never determined just what had caused the conflagration.

The following week the debris was cleaned up, the foundations removed, the basement filled in, and the area leveled, waiting for the final decision of the sponsoring Churches whether to rebuild. On the 18th of December, the board, after a long and earnest session of prayer and lengthy discussion, voted unanimously to rebuild the school. But the decision had to be ratified by the constituent congregations. On December 27, they met with the pastors and administrative councils of the Corn and Cordell M. B. Churches. Again, after lengthy discussion and prayer, ballots were passed and those present were asked to mark their ballots in favor of or against rebuilding. Of 122 ballots cast, ninety-six percent were in favor of rebuilding.¹⁷ Arrangements were made to have a meeting of all interested persons, and the board was to

be ready with a tentative plan by January 5, 1968. At this meeting, the vote again was strongly in favor of rebuilding, and there was general support of the plans presented. The new building as projected, was to be 60 x 164 feet, of steel, fireproof construction, with a partial brick front. As finally built, it was substantially the same as the old building, but with eight classrooms, and with all-electric heating and air-conditioning units. The auditorium seated 310 and was carpeted, as also was the library and the offices.¹⁸ The new band room and cafeteria had been saved from the holocaust.

At the groundbreaking service on January 28, 1968, which was led by board president, Rhiney Graf, a short message was given by Reverend Albert Epp, pastor of the local M. B. Church. Other remarks were given by Reverend John Flaming, pastor of the Cordell M. B. Church. Board members who were in charge of the building program were Rhiney Graf, president, Sam Gossen, Jake Neufeld, Henry Peters, Verno Reimer, treasurer, A. B. P. Schmidt, Otto Bartel, and J. C. Vogt. The superintendent was Richard Dye.¹⁹

At the next year's annual school meeting, the report stated:

Because of the fire on September 14, we have been meeting classes in the newly constructed cafeteria. We have partitioned off classrooms, and although the arrangement has been strained for both staff and students alike, Christ has blessed us. We trust that victories have been won and in many cases spiritual maturity is a step closer. It is a real joy to see our new facilities materialize before our eyes.

The night of the fire, many cried. And yet, the Lord has shown unto us His Greatness. Our new facilities will be wonderful. We lost so many things that can never be replaced. So much of our old plant was a work of love and concern. Yet, we move forward to the future exclaiming His glory.²⁰

When the fall term of school opened on August 26, students

registered in the new building. Fortunately, the board had, with far-sighted wisdom, updated its insurance policies some months before the fire, so that the financial loss was almost completely covered. Yet much of equipment could not be easily and quickly replaced. The library, with its hundreds of volumes, for example, had to be built up slowly and painstakingly. But the end result was a more modern, up-to-date reference and reading library, as also was the equipment in laboratories and classrooms, especially in audio-visual and science areas. These were new and in the best of condition.

On December 15, 1968, just a year after the disastrous fire, the dedication service was held. The dedicatory address was given by Reverend H. R. Wiens, a former pastor of the Bessie Church who had also served in the academy as instructor and superintendent for five years (1941-1946). The pastor of the local M. B. Church, Reverend Albert Epp, and John Martin, who had served on the board for many years, also spoke dedicatory prayers. Verno Reimer gave the building report. The service was enriched by music given by the C.B.A. choir directed by Charles Regier.

Demonstrating a progressive spirit that would not be daunted by adversity, the school leaders, only a few months after the dedication of the large new classroom building, at the annual school meeting held on April 15, 1969, decided to build a new girls' dormitory. That same year the new three-bedroom residence of Superintendent Dye was purchased as a permanent addition to the school complex. The groundbreaking was held on August 2, 1970, and the next March girls moved into a new, all-steel, fireproof dormitory. The building housed twenty-four girls in a module system and had a laundry room and a two-bedroom apartment for

resident dorm parents.

Teachers who have served in the academy since 1948 are the following: (S denotes superintendent, P denotes principal).

- 1948-49. Leo Goentzel, S. Jacob Ewert, Esther Bartel, Leonard Reimer, Robert Wiens, J. P. Kliever.
- 1949-50. J. W. Vogt, S. Robert Wiens, P. Jacob Ewert, A. F. Wiebe, Esther Bartel, Allen Grunau.
- 1950-51. J. W. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Barney Ratzlaff, Esther Bartel, Allen Grunau, A. F. Wiebe.
- 1951-52. J. W. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Esther Bartel, Allen Grunau, Barney Ratzlaff, Abe Peters.
- 1952-53. J. W. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Martha Foote, Allen Grunau, Barney Ratzlaff, A. F. Wiebe.
- 1953-54. A. F. Wiebe, S. Allen Grunau, Laurie Mitton, Barney Ratzlaff, Martha Foote, Marian Lueders.
- 1954-55. Allen Grunau, S. A. F. Wiebe, P. John E. Vogt, Martha Foote, Herbert Schmidt, Eloise Franz, Viola Funk.
- 1955-56. Allen Grunau, S. A. F. Wiebe, P. John E. Vogt, Martha Foote, Herbert Schmidt, Nola Joyce Owens, Viola Funk.
- 1956-57. Allen Grunau, S. John E. Vogt, P. Martha Foote, John C. Ratzlaff, Dorothy Schauer, Ruby Sawatzky.
- 1957-58. John E. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Martha Foote, Ruby Sawatzky, Martha Isaak, J. W. Wiebe.
- 1958-59. John E. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Martha Foote, Ruby Sawatzky, Martha Isaak, J. W. Wiebe.
- 1959-60. John E. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Martha Foote, Ruby Sawatzky, J. W. Wiebe, Paul Friesen.
- 1960-61. John E. Vogt, S. Jacob Ewert, P. Martha Foote, J. W. Wiebe, Robert Fox, Katie Travis.
- 1961-62. John E. Vogt, S. Albert Epp, P. Martha Foote, Jacob Ewert, Robert Fox, Delbert Wiens, Mrs. Hardin, W. H. Isbell.
- 1962-63. August Schmidt, S. Albert Epp, P. Martha Foote, John Dick, Beverly Vogt, Esther Bolles, Paul Kliever, W. H. Isbell.
- 1963-64. C. A. Vammen, S. Paul Kliever, P. Martha Foote, Alvin Isaac, Richard Dye, H. J. Vogt, Jr.
- 1964-65. Paul Kliever, S. Alvin Isaac, P. Richard Dye, Martha Foote, Wynema Schmidt, Odalee Craighead, H. J. Vogt, Jr.
- 1965-66. Paul Kliever, S. Alvin Isaac, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Wynema Schmidt, Lloyd Penner, Charles Regier, Leonard Johnson, Bill Cole.
- 1966-67. Paul Kliever, S. Lloyd Penner, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Charles Regier, Leonard Johnson, Louise Paxton, Gary Janzen.
- 1967-68. Richard Dye, S. Ervin Klaassen, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Charles Regier, Leonard Johnson, Gary Janzen, Mrs. Hale.
- 1968-69. Richard Dye, S. Charles Regier, P. Ervin Klaassen, H. J. Vogt, Jr., Leonard Johnson, Sue Sensentaffer, Sue Mingus, Ken Ratzlaff.

- 1969-70. H. B. Kliewer, S. Charles Regier, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Ervin Klaassen, Sue Sensentaffer, Ken Ratzlaff, Ramona Cox, A. F. Wiebe.
- 1970-71. H. B. Kliewer, S. Charles Regier, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., A. F. Wiebe, Leonard Johnson, Sue Mingus, Gary Janzen, John Block.
- 1971-72. H. B. Kliewer, S. Charles Regier, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., A. F. Wiebe, Leonard Johnson, Jaquetta Gunter, Gary Janzen, Marlin Thomas, Lois Phillips.
- 1972-73. Paul Wilson, S. Charles Regier, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Gary Janzen, Leonard Johnson, Marlin Thomas, LeeAnn Huff, Delbert Penner.
- 1973-74. Lloyd Penner, S. Charles Regier, P. H. J. Vogt, Jr., Marlin Thomas, Mary Tuttle, Charlotte Kelly, Marvin Epp, John Millirons, Dennis Reimer.
- 1974-75. Lloyd Penner, S. Charles Regier, P. Marlin Thomas, Mary Tuttle, Charlotte Vogt, Marvin Epp, John Millirons, Elaine Ogles, Irvin Schmidt.
- 1975-76. Lloyd Penner, S. Marvin Epp, P. Charles Regier, Marlin Thomas, Mary Tuttle, Charlotte Vogt, Irvin Schmidt, Nancy Wiens, Charles Vogt, W. Ernest Oldfield.

During the years since accreditation was first achieved in 1935, the school has been successful in retaining full accreditation while offering a full state-approved curriculum, as well as six units of Bible. True to the Mennonite tradition the music department is outstanding, gaining the highest awards in district and state music festivals year after year. At the latest count, there have been nearly 1,100 graduates who have gone on to make their mark in the world, and, what is even greater, have become leaders in their churches and professions. In a recent survey, which was limited and therefore possibly not entirely accurate, 7.5 percent of those answering were ministers, 5 percent were missionaries, 20 percent were teachers, and 35 percent held some positions in their churches other than in the ministry. Thus 47.5 percent were serving the churches in some capacity. This is what the academy was designed to do--provide leaders and workers in the Churches. Further, the school, since it is parochial, does not receive financial aid in any

way from the state. Therefore it is financed completely by the sponsoring Corn and Cordell M. B. Churches, with a combined membership of around 600. This demonstrates the sincerity and depth of their convictions concerning the value of a Christian education.

This has been a short history of the Corn Bible Academy. Many of the persons closely connected with the school have revealed the depth of their loyalty and the sentiment connecting them to the school. As one older man remarked, "It is almost indescribable--the influence the School has had...."²² Many of the leaders of the M. B. Conference, many instructors in M. B. colleges and the seminary, many of its ministers and missionaries, and a large portion of the Church workers are graduates of the Corn Bible Academy. It has provided an incalculable supply of dedicated Christian workers for the Churches. This has come about because the people of the Churches were willing to sacrifice, to give, to work and above all to pray--constantly--for the student body, the faculty, the board, and the staff of Corn Bible Academy. These feelings are expressed in the "Alma Mater" written by an alumnus of the Academy.²³

Come let us stand united, our praises to hold high,
For our dear Alma Mater, we never can deny.
In sunshine or in darkness, whatever may betide,
Forever onward, upward--our helper and our guide.

O emblem of our Fathers of truth and purity,
Forever may this standard our Alma Mater be.
They precepts and thy teachings and admonitions too,
God bless them thro' the ages, and help us to be true.

Hail, our Alma Mater, ev'ry where we go.
Hail, our Alma Mater, conquer every foe.
We'll carry on our banner, white and royal blue,
Corn Bible School and Academy, forever true.

Higher Education

In addition to supporting the secondary school, the Churches

support higher education. The General Conference churches have a secondary school that is supported by their Oklahoma Conference, Oklahoma Bible Academy, at Meno, near Enid. All Mennonite churches support their schools of higher education, the General Conference churches supporting Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, and Grace Bible Institute at Omaha, Nebraska. The M. B. Churches support Tabor College at Hillsboro, Kansas, Pacific College and the M. B. Biblical Seminary, both in Fresno, California.

FOOTNOTES

¹J. E. Hartzler, Education Among Mennonites of America (Danvers, Illinois, 1925), p. 10. (Underlining for emphasis by writer).

²Ibid., p. 50. (Underlining for emphasis by writer).

³John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), p. 94.

⁴Harley J. Stucky, A Century of Russian Mennonite History in America (North Newton, Kansas, 1973), p. 52.

⁵Toews, History of M. B. Church, p. 254.

⁶Henry H. Hinz, Recollections, 1973 (Taped Interview).

⁷John Arn, The Herold Mennonite Church, 70th Anniversary, p. 37.

⁸Cornelius Bergmann, The 60th Anniversary of the Corn Mennonite Brethren Church (1953), no page numbers given. Many persons most intimately connected with the institution have already passed into eternity, and within a few years those that are still living also will be gone, thus removing forever a primary source of information concerning the early years of the school's existence. It is imperative, then, to reach and record these experiences, since most of the written records and documents that are extant were included in the Church records of the local Mennonite Brethren Church. These were destroyed by fire when the sanctuary was completely destroyed in 1949. Other documents were also destroyed when the school building itself burned in December of 1967.

In the absence of documents and records, it has been necessary to gather material from the older persons of the community--those that have been acquainted with the school from its beginning--together with papers, writings, and pictures they still possessed. Special mention must be made of K. J. Kliewer, who as a member of the board for many years was able to gather many pages of records, and of A. G. Duerksen, an early graduate (1909), and a son of Professor J. F. Duerksen, head of the school from 1905 until ill health forced him to retire after many years of teaching.

Additional sources of valuable information were C. F. Reimer, Mrs. Cornelius Bergmann, whose husband was the first graduate, and C. J. Funk, who in addition to personal experiences, secured material from his sister, Miss Agatha Funk, who had taught in the school many years ago.

⁹Information by K. J. Kliewer, 1967.

- ¹⁰This information is from a record book of Peter Guenther's, given to the possession of C. C. Vogt after Guenther's death.
- ¹¹From notes collected by K. J. Kliewer.
- ¹²A. G. Duerksen, Recollections, 1967 (Interview).
- ¹³Document, "Policies and Principles of Corn Bible Academy, 1954."
- ¹⁴Golden Jubilee Data of Corn Bible Academy, 1952.
- ¹⁵Board Minutes of April 24, 1967.
- ¹⁶Washita County Enterprise, Article, December 20, 1967.
- ¹⁷Minutes of the Meeting, December 27, 1967.
- ¹⁸Washita County Enterprise, Article, January 10, 1968.
- ¹⁹Ibid., January 31, 1968.
- ²⁰Corn Bible Academy Annual Report, 1968-69.
- ²¹Statement by C. F. Reimer, an early graduate of the school.
- ²²Written by A. G. Duerksen and J. W. Vogt, both early graduates of the school.

CHAPTER X

BENEVOLENCE AND COMPASSION

In the preceding centuries in Europe, Mennonites were known for taking care of their own--the aged, the unfortunate, the orphans. This was true in Prussia and in Russia, where the church operated and supported homes for the aged, special schools for the deaf and dumb, and orphanages for the children that had lost their parents. Those that were poor were provided for, as in the great migration of 1874 when entire villages and congregations moved to America. Many were poor and landless, but the wealthier ones contributed money to enable their less fortunate brethren to pay the fees and transport monies so that they too could begin a new life under less oppressive laws.

Health Problems

It has already been mentioned that in the early days of settlement on the Washita, most of the Mennonites were poor--some desperately so. One of the first problems encountered was that of maintaining their health. Hospitals were non-existent, and few had the finances to place an ailing family member in one anyway. Most likely the nearest hospital was at El Reno, sixty to seventy miles away, with the roads rough, hardly more than a trail. There had to be a better way to care for those that were ill.

Most of the sick simply treated with home remedies and tender

loving care. Often this did not suffice, especially for babies and small children. Many of them died. It was not unusual for a family to lose three or four babies. In practically all cases, delivery of babies was by a neighborhood mid-wife who often did a marvelous work with a great expenditure of time and effort to help her neighbors with deliveries. Two women that were noted in this work were Mrs. J. M. Reimer and Mrs. Emil Hinz.

But there were other ailments such as broken bones and dislocations of joints and muscles. They were cared for by several men gifted with sensitive hands. Henry Janzen and Martin Schlichting were outstanding. Broken bones were straightened out, set, and splinted, and recoveries were routine. The extent of their practice and the hundreds of ailments they treated with good results were amazing. The Schlichting family became known far and wide, for a number of sons followed the father in this work and continued as long as they lived. The last one, Jacob D. Schlichting, is still living in Corn, and is known and respected for his ability.

Diseases also came, and for this area of healing Dr. Ballard, in Seger Colony, some ten miles southeast of Corn, could be called for severe illnesses. Dr. J. H. Harms hung out his shingle in Cordell, and was successful in treating cases of typhoid fever. He also was able to give advice and help to mothers, which saved many babies that had formerly been lost. Nevertheless, death and illness plagued pioneer families. Agatha Funk remarked, "In those days, James 5:14-16 was practiced more. Several were healed by prayer."

In later times, hospitals have been built in the three larger towns that are nearby: Clinton, Cordell, and Weatherford; these have good

staffs to take care of medical problems that arise. Good roads and fast vehicles have erased many of the difficulties of past years. However, to the deeply religious Mennonites, it is a mixed blessing because with a dependence on technological advances and human skill has come a lessened dependence upon the supernatural power of their God.

Home for the Aged

One of the major avenues in which to demonstrate Christian compassion has traditionally been the care of the aged and infirm. True, in the past, it was regarded as the privilege and duty of children to care for their aging parents. This was, of course, the ideal solution--the elderly grandparents living with their children surrounded by a group of grandchildren whose liveliness and energy filled their days with wonder and joy. Even in early days, the ideal was not always realized. With a high death rate, especially among children, some older people did not have a family. Or financial circumstances prevented the normal course of events. Possibly the children moved to a different state, or to Canada, as many did. The parents were then left, reluctant to leave their lifelong friends and their beloved church. Then it became incumbent upon the Church to care for them when old age or senility laid them low.

Since the Mennonite Churches had traditionally cared for their aged people, many of those living in the Corn community began to share a deep concern for those that were approaching old age. More and more young people were moving to the cities or working in areas and vocations other than farming. City dwellings and high rise apartments were not conducive to tender care for persons whose eyes were dim, whose hearing had

become dull, and whose limbs were trembling and unsteady. Possibly the onset of World War II aggravated the situation, with young people being drafted or taking jobs in industries.

Shortly after the Mennonite Brethren General Conference officially celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its founding in North America, the Church at Corn held a business meeting to discuss the disposition of a Jubilee Offering received at the celebration (October 26, 1943). Someone presented the idea of erecting a Home for the Aged (Altenheim). No decision was reached for sentiment was divided, but a committee was elected to study the proposition. P. J. Franz, H. N. Kroeker, and J. L. Martin were elected to serve this cause. Some time later, ten others were elected to contact the church members for pledges or donations. A plan was drawn up, and H. W. Vogt offered to donate an acre of land, while another person offered to buy an additional acre and donate it also. The Church voted about a building, but this failed by three votes to receive the necessary three-fourths majority. A reason given was that the Bible Academy was planning to erect a new classroom building, and two projects undertaken simultaneously would create an intolerably heavy financial burden on the members of the Church. The project was then tabled for some months.

In February of 1945 the committee was asked for an accounting and further plans. Their reply was that the Church should proceed with the plans or drop the matter entirely. One possibility discussed was the purchase of the former Gaede hospital in Weatherford, for the building was furnished and ready for immediate possession. On March 20, 1945, a motion was made "...To vote whether we want to have an Altenheim or not." The motion passed. Then someone mentioned that it was now time to vote

whether to build new or buy the Weatherford building. A motion was made to decide whether it should be in Weatherford or Corn, and by a large majority it was decided to have it in Corn. This, of course, meant that a new building must be constructed.²

The same three men who had served on the preliminary committee were again elected to serve as an executive committee for building the Home. A building site was purchased for \$900. As Corn did not at that time have a water system, the first problem to be solved was an adequate supply of water. A well was drilled to a depth of 282 feet where an abundant amount of water was found. This was encouraging, so on November 5, 1945, the Church congregation gathered for a groundbreaking service. After several songs were sung, Henry H. Nickel, Deacon emeritus and at eighty-seven the oldest member of the church, was given the opportunity to turn the first spadeful of earth.

After bulldozers and tractors had dug the excavation for the basement, the forms were made for the concrete, which was poured in one day. More than one hundred men volunteered their labor to mix and pour 860 sacks of cement. The women of the congregation provided the noon meal for the workers. Thus was demonstrated again that Mennonite way of giving--not only of money, but of self in working with their hands at a time when laborers were scarce.

The brick work was begun, but a ten-months delay in delivery of the steel windows, caused by war-time shortages of steel, held up the work for nearly a year. Finally, nearly five years after the first proposals were made, the building was ready for the dedication. Reverend J. P. Kliever, Pastor of the Corn M. B. Church, was in charge. He also brought the dedicatory message in which he stressed the thought that is

paramount in many of the things done by the Mennonite Churches--that not only was this to be a Home for those who are old, but it would provide much more: a place where the souls of the aged could be nourished and where the Church could provide for their spiritual needs. This was, in reality, the goal of the Church. In the school, the spiritual needs of young people were met by providing spiritual nourishment in education. In the Church these spiritual hungers were met on a constant year-long basis. Now the needs of the old were to be met by providing more than physical care.

With the unveiling of the cornerstone at 4:20 P. M. on this dedication day, February 15, 1948, the building officially opened for business. The treasurer's report placed the initial cost at \$36,042.19, all donated by the people of the community. A total of 225 different men and women had donated 824 days of voluntary labor, which of course reduced the monetary cost considerably.

At the time the Home was built, there were few laws governing such institutions, and those residing there had to enter in hope that the care would be such that they could live in comfort and peace. The Home in Corn has been noteworthy in the care given its people. The first house parents were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Richert, who gave years of devotion and love in caring for the elderly. A few days after the dedication, occupants began to enter. Mrs. Agnes Vogt was the first, then David Buschman, eighty-two, Peter Franzen, eighty-two, Mrs. Elisabeth Schmidt, seventy-nine, Mrs. Christina Balzer, eighty-two, and Lela Rempel. A few weeks later Mr. and Mrs. Henry Foote, eighty-four and eighty-three years old, moved in also.³

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Home, many

changes were noted in the report issued by the board and given by the present administrator, Mrs. Alvina Bergmann. The report read, in part:

Since the original building was constructed there have been two major expansion programs, so that while the original Home cost \$36,000, the appraised value is now around \$320,000 (1973). Accommodating 61 patients, the Home now has four registered nurses on 24-hour duty, and one LPN, with 20 attendants on the floor to give aid and attention to the patients. A kitchen staff of 10 prepares the meals, which are served in the dining room to those able to be there. Trays are sent to the rooms of those who cannot be in the dining hall. Meals are prepared under the direction of a registered dietitian.

Since such homes for the aged are now under strict state supervision, Alan Early, from the Oklahoma State Board of Health, spoke at the anniversary celebration. He stressed that there had never been a complaint against the Corn institution and that it held a Number 1 classification, as one of the best in the state.⁴

In carrying out the pledge to provide for the spiritual needs and care of the occupants, the Church has installed loudspeaker facilities in the living room so that the services in the Corn M. B. Church, only two blocks away, can be heard by everyone. Every evening different groups present a program of singing or short messages from God's Word. Different individuals from the community accept the responsibility for one such service per month. Churches from the surrounding areas also take such responsibilities, so that every evening a religious service is held. Usually they are eagerly attended, especially by those who are no longer able to leave the building to attend Church services elsewhere. The Mennonites thus are still carrying on their concept of sharing, of freely donating time, and material goods, and labor, that life may be made easier for those in need, those who are old and cannot care for themselves. This is regarded as their demonstration of Christian love.

Contributing to Missions

Since the settlement on the Washita was itself an outgrowth, or a child of, missionary activity in that of Missionary J. J. Kliever spread the word of the availability and fertility of the area, thus encouraging many would-be settlers to investigate the possibilities, it was logical that the people who came would also be mission-minded. This, too, was a part of the Anabaptist tradition handed down through succeeding generations. In this endeavor the Churches of the Washita were a part of the larger Conferences, and thus only a segment of the total picture.

The General Conference churches were directly related to the mission at Shelly, and all the original settlers met there for church services. When the missionary activity was formally suspended by the Conference in 1900, most contact with such activity ceased. However, there was still an affiliation with missionary work among the Indians at a distance, since a Mennonite Indian Church, presently known as the Koinonia Church, was organized at Clinton. It is still in operation with Lawrence Hart, a chief of the Cheyenne tribe, as pastor of the sixty-nine members (1972). Another Indian Church is located at Hammon, northwest of Clinton, where a mission was begun almost simultaneously with the Shelly Mission. The present church is the responsibility of Robert Standingwater, an Indian leader, and has seventy-one members (1972). An Indian church is also in existence near Canton, some miles from where the Cantonment Mission originally ministered to the natives of that area. But in a stricter sense, these churches are not in the mission stages of ministering to natives; rather they are accepted as sister churches in the larger brotherhood of the Conference.

In the modern sense, to Mennonites the word "Missions" is used in the context of foreign fields. The statistics of the 1974-75 Handbook of the General Conference Mennonite Church gives the total contributions of American and Canadian Churches for overseas missions in 1972 as \$1,847,157, from a membership of 59,936, making a per capita contribution of nearly thirty-one dollars per person per year. To give a larger picture, the total amount contributed by the same membership for all purposes was \$11,432,113. This included church operation, operation of colleges and seminary, home missions, and all other Conference activities. For the membership this totals over \$190 per member. Institutions supported by this membership include five nursing homes, four hospitals, six mental hospitals (some of these are under the M. C. C. and thus supported proportionately by other Mennonite groups), twelve colleges and Bible institutes, and a seminary,⁵ plus several seminaries in other countries (Africa, India, and Uruguay). These are cooperative institutions in connection with other denominations.

This briefly gives a picture of responsibilities shared by the General Conference Churches of the Washita area in the field of missions. Not only do they contribute financially, but also they share in providing personnel. The 1972 Yearbook listed 147 missionaries in the field, plus twenty-four on leave, and ninety-five young people who were volunteers in Christian service work, scattered throughout the nation. The Herold Church (1969) listed ten young people serving in various phases of work, besides two couples serving in the mission field, with the Church providing partial support. The Bergthal Church still had one person in mission work, Miss Evelyn Heidebrecht, in Yaddis, Kentucky, when the church ceased functioning.

Menonite Brethren Missions

The Menonite Brethren on the Washita were not directly connected with the Shelly Mission, but nevertheless had connections with Conference mission activity. As early as 1889 the M. B. Conference began preliminary work in establishing an Indian mission among the Comanche Indians of southwestern Oklahoma. In 1894 this work was launched five miles northeast of Indianahoma with a grant of 160 acres of land. The Conference supplied the funds, buildings were erected, and the mission, under the direction of Heinrich Kohfeld, slowly began to contact the Indians. In 1906 Mr. and Mrs. Abraham J. Becker took over the work, and by 1909 congregational services had been established. The Beckers continued until 1942 when they retired, but others took up the work. In 1948 a school for Indian children was built in Indianahoma, and operated as a mission school for a number of years.

This mission is of interest because it was only some fifty miles from the Washita communities, and thus close contact was maintained. Due to the Army post at Fort Sill taking over the entire area for an artillery range, the mission was moved to Indianahoma where an Indian Church is still in existence. The latest pastor was Reverend Cycil Adrian who, incidentally, was from Corn and a graduate of the Corn Bible Academy. The Corn Church stood in the place of an older brother, giving aid, help, and encouragement to the Indian Church whenever needed.

The Corn M. B. Church, the Bessie (Cordell) M. B. Church, and the newer churches in Weatherford and Clinton also provide support for Conference mission endeavors, as well as having provided a large number of missionary personnel. The names have already been given in a previous

chapter, but the Corn M. B. Church was especially noted in Mennonite Brethren circles for having provided more ministers, missionaries, educators, and church leaders than almost any other church of its Conference in the United States. A valid question for further study and research would be what component, or ingredient, in the people of Corn Church and community has influenced the production of so many outstanding individuals?

In an informal meeting in the Corn Church, chaired by Dr. J. B. Toews of Fresno, California, who is engaged in the classification of Conference historical materials for the permanent archives, the question above was thrown open for discussion.⁶ Several older men present felt that the leadership of the early Church had been a great influence, for it had constantly been in the hands of men who had been absolutely thorough and honest in living their Anabaptist principles in every area of their lives. Others, not at that particular meeting, pointed to the influence of the Bible School in which Bible principles not only were taught from a tender age, but also leadership training was emphasized so that by the late teens the young people had been filled and thoroughly indoctrinated with both principles and practice. As proof one could turn again to the questionnaire mentioned in the history of the Corn Bible Academy which showed 47.5 percent of the alumni answering the survey were in positions of leadership in their churches.

Still another point of speculation might be that the aggressiveness and initiative of the early settlers had carried over into succeeding generations, nurtured in a rural setting in a semi-arid environment, demanding perserverance, patience, and skill in the process of making a living. Many of the original settlers were unusually determined in

living their faith. Witness the families that participated in the Östliche Reise to Turkestan. Many of their comrades simply gave up and settled in Asia. These, however, continued on to America. Finding the Kansas communities already settled, they move once more to Oklahoma before finding a place of permanence. This determination and drive must have been passed on to future generations, and, given the tools of leadership, is still bearing its fruit in producing men and women willing to give everything that is within them to carry out the principles in which they believe.

Continuing with the missions work of the M. B. Conference, with which the Corn and Bessie (Cordell) Churches are so closely intertwined, one must again go to the official statistics. With a membership of 32,749 in both the United States and Canada (1972), the financial giving averaged \$198.60 per member. The contributions for missions was \$1,329,731 for 1971-1972, which was used to support 147 missionaries in foreign fields and 111 Christian Service workers, both domestic and foreign. The numbers of both missionaries and Service workers were down sharply from the 1970 to 1972 period, when there were 205 missionaries and 336 Christian Service workers.⁷

The Christian Service program of the Mennonite Brethren Churches is constituted entirely of volunteers, particularly young men and women, many if not most of them single. This gives them an opportunity to share in the work of the Church in areas outside the usual circles. This is not necessarily mission work, but the people are sent to areas where they hold jobs or perform work for which they may have training, such as teaching. The Conference pays their transportation and living expenses, plus forty dollars a month. In turn, the salary they earn at

their work is channeled back into the Conference treasury. Thus essentially, the worker is donating a year or two years of his or her time to work that is deemed of Christian value and are carrying a Christian witness into areas that may not be open to mission activity or where such a mission activity may not be needed. The program was established in 1960 primarily to provide assignment for Conscientious Objectors who were to be placed in alternate service approved by the government. Thus they perform a service of sacrifice and devotion to their fellow man instead of military service, which is still contrary to the teachings and principles of the different Mennonite Churches.

Phasing out the draft most likely accounted for the drop in Christian Service workers from 336 in 1970-71 to 111 in 1972. However, the work is still continuing with workers being sent to various places in the United States, several provinces in Canada, Zaire, Austria, Germany, Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Mexico.⁸

An interesting study of the growth of the M. B. Mission Enterprise is found in the Resolutions of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1878-1963, compiled by A. E. Janzen. According to this study, the first mention of missions was in 1879 when a resolution was passed that an evangelist be engaged and mission work to be conducted. In 1884 a decision was made to participate in India Missions with a Baptist group.⁹

- 1885 -- A Foreign Mission Committee was established.
- 1887 -- \$100 was appropriated for work in Africa, with another \$150 for training a worker.
- 1893 -- \$300 was appropriated for field in the Kamerons.
- 1894 -- \$150 was appropriated for beginning work among the American Indians. (Comanche)
- 1895 -- \$800 for a residence and a church, \$500 for support of the Missionary Kohfeld to Comanche Indians.

- 1898 -- Mission to India opened by Reverend N. N. Hiebert independent of other denominational groups.
- 1919 -- Mission work in China accepted.
- 1939 -- Mission budget, \$33,366.
- 1943 -- Mission to Paraguayan Indians established.
- 1948 -- Budget advanced to \$275,000 annually.
- 1963 -- Budget reached \$767,671.⁹
- 1972 -- Mission Budget, \$1,329,731.¹⁰

The growth of missions in the Mennonite Brethren Churches has increased tremendously. The M. B. Churches met as a Conference for the first time in Russia on May 14-16, 1872, with three participating churches, Einlage, Chortitza RÜckenau (Molotschna), plus one from the Kuban. The total church membership was 600. The Mennonite Brethren Church as such was then only twelve years old, having been founded in 1860 when eighteen men withdrew from the existing Mennonite Church, usually called the "Kirchliche," and signed a document in which they bound themselves as Brethren, yet Mennonite. In the Great Migration, some 200 families came to America, mostly to Kansas. These spread into a number of communities, eventually to Washita County, in Oklahoma.

The first M. B. Conference in the United States convened with the congregations of York and Hamilton County, Nebraska, on October 18-20, 1879. It continued to convene annually until 1909 when it was divided into district conferences which now meet annually, while the General Conference convenes tri-annually. Thus the beginning of foreign mission work was early in the history of the Church--at the very first conference. The churches on the Washita were thus imbued with the spirit of missions from their beginning.¹¹

Mennonite Central Committee

As in many other phases of their work, the Mennonites combine into

a group in the area of relief. A classic example of this is in the Mennonite Central Committee, formed in 1920 as a united Relief Agency with the special purpose at that time of assisting the Mennonites of Russia during the great famine of 1920-1922. As a result, thousands who would have starved were enabled to remain alive. Many of these people later were assisted to leave Russia, migrating to the United States, Canada, and South America (mainly Paraguay). The work of the M. C. C. (Mennonite Central Committee) had not ended, for it became the spokesman for various Mennonite groups for the cause of Conscientious Objectors during and after World War II, and again engaging in a relief program after that great war was ended.

The Mennonite communities on the Washita were, if possible, even more closely linked with the rise and development of the M.C.C. than other Mennonite groups whose forefathers came to America directly from Holland or Switzerland. Some living on the Washita had come from Russia or Asia, and many still had relatives in the old country. Thus they became an integral part in the movement of the M.C.C.

To best understand the situation that led to the founding of the M.C.C., one must go back to the Russia of 1917, the time of the Red Revolution. As the Mennonites of south Russia were landowners, or at least could legally own land, although possibly two-thirds did not, they were regarded with suspicion by the "Workers Revolution" as Kulaks, landowners and employers. According to the terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Ukraine was to be in the hands of Germans who were welcomed by the Mennonites. But the fall of the German Reich meant the withdrawal of German troops and a period of anarchy, for the Bolsheviks were not in full control of the area. During this time the entire area

fell under the sway of a brutal, bloodthirsty bandit leader whose forces at times were said to number as high as 40,000 men. The leader, Nestor Machno, had worked on the Mennonite estates in his youth, and was able to speak Platt-Deutsch well. He felt that he had been underpaid at that time and was seeking revenge. As a result, hundreds of Mennonites were murdered by his men, 240 in Zagradovka alone in November of 1919. Countless villages were completely destroyed; in others the men were brutally murdered, often with torture, and the women and girls raped and horribly mistreated.¹²

In addition to inflicting physical suffering and loss of life, the bandits stole everything they could lay their hands on, destroying that which they could not carry away. To add to the horror, the Mennonite villages for weeks lay in the path of contending White and Red armies, some villages changing hands up to twenty times. These armies seized what had been left by the bandits. Disease and epidemics, such as spotted typhus, cholera, syphilis, and malaria began to rage, spread by unsanitary conditions, lice, and the constant raping of the women; these took a terrible toll with a heavy loss of life. In the Chortitza colony alone the population dropped from 18,000 in the fall of 1917 to 13,000 in 1920.¹³

As if these things were not enough, a famine came in 1920, for the draft animals, cattle, and all grains, both that for animals and humans, as well as seed stock, had been taken by the robber bands or the Red Army. Also, a severe drought affected the entire Ukraine for two years, resulting in total crop failures. Weakened by disease, with many of the laborers killed, leaving many women and children, the Mennonites were facing disaster if not annihilation, from the combination of

circumstances in the "Bread basket of Europe."¹⁴

In this desperate hour the Mennonite Central Committee was born. A study commission had been in touch with the brethren in Russia. Militarily nothing could be done as far as the battling hordes were concerned. But when it became a matter of relief, the Americans were willing and eager to help. A special meeting of representatives from all existing Mennonite relief organizations assembled at Elkhart, Indiana, on July 27, 1920. A united relief agency, the Mennonite Central Committee, was formed with Dr. P. C. Hiebert of Hillsboro, Kansas, as chairman. He remained in this position until 1953.

The first relief unit of three men began their work in October of 1920 in Sevastopol, but met disaster. One of the men, Clayton Kratz of Pennsylvania, was taken prisoner by the Reds and never heard from again. The following year, by working directly with the government in Moscow, it became possible to ship supplies to south Russia. By May of 1922 large amounts of foodstuffs began to be distributed, not only to the Mennonites but also to everyone in need. By August 40,000 rations were issued daily in the feeding kitchens, a rate that continued for three years and then gradually declined. Clothing distribution centers were also set up. In addition, the officials of the M.C.C. assisted thousands to migrate to the United States and Canada, of whom hundreds owed their lives to M.C.C. food shipments.¹⁵

For a time the Mennonites of Russia began a rebuilding process, with the New Economic Policy (N E P, 1921) which halted collectivization and encouraged private trading and commerce. But draft animals were non-existent, and there were no seeds. The M.C.C. purchased twenty-five Fordson tractors, with Oliver plows, and shipped them to Russia

with men to operate them. Plowing started on September 15, 1921, and by Christmas 3201 acres had been plowed and 714 acres of rye sown, which was cut the following year with American binders. Both food and seed were thus produced. A second shipment of twenty-five Fordson tractors were sent in 1922, and the next fall, 9,176 acres were plowed.¹⁶ Over 200 horses were also purchased for the Mennonite farmers.¹⁷

With the beginning of the collectivization in 1928, many more Mennonites attempted to leave Russia. In the fall of 1929 some 13,000 were around Moscow trying to get visas, but only 5,677 were able to leave at this time. Another famine followed in 1932-1933 as a result of the collectivization; five to eight million Russians died, including 100,000 German speaking people, many of them Mennonites. The M.C.C. and other groups managed to bring some 20,000 to Canada by 1930, when all emigration from Russia was stopped.¹⁸

In the meantime, Canada had begun requiring the English language to be used in schools. Many Mennonites resented this, and large numbers of them went to Mexico in 1922-1926. Later, in 1948, several hundred more families joined them, so that by 1950 there were some 16,000 in the states of Chihuahua and Durango. When the doors to Canada closed in 1930 (those of the United States had already been closed for several years), the M.C.C. settled some Russian Mennonites in Mexico, but in general this was not a popular move. In the years 1958 to 1964, some 3,000 Mennonites moved from Mexico to British Honduras, settling north and west of Belize.¹⁹

By far the largest migration in this period was to Paraguay. As early as 1920, Mennonites from Canada were investigating the possibilities of such a move. The Paraguayan government gave full guarantees of

religious and educational freedom in 1921. In 1926, Mennonites purchased 137,920 acres of land in the Chaco, with the first group of 309 persons leaving Altona, Manitoba, on November 23, 1926. By 1964 the Menno colony they founded had grown to nearly 5,000 people, with nearly a million acres of land.²⁰ The second colony, of Fernheim, was settled in 1930 by emigrants directly from Russia. A third colony, Friesland, was established in 1927, and by 1964 the two numbered 3,000 and 1,000 inhabitants.

After World War II closed, the M.C.C. was instrumental in moving some 4,000 displaced Mennonites from Germany, where they had fled to escape the Russian armies after the German occupation of their Ukrainian villages. In a thrilling adventure, Peter Dyck, representing the M.C.C., chartered a Dutch steamship to get the refugees out, thus preventing them from being forcibly repatriated to Russia.

A fourth wave of Mennonite migration to Paraguay came in 1948 when nearly 1,700 left Canada to establish more colonies. These were self-sustaining, but the M.C.C. has been giving substantial aid in helping to adapt the familiar wheat and sorghum of Canada and Russia to the climate and environment of Paraguay. Another 1,300 Mennonites settled in Brazil in 1929, increasing to some 3,500 by 1964. Still another settlement in 1948 was in Uruguay, which numbered 1,500 by 1964. Scattered groups also are in Argentina and Bolivia, with a total of around 40,000 in Central and South America.²¹

The M.C.C. has been the guiding hand, the one with advice and financial assistance. Farm machinery--particularly horse-drawn implements, which were no longer used in the United States were gathered and shipped to the new settlements. A group of American businessmen formed a

Mennonite Economic Development Association (MEDA), to help build mills and small businesses that would aid the South American Mennonites achieve self-sufficiency.

Mennonite Disaster Service

While the M.C.C. movement has done a tremendous work in its united effort to aid people, particularly fellow Mennonites, the Mennonite Disaster Service, often referred to simply by the initials M.D.S., was organized spontaneously by laymen who were interested in helping people in need, particularly in the areas surrounding them, to a radius of several hundred miles. Out of this concern has grown an organization that has traveled far and wide, from the Gulf to Alaska, helping in cleanup and rebuilding operations after tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters. Each man or woman pays his own way, donates his time and labor, using a highly organized and equipped system that could well be the envy of many civil defense and disaster organizations, all without taxes or levies except what money individuals and churches donate. The churches in the Washita area are a part of this M.D.S. and have gone far and wide in carrying on the work, often unknown and without publicity, because they are doing it for the Lord. In many areas, the M.D.S. is recognized as a legitimate organization, ranking with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Often it is the only organization, along with the other two, that gains admittance to a disaster area.

This service began when a number of young married couples from two Mennonite Churches in Hesston, Kansas, were having a fellowship picnic in 1950. Some of those present had been in the C.P.S. camps during

World War II (Civilian Public Service) and were interested in finding ways of helping others. One remarked that they might give emergency help in time of disaster.

The next step was a questionnaire circulated in the two congregations, (the Pennsylvania and Hesston College Churches, both in Hesston) asking the following questions:

What skills are available--

Carpentry

Cooking

Typing

Welding

Nursing

Airplane pilot

Could the person come at a moment's notice?

What equipment could each furnish?²²

An organization was formed, with John Diller of Hesston as the one to call. Diller had been injured in an accident and was in a wheelchair, but was eager to do what he could. This combination made him an ideal coordinator. He would always be at home or at his place of employment, and could be reached at all hours of the day or night. On May 17, 1951, the first call came. The Little Arkansas River was flooding at Wichita, and the radio stations were calling for help. Lyle Yost, president of the organization, (he was also president of the Hesston Corporation, manufacturers of farm machinery) went to Wichita to look over the situation. At six o'clock he called, saying he had promised fifteen men and a truck. Diller sent out word, not only to the original two congregations, but to several other Mennonite Churches, both of different Conferences. At eleven o'clock he had forty-five men and four trucks in Wichita building sandbag dikes. A group of women, not to be left out, were there with sandwiches for the workmen. Later in the year, more floods came, and volunteers were sent to Marion, Florence,

Kansas City, and Topeka for cleanup operations.

In cooperation with the M.C.C., the work was enlarged to include reconstruction of damaged houses. They contracted to send six men per day to help rebuild five houses. On December 26, a meeting was held at the Hesston Manufacturing Company with forty-nine people present, representing the Old Mennonite, General Conference Mennonite, and Church of God in Christ Mennonite congregations. They scheduled six workers per day through January. The Eden Mennonite Church had been omitted somehow, but when it heard of the meeting, it volunteered six men per day for six weeks. The size of the unit was doubled to twelve men, and a total of 150 men, from twenty different congregations worked through May 3. The Red Cross furnished the materials, the Mennonites built the houses and St. Marks A.M.E. Church. Women helped with the cleaning, paperhanging, and painting. What the people of Topeka could not understand was why did these men and women do this hard, often unpleasant work for nothing, asking for nothing, selling nothing. They only gave themselves and their time and labor. They were given the answer, "In the Name of Christ."

The experience in Topeka pointed to a definite need--that of a more closely knit organization. In March of 1952 word came of a tornado in White County, Arkansas. Again a meeting was called in Hesston, and representatives of twenty-eight congregations were there. A decision was made to appoint a disaster committee that would represent the group, make the contacts in the disaster area, locate the areas of greatest need, and report to the local organization, which then would call on the men and assign them work.²³ The committee was not to take the place of local organizations and was not to solicit funds. They

went to the work immediately. Each man was advised to take along sheets, a pillow, and towels, with basic carpenter tools. Housing and food would be provided. Ninety-three men responded and worked for some time.

For several years, the disaster service was called upon at least once a year to help in major disasters in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. Lists of men available in every congregation were compiled and the type of equipment they could bring. Diller sometimes spent as much as four hours straight at his old crank type telephone rounding up volunteers. He said, "We never came up very short. Many times we went way over our goal."

While serving at Meeker, Oklahoma, in 1954, a group of men were invited to a midweek prayer meeting in the Christian Church. Protesting that they had only overalls and were reluctant to attend church in work clothes, they were assured of a welcome. During the evening, the Mennonites were asked, "Do you believe in God?" After some questioning, someone suggested, "We believe the same things, so why do we have different denominations?" H. B. Schmidt, pastor of the Tabor Church, who was working with his men, replied, "Some people like red apples, some prefer yellow apples. Some like their apples sweet, some like them sour. But they are all apples. So it is with churches. Some prefer one, some another, but they are all Christians." The friendship continued with the entire congregation visiting each other.

A tornado at Udall, Kansas, in May of 1955 brought out 1,100 Mennonites with trucks on Memorial Day. A total of 1,800 worked in the cleanup. On the same day a tornado struck near Blackwell, Oklahoma, and other volunteers helped in cleanup there. The organization began to

cooperate with the Red Cross office in Wichita, becoming recognized as a trustworthy, well-equipped organization that could respond at a moment's notice. Volunteers went as far as south Texas, Haiti, and to Alaska when the great earthquake nearly destroyed Anchorage. After the Galveston, Texas, hurricane, the Red Cross people were looking for the M.D.S.

In 1955 training schools for field directors began. The following year a mobile office was added. Rescue teams were trained, and in 1960 radio equipment was obtained. The M.C.C. with its organization helped to form the service on a national level, and by 1962 the M.D.S. was a part of the M.C.C.

When a hurricane hit Gulfport, Mississippi, in 1969, the head of the Kansas M.D.S., Marvin Hostetler, was sent by plane to the area, meeting with Red Cross officials to assess the needs. A plane was obtained from the Kansas National Guard, and workers were in Gulfport the next morning. John Diller said of the organization:

Menonite Disaster Service came into being a little at a time, a 'spontaneous grass roots' organization of laymen. First, there were Christians, willing to take the injunction of Jesus Christ literally, then there appeared opportunities to put these injunctions to work. M.D.S. is the organization that emerged.

He continued:

Through four centuries of their existence, Mennonites have always practiced the commandment, 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...and thy neighbor as thyself,' wherever there was a need. But it was the demands of specialization of the mid-twentieth century which dictated the formal organization as we have it today.

There is no official membership other than church rolls. Non-Mennonites have worked with the groups. Many women help, especially in the cleanup work after floods. Many young people have become involved, especially

at the Rapid City, Nebraska, flood in 1972, when sixty-five percent of the 1,500 volunteers were under twenty-five. Mr. Hostetler said of the experience:

At first the older people looked sideways at the longhaired kids, but by night they all looked the same--muddy. By Monday, they were all one family....We had sharing sessions every night.

Mr. Hostetler said also:

You get a bond of fellowship among M.D.S.ers that you don't get in Church membership. The experience pulls us together.

Also it pulls together disaster victims. Once we hit a town in force, the effect is more than what we actually do. In Emporia we could see the morale of the people coming up in the hour.

A Red Cross official in Nebraska wrote thus concerning the work of the Mennonite volunteers:

...it just doesn't seem possible that they could accomplish so much in so short a time.

One thing we sometimes fail to recognize is the fine Christian influence that your men have upon the people in the communities where they are assisting. In years to come, they may forget all the hard work and help you have given, but the Christian spirit that they leave with the people will continue and become a part of the lives of the families who have needed assistance.²⁴

The Churches on the Washita have become part of the Mennonite Disaster Service. One of the leading men in a Church or community is elected or appointed as the contact man for the state officials to notify in case of need. State officials call this contact man, and it is his responsibility to see that volunteers are notified and are ready to respond to whatever the need may be. The Washita Churches have a man in their area, Marvin Vogt of Corn, who, with Dean Shantz of Hydro, is co-director of the Oklahoma region. As mentioned before, the Mennonites are not publicity seekers and do not keep accurate records, but they are

involved in cleanup work and reconstruction in practically every disaster area in their state. The number involved, of course, depends on the size of the disaster. In a recent report, these facts were revealed:

Two thousand man-hours have been put in, in the past year, by the Oklahoma M.D.S. workers, not counting the many days the State officials have spent, travelling all over the state giving programs in churches, working with the Red Cross, and coordinating the actual work.

If you would like to receive a real blessing the next time a disaster strikes, whether far or near, just try dropping everything and going to lend a helping hand, a listening ear, and giving some words of encouragement. You certainly will be rewarded.²⁵

Examples of the work which has been shared by the Churches on the Washita are easy to find. On Thursday, October 11, 1973, the city of Enid, Oklahoma, was drenched by a deluge of 15.62 inches of rainfall within a period of seven hours (from 5 P.M. on Wednesday to 2 A.M. Thursday). In some areas of the city water was over roof tops, according to a clipping from the Enid Morning News. The M.D.S. was immediately alerted, and in a short while men, women, and young people, with trucks, boats, and whatever tools were needed were on the scene. Students from the Oklahoma Bible Academy at Meno and young people from Corn were there, working long, hard hours. An estimated 100 man-days were put in. People who had suffered a traumatic experience could hardly believe that these Mennonites were there to help everyone who needed it regardless of race or creed.

The following year, on May 4, 1974, a tornado struck Brandenburg, Kentucky. The M.D.S. team from Oklahoma was on the job, searching for bodies, cleaning up debris, and helping in every way possible. In July a group of forty-three young people also went to the disaster area,

working in the rebuilding effort. A news clipping of the first effort stated that fifty-two men and women had traveled 1,000 miles to assist in the cleanup work.

Other activities were at Blanchard, Oklahoma, and at the Drumright, Oklahoma, nursing home when the tornadoes created havoc. Another group of young people, mostly from Corn, traveled to Deer Park, Louisiana, after a hurricane to work in cleaning up and rebuilding.

This has been a brief story of the Mennonite Disaster Service, an organization of laymen and laywomen, involving all the different Mennonite Churches in a joint effort to ease the burdens of their fellow human beings when disaster strikes. Many of their actions are not published or publicized, especially when the action is local, such as a community effort to help a family whose house has burned or a group of neighbors pitching in to help harvest the crop of someone who has met with misfortune, or to plow his fields. In all this, the Mennonites do not ask for or seek publicity, but simply carry out the principles of their forefathers in caring for those in need. These forefathers had a feeling of Gemeinschaft, a community, in which anyone's misfortune became everyone's misfortune. Therefore they responded to the needs and hurts of anyone, since that hurt their body of faith.²⁶ They went according to the Word of James: "Pure religion and undefiled is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27, KJV).

Non-resistance in America

American military conscription, especially in the two world wars, placed an acid test upon the Mennonites of the Washita. Not that

military demands were something unknown in America, but these were the first made upon those who had come from Russia in the 1870s and 1880s. For these people, who had left prosperous farms and villages, schools and churches to take up life in a raw wilderness because the Czar of Russia withdrew their privileges, particularly their exemption from military service, the prospect of conscription was terrifying, to say the least. However, Mennonites had faced this problem before in America. During the colonial period, many had settled here, especially in Pennsylvania. Later, as a result of the Napoleonic wars, most nations in Europe adopted universal military conscription. Only in Russia was there haven for those who had religious scruples against serving in armies. Therefore many of the Mennonites from Prussia, Germany, Holland, France, and Switzerland migrated to America.²⁷

The Revolutionary Period

Several thousand Mennonites were in America, and great pressure was put upon them to join the Revolutionary armies--the companies of volunteers. When they refused, mob violence broke out against them. However, the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Continental Congress both assured them that their religious convictions would be respected, although the Assembly required them to pay a fine. The Quakers refused to pay the fine, but the Mennonites paid, feeling that the government was responsible for the use or misuse of the money. The following statement was drafted, and given to the Assembly.

...we have dedicated ourselves to serve all men in everything that can be helpful to the Preservation of Men's Lives, but we find no Freedom in giving, or doing, or assisting in any Thing by which Men's Lives are destroyed or hurt...²⁸

The Civil War Period

During the Civil War was the first time a conscription law was applied in the United States. The federal order merely stated that exemptions could be allowed by the various states. Several allowed conscientious objectors to pay a fee or hire a substitute. In 1863 Congress passed a Conscription Act drafting all able-bodied males between eighteen and forty-five. Exemption could be purchased for \$300 or hiring a substitute. Mennonites felt it was improper to hire a substitute, but they did pay the commutation fee. In the South, especially Virginia, where a large number of Mennonites lived in the Shenandoah Valley, no provision was made for exemption. Some joined the army, but others hid out in the mountains. One group of seventy was captured and jailed. They were finally allowed to do non-combatant work, caring for the sick and hauling hay for the horses. In 1862 the Southern government allowed payment of \$500, which freed many young men from prison. In 1864 the draft laws were again tightened, and the fellows fled from Virginia. During Sheridan's raids in the Shenandoah Valley, the Mennonites experienced great losses. In some instances the Northern armies, finding young men of military age, tried to force them into the Union blue. So they were regarded as traitors by both sides in refusing service. As a whole the Virginia Mennonites remained true to the historic position of objection to military service.²⁹ Thus the stand taken by the Mennonites was not new in the United States when the Russian immigrants came to America in the 1870s, although they were even more sensitive to the conscription question when it came.

World War I

The Spanish American War posed no great problems, although some Mennonites reaffirmed their historic position on war. In 1915, before the United States entered World War I, the (Old) Mennonite General Conference passed a resolution that their men should suffer imprisonment or courtmartial rather than have any part in taking of human life. They also sent a letter to President Woodrow Wilson in which they declared their loyalty and cooperation, except participation in warfare.³⁰ After war was declared, provision was made for exemption, but not from non-combatant service. The Mennonites asked for complete exemption, but would accept farm work under civilian control. A third alternative was in Red Cross work.

On September 1, 1917, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker ruled that conscientious objectors should report to military camps where:

1. They would be segregated.
2. They would not be required to wear the military uniform or engage in drill.
3. They would be offered a list of services considered non-combatant but need not accept any in violation of their conscience.
4. Those who could not accept any service under the military would be held in detention camps to await such disposition as the government would decide upon.³¹

Later orders directed that Mennonites should not be forced to wear a uniform, and that conscientious objectors be segregated and handled with tact and consideration. The problem, however, was that the commanding officers allowed the lower officers and enlisted men to misuse and maltreat COs to such an extent that several died of injuries. In Camp Funston the abuses were so extreme that a major and a captain were finally removed for negligence in permitting rough treatment of the conscientious objectors by allowing them to be beaten, bayoneted, and

tortured. A Mennonite youth wrote from Camp Lee, Virginia, in 1918, "We were cursed, beaten, kicked, and compelled to go through exercises to the extent that a few were unconscious for some minutes...then... compelled to take cold shower baths. One of the boys was scrubbed with a scrubbing brush, using lye on him. They drew blood in several places."³² C. Henry Smith sums up the experiences in these words:

In other camps similar abuses prevailed, carried on usually by under officers for the purpose of breaking down the morale of the conscientious objector, or perhaps to retaliate for his refusal to obey preemptory military orders. Men were forced to stand at attention, sometimes with outstretched arms for hours and days at a time on the sunny or cold side of their barracks, exposed to the inclemencies of the weather as well as to the jeers and taunts of their fellows until they could stand no longer; chased across the fields at top speed until they fell down exhausted, followed by their guards on motor cycles; occasionally tortured by mock trials, in which the victim was left under the impression to the very last that unless he submitted to the regulations the penalty would be death. Every conceivable device--ridicule, torture, offer of promotion and other tempting inducements were resorted to in order to get them to give up their convictions; but with only few exceptions the religious objectors refused to compromise with their consciences.³³

Many of the abuses came because men refused to wear army uniforms, being fearful that if they yielded to this they would be indeed in the army and subject to courtmartial if they refused further orders. Actually they were completely within their legal rights, for Secretary of War Baker had issued orders specifically exempting COs from wearing the uniform or engaging in drills.

The young men from the Churches on the Washita who claimed conscientious objection to war suffered along with their brethren elsewhere. Details are lacking except that the Herold Church record relates the drafting of its men. Of the first three, two were sentenced to Fort Leavenworth penitentiary for refusal to serve the military. One died

there and was sent home in a uniform. The father, Elder Klaassen, removed the uniform for the funeral, which resulted in such a furor that the family moved to Canada to escape persecution. Eighteen other families also moved at the same time--about half of the community.

An estimate of Mennonite conscripts in World War I placed the number at 3,000. Of these, a large majority refused service of any kind, a substantial minority accepted non-combatant service, and a few accepted combatant status. Possibly ten percent were sent to Leavenworth, sixty percent were eventually assigned to farm or reconstruction work, with the rest unassigned at war's end.³⁴

Not only did the draftees have problems in the camps, but also they encountered trouble with draft boards that were unsympathetic. Those remaining at home were also misunderstood and mistreated. Some individuals threatened to destroy the churches because the German language was used. In Cordell the city council passed an ordinance making it an offense to speak the German language. On one occasion the Cordell newspaper published "A Revised List of County Slackers."³⁵ In other areas men were tarred and feathered, homes and churches painted yellow, and other forms of mistreatment were evident.

In Kansas and Oklahoma, about three-fourths of the General Conference and Mennonite Brethren took the C.O. position. Smith noted that among these people were those who had come from Russia in the 1870s (Russian Mennonites) and were if anything more firm in their convictions than those who had come in earlier days. These latter had a large percentage that accepted the non-combatant position.³⁶

World War II

The trials of conscientious objectors in World War I did have a practical effect, for they taught the Mennonites several lessons. One, they realized the need of making arrangements beforehand with the government concerning the status of non-resistant Christians in time of war. Then it would not be a major question in the excitement and confusion of a nation entering a war-time footing. Second, to prevent mob scenes and the ill-feeling on the part of their neighbors, they realized that a clear peacetime explanation of their position was needed to give a testimony of their loyalty and of their strong convictions. Third, the Church as a whole realized it had grown lax in teaching its own people about the historic faith of non-resistance. Many congregations undertook to bring this doctrine into sharper focus, especially to young people.³⁷

In keeping with the above resolution, the Mennonite Central Peace Committee was organized in April of 1939 (a few years later, in 1942, it became a part of the Mennonite Central Committee), which drew up a "Plan of action for Mennonites in case of War." The next year, at a meeting with Solicitor General Francis Biddle, they were asked to present three points of information: (1) A manpower report on the historic peace churches. (2) A report on the experience of Britain with COs in the present war (1940). And (3) what they would be willing to do in case of war. This enabled them to prepare for the Conscription Bill when it took effect in late 1940.³⁸

The M.C.C. urged all young men to register when called to do so and indicate their conscientious objection to military service, but state a willingness to render other useful service of a non-military nature.

Types of work they should be willing to accept were relief, reconstruction, reclamation, refugee, farm, and health services. This was presented to the president, along with a request that these services be under a civilian board of control, not within the military control as in the previous war. Also, they suggested that separate camps should be provided, not as before, within the military camps where overzealous officers had tried to force their cooperation by torture.

On January 10, 1940, a delegation met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and presented him with a statement outlining the plans as given. He expressed his appreciation of their concerns, commended them on their thoughtfulness in showing what COs could do, and sent them to interview Attorney-General Frank W. Murphy, who said, "The country is not hurt by people who exercise conscience. We need to think this through now so that good people aren't declared traitors. I will give it serious consideration and present it to the Cabinet." Later, the "Plan of Action" was presented to Secretary of War Harry Woodring, and he agreed with most of the proposals, adding that the department had been making plans along the same lines.³⁹ However, when the Burke-Wadsworth Bill was passed on June 20, 1940, it was patterned after the Selective Service Act of World War I and offered no exemption except from direct combatant service.

A delegation from the historic peace churches was sent to Washington, appearing before the Senate and House Military Affairs Committees to request: (1) Civilian rather than military control of Conscientious Objectors; (2) apply the privileges to others than members of the historic peace churches; (3) that the list of required services be enlarged; and (4) special methods of classification for conscientious objectors.

An amendment was drawn up and submitted to the Senate Committee, which reported out the text with this statement, "If the objector is found to be conscientiously opposed to participation in such non-combatant service, that he shall be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction." The final wording as passed was similar.⁴⁰

When young men were registered, they were to state on their questionnaire their objection to military service and request special form DSS 47. In some cases local draft boards insisted they had no such forms or refused to give them upon request. After some time, however, they were informed of the law and conformed to the requests. The local boards then passed judgment on the sincerity of the registrant; some boards refused all requests, which necessitated an appeal to the United States District Attorney, who usually granted the desired classification. If they did not, the registrant had the right of appeal to the President, and many did so. The requests were usually honored. Conscientious objectors were classified as 1-AO if they accepted non-combatant work, and IV-E if they refused a 1-AO and chose civilian public service instead.⁴¹

Public Service Camps

The first CO draftees arrived at a Quaker camp near Baltimore, Maryland, on May 15, 1941, and eight men arrived at the Mennonite Camp near Grottoes, Virginia, on May 22. These were the first contingent of over 4,600 Mennonites that would serve in the CPS (Civilian Public Service) camps throughout the war. The larger percentage (fifty-nine percent) of these men came from a rural background and a survey showed an average of 10.45 years of schooling, which was higher than the average

in the Army and Navy, which were 9.4 and 9.3 years respectively.⁴² Over five percent of the Mennonite Men were college graduates compared to two percent of enlisted men. This was a surprising corroboration of a study of 1,000 conscientious objectors made by a special psychological board in World War I, appointed to study the strange phenomenon of such objection. The conclusions were that the COs were above the average of all enlisted men in intelligence--hardly what those appointing the board expected to find.⁴³

The General Conference Western District to which the Churches of that denomination on the Washita belonged, had forty-two percent of their drafted men in CPS, seventeen percent in I-AO, and thirty-nine percent in the regular military. The Mennonite Brethren, to which the Corn and Bessie Churches belonged, had thirty-nine percent in CPS, twenty-six percent in I-AO, and thirty-four percent in the military service. The individual churches seem not to have kept records of their participation, but most likely were approximately following the larger trend.⁴⁴

Many of the CPS camps were former CCC camps, using their buildings and equipment. From this base, they were assigned work projects which were in the area of soil conservation, fighting forest fires, blister rust prevention, planting trees, surveying, building, and many other things that needed to be done.⁴⁵

A second camp was opened at Colorado Springs where the men worked for the Soil Conservation division of the United States Department of Agriculture. Dams were built, seventy-seven reservoirs made, 526 irrigation control structures formed, and over 22,000 man-days spent in farm work. When a rumor came that the camp was to be closed in 1943, the district SCS office, the Chamber of Commerce, the County War Board, the

National Livestock Commission, as well as the state SCS office, asked that the camp be continued.

The camp at Denison, Iowa, was particularly appreciated when the men were called to Council Bluffs in April of 1943 to help protect the city against a flood of the Missouri River. Ten days later, with the battle won, the men returned to camp. They were said to have outworked all other men. City Engineer Jack Boynes wanted to reward them, so he went to the Armory where they were quartered.

'You've done a swell piece of work, boys,' he said, 'How'd you like to go to a show?'

'We never go to shows,' they said.

'Well!' Boyne countered. 'Can I send you some cigarettes?'

'We don't smoke,' the conchies replied.

Boyne made a third attempt. 'How about some beer?'

'No!' they shouted horrified.

'Isn't there anything I can do for you?' Boynes asked.

'Yes,' they said. 'You can send us two new aprons for the cook, and four dish towels.'

These were promptly provided.⁴⁶

Here, as in some other places at first, the COs were not welcome, and they encountered antagonism. But after a time the feelings changed, and they were a welcome addition to the community. Many were married men whose wives lived in the town, worked there, and mixed with the other women.

Camps were established in other states--in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Colorado, Idaho, Ohio, Indiana, California, Montana, and Oregon. An indication of the amount of work done was the report of Forest Supervisor Edwin F. Smith that CPS boys had been doing 2.8 times the

amount of work per man-hour than had been done by the CCC boys whose place they had taken.⁴⁷ One of the more exciting details was that of smoke-jumping. Men were trained to jump by parachute into inaccessible areas of forest in order to fight fires. This was a very elect unit, since less than 240 men served in it by the time it was closed in 1946.

Mental Hospital Work

A great area of work for COs was in hospitals. Because this type of work was paying less than people could earn in factories during the war years, it became almost impossible to hire help, especially in the mental hospitals. The Philadelphia State Hospital, with 6,000 inmates, and a normal complement of 1,000 workers, was down to 200, so when it became possible to sign on some CO workers the hospitals took all they could get.

The first such unit was authorized in July of 1942 at Western State Hospital at Staunton, Virginia. It was difficult work with poor living quarters, long working hours (twelve to fourteen hours per day), seven days a week, with two afternoons a week off duty. By the end of the second year, after a change of administration, conditions at the hospital were much better. Later, hospital units were opened in a number of other states. In some, as many as 100 CPS men were at work, and in every situation they won high praise for doing a difficult job, often under hard conditions and without preliminary training and yet going far beyond the call of duty. At the height of the program in 1945, there were over 1,000 men in twenty-six Mennonite hospital and training school units. In all, over 1,500 served in such units.⁴⁸

As a result of the hospital work, an intense interest in mental

institutions was created among Mennonites. Young doctors were urged to specialize in psychiatry, and in 1947, just a year or so after the CPS units were phased out, a Mennonite mental rest home was built in Leitersburg, Maryland. In 1948 another was built near the world's largest Mennonite church group on the west coast, near Reedley, California. And the Prairie View Hospital was established at Newton, Kansas. All are under the direction of the M.C.C. Hospital Section, and carry out the distinctive faith of the Mennonites in caring for those who are infirm, mentally as well as spiritually.

Financing the CPS Camps

Since the churches desired that the control of the CPS camps be in their hands, the President was in strong opposition to the government providing the finances or paying the men even the nominal wages that enlisted men were receiving. The alternative finally became: government control with no wages, or Church control with no wages. The M.C.C. then undertook to finance the whole CPS program, including the food. Consequently, the M.C.C. assigned quotas to the various branches of the Mennonites represented, and from 1941 through 1947 contributions in cash and in kind, (largely canned foods) amounted to a total of \$3,386,254.25. It had been agreed that all CO registrants would be under this financing, regardless of whether they were members of the historic peace churches or not.⁴⁹ It would have cost more, but those working in the hospital units, training schools, and dairy service received food and lodging. The men helped out by raising gardens; some raised pigs. One camp had a herd of milk cows.

The men received no wages whatever, except an allowance of \$1.50 per month. Later this was increased to \$2.50 for non-Mennonite men, but the

M.C.C. discontinued even the \$1.50 in December of 1941. Some men took up outside work if this did not affect their camp duties, and the wives of married men also worked in many cases. Some of the home churches sent regular amounts, usually small, to the men. In January of 1944, the M.C.C. began depositing \$5 per month to the account of each Mennonite CPS man, from which he could draw. After discharge, whatever amount was left in his account was paid to him directly. The home churches were urged to provide \$25 per month for wives and \$10 per month for dependent children to assist in living expenses. When demobilized, the CPS men, some of whom had worked up to five years without pay, were not eligible for separation pay or the G.I. Bill.

Each conference group made its own plans for separation pay. For example, the Mennonite Brethren men received a love gift of \$25, plus \$5 per month for time served, up to \$150. Whatever plan they were in, none of the men profited financially by the stand they had taken. Instead, they suffered financial loss, for even enlisted men received their monthly wages, dependency allotments, severance pay, and later were able to attend college on the G.I. Bill. True to the faith of their fathers, they showed a willingness to sacrifice for their convictions. And of the thousands who served, only about forty Mennonites were convicted of violating the Selective Service Act, compared with nearly 1,000 other conscientious objectors who were non-Mennonite and violated the laws.⁵⁰

The P A X Program

The story of the work of the M.C.C. and its kindred Mennonite organizations would not be complete without an account of the PAX work.

The CPS camps during World War II were a definite testimony of Men-
nonite convictions and their willingness to obey laws to whatever extent
possible, but to refuse any work that aided or abetted the taking of
human life in any form. But the war ended, and by 1947 the CPS camps
were phased out. Then in 1950 the outbreak of the Korean War again con-
fronted the Mennonites with a challenge. Some began to ask, Why must
we always wait for our government and some international crisis to nudge
us into an expression of our love ethic?" As a result, a Builder's Unit
was organized and sent to Germany to assist refugees to acquire homes
and aid in reconstruction. On April 1, 1951, the first PAX unit ar-
rived in Europe, to begin a work that has literally reached around the
world. Bender states:

That service did not represent an escape from military ob-
ligation or a running away from danger.... Nor was it
primarily a telling mission or even a doing mission. Per-
haps the essence of every PAXer's contribution was his
willingness to be with people in need, to live in re-
lationship with deprived persons, to sit where they sit.
(This last expression is taken from Ezekiel 3:15, 'Then
I came to them of the captivity at Telabib, that dwelt
by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and
remained there astonished among them seven days.') King
James Version, Holy Bible.⁵¹

PAX men were persons that wanted to accept a positive attitude, to
rebuild, to help, to show that conscientious objection was not simply a
passive or negative stand. At times they have been in danger, as in the
recent war in Vietnam, yet they have been ready to serve and carry out
the highest expression of religious love for their fellow men. In other
words, they became involved.

To demonstrate the depth of their commitment, each PAX volunteer
had to contribute \$75 per month toward his own expenses, or \$900 per
year. Out of this his travel, room, board, and other expenses were paid,

and he received ten dollars per month for personal expenses. Later, costs became higher, and he had to contribute ninety dollars per month, or \$1,080 per year. Qualifications for service were:

1. Personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
2. Active membership in a Christian Church.
3. Be prepared to participate in Christian witness in both word and deed, with commitment to a ministry of Christian non-resistance and reconciliation.
4. Readiness to participate in the religious, educational, and social program of the church, community, and M.C.C. team, where the person is assigned.
5. Emotionally and physically qualified to cope with new and diverse demands of work, responsibility, and adjustments involved in cross-cultural assignments.
6. Willing to abstain from the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages.
7. Respectful towards the convictions of others, understanding of differing customs and religions, and cooperative with the administration in carrying out the total purpose.
8. Vocationally competent to fulfill the job expectation and grow into expanding assignments.⁵²

Since the CPS program had been closed for some years, the new Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951 specified that the CO was to be "ordered to perform...such civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest as the local board may deem appropriate." A special classification was set up, with a 1-W designation for COs performing such work, instead of the IV-E which had designated them under the earlier law. The M.C.C. then designated PAX as an overseas I-W program. By 1968, when Bender wrote his very excellent history of the movement, the units had served in thirty-nine countries on every continent, beginning in Germany among the refugees, many of whom were Mennonites who had followed the German armies in their retreat from Russia, then going to Greece, Austria, Belgium, Holland, France, and Switzerland, down into Africa, into the Asian countries, into the Caribbean, and into South America. They went wherever there

was a need for builders, agricultural specialists, cattle raising, sheep, chickens, nutrition, better living, building schools--the list is endless.

The men worked with their hands, helping dig wells, encouraging irrigation projects, educating people, living with them in their houses, eating their food, enduring their hardships. Many of the PAXmen were farm lads, and they simply applied American knowhow to the local situation. An example was in hog production. First, hogs were raised under modern conditions and practices to show how much they would gain weight and grow compared to native strains. Then selected farmers were given gilts; when her first litter of pigs came, one was to be returned to the unit so another farmer could receive it. Usually the program worked well.⁵³

Experiments were made to determine crop rotations and better seeding and fertilizing practices with cereal grains, berries, potatoes, onions, and corn. This type of work was repeated in nearly every country, thus being a form of self-help to enable the indigenous population to do a better job of helping itself.

A unique feature of PAX was that for the first time girls and women were allowed to volunteer. At first only older women were accepted to serve as matrons and to add a feminine touch to the dormitories where units were housed. Then younger women were allowed to enter the work to aid in nursing, health problems, teaching, household skills, and many other things and ways in which the men could not serve.

Among the dangers faced by PAXmen were revolts in Africa, where two were in the group of prisoners facing execution in the Belgian Congo. Another member of their group was with Dr. Paul E. Carlson, who was

machine-gunned to death on November 24, 1964. Yet, after it was over, the young men expressed a desire to return, to serve again without reward.

There were many examples of the work of the PAX units and the inspiration they were to the people whom they served. Perhaps the greatest tribute is the story that made the rounds among the Mennonites some years ago. It seems that President John F. Kennedy became acquainted with the work of the PAX units as a part of the I-W alternate service program. He liked the idea of working in a positive way to help those who were disadvantaged, and as a result formulated the Peace Corps that became a great area of service for American young people. It was operated on basically the same principles as PAX and even borrowed the name, since Pax is the Latin word for peace. No greater compliment could be paid to any organization than that of being copied by those in authority.

At first glance it may seem that in this chapter, especially in the sections dealing with the M.C.C., with PAX, and to a lesser extent with MDS, is a departure from the initial focus of this paper to concentrate on the churches and communities along the Washita. But in presenting this view of the Mennonites and the way in which they are sustaining their goals of compassion and charity, of helping those in need, as well as in service to their country in time of war, it is impossible to separate the individual churches from the greater scope of the M.C.C. and its work, just as it is impossible to differentiate from the work of an individual and his church. In fact, it shows that Mennonites have learned to unite and work as one in relief, in reconstruction, in picking up debris after a storm, be it of nature, or the storm of war. In

this sense, the individuals, the churches, and the communities are simply parts of a unified whole, working together to demonstrate their deepest, innermost feelings of love and brotherhood to the world.

The freedom to serve mankind without the taking of life was one of the basic doctrines and principles for which the Mennonites had spent four hundred years as wanderers, migrating from country to country and continent to continent in search of a homeland where they could live according to the dictates of their conscience and their God. The fact of non-resistance is part of the fabric of their lives and cannot be separated from their story without leaving out that warp and woof that knits the threads together.

FOOTNOTES

¹Agatha Funk, History of the Corn Community (Unpublished manuscript) No date given. These verses read thus:

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

--James 5:14-16, King James Version,
Holy Bible.

²Notes from the Minutes of the Corn M. B. Church, p. 4.

³Newspaper clippings of the Home. Names of publishers and dates were not given.

⁴Report of the Board, by Alvina Bergmann, Administrator, April 1, 1973.

⁵Handbook of Information, 1974-1975. General Conference Mennonite Church (Newton, Kansas, 1974).

⁶Dr. J. B. Toews, Corn M. B. Church, informal meeting.

⁷Yearbook of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1972).

⁸Mennonite Brethren Workers Directory (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1974).

⁹Resolutions of the M. B. General Conference, 1878-1963 (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1963). Compiled by A. W. Janzen.

¹⁰Yearbook of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1972).

¹¹John H. Lohrenz, History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1950), p. 72.

¹²Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 140.

¹³ John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), p. 110.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁶ P. C. Hiebert, Feeding the Hungry, the Russian Famine, 1919-1925 (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1929), p. 296.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁸ Dyck, An Introduction, p. 142.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 241, 243.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 245.

²¹ Ibid., p. 251.

²² Lois Barrett Janzen, From Picnic to International Organization (Unpublished Manuscript), (Hesston, Kansas, no date given).

²³ John Diller, Mennonite Disaster Service in the Beginning (Unpublished Manuscript), (Hesston, Kansas, 1971).

²⁴ Janzen, From Picnic, p. 14.

²⁵ An Official's Report of M.D.S.

²⁶ Isaac Clarence Kulp, "Love Stories from Old Alms Books" published in Sharing (Goshen, Indiana, July, 1975), p. 5.

²⁷ Melvin Gingerich, Service for Peace (Akron, Pennsylvania, 1949), p. 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹ Ibid., p. 8.

³² Ibid., p. 10.

³³ C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 797.

³⁴ Gingerich, Service for Peace, p. 11.

³⁵ The Cordell Beacon, April 18, 1974, p. 3a.

³⁶ Smith, Story, p. 803.

- ³⁷Gingerich, Service for Peace, p. 11.
- ³⁸Ibid., p. 41.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 45.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 47-48.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 87.
- ⁴³C. Henry Smith, Story, p. 809.
- ⁴⁴Gingerich, Service for Peace, p. 91.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 101.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 118, taken from the Omaha World Herald.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 132.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 214.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 543.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 389.
- ⁵¹Urie A. Bender, Soldiers of Compassion (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1969), p. 17.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 272.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER FOUR CENTURIES---WHAT NOW?

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In his book, Brothers in Christ, Fritz Blancke makes the following observation:

We are familiar with the criticism which Goethe made of the Writings of Church History. In the Ninth of his *Zahmen Xenien* he says: 'What do I have to do with Church History? I don't see anything but Parsons. How it goes with the Christians, the ordinary people, about that I can find nothing.'

In reality, the sources of Church History do show us how the theologians have felt and thought, or what great personalities have deeply experienced. But of the soul struggles of the ordinary nameless Christian man we hear practically nothing.¹

Our thesis as stated in Chapter I was the preservation of the basic tenets and doctrines of Mennonite faith through centuries of pilgrimage in many different countries under varying conditions, both political and economic.

It has been part of my purpose of show the ordinary people, the average day-by-day Mennonites, as they settled on the banks of the Washita, as they worked to establish themselves and their families, and as they tried to regain the prosperity they lost in the transition from Russia to America. But the ordinary must be within the overall picture of the brotherhood.

Are the Mennonites of the Washita still conforming to the basic beliefs and cultures that have characterized them for so many years, or

have they changed? This is not a discussion on the theological level, nor does it pretend to be. That we leave to the theologians. But we do need to keep in mind that Mennonites are men who follow the Bible as their guide, who accept its teachings literally and mold their entire lives by them. Therefore we can no more leave out references to the Bible and their religious beliefs than one could write a history of the Pilgrims or the Puritans, of Roger Williams and Rhode Island, or William Penn and Pennsylvania, and omit all mention of religion. It simply would not make any sense.

In attempting to reach some conclusions, it may be best to use the method of comparison: the Mennonites of today versus those of a century ago. Are these different, and what advantages or disadvantages does the difference or similarity hold? Since Mennonites have traditionally been a rural people, let us look first at this area.

Agriculture

Mennonites have for centuries been known as some of the finest agriculturalists that could be found anywhere. In Prussia and Poland, they took the swamps of the Vistula Delta, uninhabited and useless, but after draining and clearing it, the area became a rich and prosperous garden spot. Later generations of Prussians and Poles asked, "Why did these foreigners ever obtain the finest lands in the kingdom?" and began repressions to force out the Mennonites so they, themselves, would acquire the coveted lands.

In Russia the Mennonites moved into a barren, semi-arid land, changed their methods of farming to include the moisture-saving fallowing of the fields, planted trees, and made the land into the bread-

basket of Russia. The difference was so apparent that a foreign observer is said to have exclaimed, "Why? do the Mennonites have a different God?" upon seeing a Mennonite field that had been summer-fallowed and bearing a good crop next to one that was burned by the drought.² Agriculture was a religious duty. Hard work was a God-given privilege, and woe to the one who shirked either of these.

The ability to make the desert blossom was transferred to America. Arriving in Kansas after disastrous droughts and a grasshopper invasion, the Mennonites settled, and in a few months their wheat began to grow. One must almost begin to wonder about their uncanny ability to choose only the most productive land--or did they possess an uncanny ability, a touch, that caused whatever land they farmed to produce profusely?

The Daily Record of Lawrence, Kansas, said in 1890:

After sixteen years those Mennonites are with us still. They abided and toiled in Marion, McPherson, and Harvey counties...went on tilling their 100,000 acres of land... and every fall, no matter what the season, wheat has been brought to the Newton Market in untold quantities from that settlement....The Mennonite says nothing, but goes on marketing his fat cattle, his corn and wheat....³

Another writer said:

Day after day, all through the fall and winter, the Mennonites come in with wheat. The native American stands on the corner and complains, but the Mennonites come in with wheat. The Farmers Alliance holds its secret and noiseless sessions, and nothing breaks the silence save the chuck of the Mennonites' wheat laden wagons.⁴

Suffice it to say that even today, after a century has passed, the Mennonite communities encompass some of the most fertile and prosperous farming areas in the Midwest. The communities on the Washita are no exception. A trip through the area reveals prosperous, well-kept farmsteads, herds of sleek cattle, with the finest, most modern equipment that money can buy and American technology can produce.

The serious questioner may well ask whether this is entirely what our forefathers had in mind. In reading the story of the Churches, a revelation comes to view. One Church after another became extinct. The Sichar Church, once prosperous and growing, with over a hundred members in 1935, was forced to close in 1947 because it was too small. The parent Bergthal Church, in existence since 1894, closed in 1974 because of too few members. The Herold Church, while still in operation, has decreased in number, although some were added by the closing of the other two churches, at which time some members transferred to Herold. Other small churches that have ended their existence were the Gotebo Mennonite Church and the Salem Mennonite Church, which simply ran out of people.

Even the larger Bessie (Cordell) and the Corn M. B. Churches have felt the pressure of decreased attendance. The Corn congregation at one time numbered over 760 members, with an attendance of well over 800 in the Sunday School; today it has around 450 members and an attendance of less than 300. One might well ask, "What has caused the loss of members?"

There are many reasons. One of the times when the greatest losses occurred was the depression and drought of the Thirties when many people moved to the west coast, mainly California. The Sichar Church records show that at that time thirty-five out of its eighty-nine members were residing in California. Other churches lost members in a similar way. The Bethel K.M.B. Church also closed in 1937 due to a drop in membership. The Herold Church lost a third of its people in 1918-1919 as a result of the rigid draft laws when families moved to Canada.

But those are incidents that would be overcome by natural increase,

since Mennonites traditionally had large families with ten, twelve, or more children, as revealed in the family records of the Church record books. This brings us back to agriculture and the question: "Was the prosperity, and the work ethic of the Mennonites responsible for the decrease in numbers?"

Let us look for a parallel in history. When the Mennonites migrated to Russia in the 1780s to the early 1800s, each family received sixty-five desjatine of land (175 acres) free. The population doubled every twenty-five years because families averaged eight children. According to law, only one son could inherit the estate; the others had to find other land, which soon became difficult and finally almost impossible, or enter some other area of work, which was equally difficult and considered degrading. By 1865 nearly two-thirds of the Mennonites were landless Anwohner; the other third were the landowners, called Wirte. Only landowners could vote, so the majority were disfranchised and powerless, and this led to strife and hatred.⁵

It is tempting to speculate on what might have happened in time, but just a few years later the Great Migration to America removed 18,000 people, releasing the pressure. In addition, manufacturing was being developed, and many of the previously unemployed could find work.

The parallel in America today is evident. Kauffman and Harder, in a recent study entitled Anabaptists--Four Centuries Later (1975) show that in America today only thirty-four percent of all Mennonites live on farms. This means that approximately the same percentage are on farms today as there were in Russia in 1865. However, the fact that nearby cities offer almost unlimited job opportunities has removed the pressure from those who by choice or financial considerations are unable to farm.⁶

There is another facet which would show that Mennonites today have departed somewhat from the ethic of their fathers. Interviews with some of the older people, who as children came to this country with their parents, revealed that some original settlers did not take up more land than they deemed necessary to make a living. In some instances it was decided that eighty acres was sufficient although they could have homesteaded 160. The opinion was also given that the distance to market at El Reno was really immaterial, for few people would want to raise a great amount of marketable goods anyway.

Concerning one church group, the K.M.B., author Toews quotes C. Henry Smith as follows:

Like other groups, they discouraged worldliness in superfluous dress, excessive buying of land [underlining added] attendance at theatres, and circuses, carrying guns, hail insurance, and voting.⁷

Today this caution against expansion has been forgotten. The sky is the limit, and when one tractor is not sufficient to work the ground, another is purchased, or two or three or more. Some of these cost up to \$40,000 or even more. When one combine cannot harvest the acreage, two or three more are procured at a cost of \$30,000 or more each. Economists may point with pride to this and call it progress toward greater efficiency and productivity, with one family covering thousands of acres. But as one drives through the countryside, where each quarter section formerly housed a family, or possibly two, now only a solitary windmill or a clump of trees or a delapidated barn or other outbuilding, with perhaps occasionally a large two-story house, indicates the previous large families and prosperity. Today they are in disarray and decay. Small wonder that churches and schools are dying. There is no room for the people. And those who would love to farm find the financial demands

impossible to meet, with the machinery for even a modest beginning costing \$50,000 to \$150,000 and more and land too dear to be purchased at almost any price, around \$1,000 an acre.

However, there are advantages to urbanization. Since America is highly industrialized, the overflow of the farm population can readily find employment. For those from the Washita communities, nearby towns and cities are close enough to offer a place for many. Cordell, Clinton, and Weatherford absorb many. Just a little farther afield is Oklahoma City. Evidence of the flow to the cities are the churches that have been established in each of the above named places, with four in Oklahoma City. The greater density of population in turn lends itself to greater efforts at evangelization, of offering the Anabaptist doctrines and principles to non-Mennonite peoples in a far greater measure than ever before attempted or have ever been possible in a rural setting. Mennonites have traditionally increased in numbers solely through their own reproductive ability, except in foreign missions.⁸

Another departure from tradition that may be of equal gravity, perhaps even more so, is the language accommodation. For four hundred years the Mennonites have clung tenaciously to their mother tongue, with the only change being an accommodation to a related language--German. Speaking Platt-Deutsch originally, the German language was adopted in Prussia. But the threat of being forced to teach Russian in their schools played a major role in causing the Great Migration--almost as great as that threat of military service. Now, spurred on by two major wars in which their loyalty was questioned because of the language they used, intense pressure upon the Mennonites has caused a wholesale abandonment of the two languages. In another generation or two there will

be few left that would be able to understand or speak either language, possibly a few more than would be conversant in German since it is a major European language.

It may be that the older Mennonites view is extreme, as quoted from C. Henry Smith:

To the Mennonites, especially, there seemed to be a close relation between their distinctive Mennonitism and their Deutschtum. It was a matter of grave doubt to many of them whether they could maintain their traditional religious principles separated from their German tongue and culture.⁹

The studies of Kauffman and Harder seem to bear out this contention, although it seems incredible that language alone would have such a powerful influence. The study, a comprehensive and exhaustive work in objectively measuring Anabaptist trends, stated: "...the movement of members to the city does not appear to be conducive to commitment to Anabaptist doctrines."¹⁰ The authors also state "...that an urban group is more likely to draw non-Mennonite members," but "...they are less likely to register as war dissenters" and "they are increasingly tempted to surrender their spiritual heritage and their confessional identity."¹¹

The statement that urban people would be less likely to register as dissenters is bolstered by the actual figures from World War II in which fifty-nine percent of the Mennonites in CPS were from a rural area. Of course at that time, 1940-1946, a larger percentage of Mennonites still lived on farms.¹²

The conclusions reached by Kauffman and Harder, as related above, may possibly be attributed to a combination of factors or to both urbanization and the loss of language. The urban setting, in which the individual Mennonite and his family find themselves surrounded by persons of other faiths and beliefs, thus cutting him adrift from the supportive

influences of the family ties and Church ties, with their strong emphasis upon conformation to accepted doctrines, is likely either to forget or to neglect the peculiar facets of his traditional beliefs, especially, in a crunch, that of non-resistance. A common language that he shares with family members and sets them apart from the "world" also tends to strengthen the bonds of traditionalism. When that language is dispensed with, those bonds would be weakened and possibly broken. Tradition and the knowledge of a great heritage is also increasingly lost until, with succeeding generations, the young are scarcely aware of the struggles of their forefathers to gain freedom at a tremendous cost. One might, however, point to the European Mennonites who retained their language yet dropped their emphasis on non-resistance and other areas.

Economic Affluence

During the century that Mennonites have lived in America, they have gone from poverty to affluence as they did in Russia during the preceding century. To some extent this affluence is reflected in their beautiful, modern homes, and the extensive, well-equipped farmsteads. Possibly better indices of this prosperity would be in the areas of Church giving and properties. In 1951 the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America valued its churches at \$2,678,920. In 1968 investments in church properties for one year alone was \$1,304,000. A number of buildings were erected that cost from a quarter to a half million dollars each.¹³ Another index is Conference giving. In 1883, total contributions were \$1,258.21. Ten years later it had increased, with \$971.11 for home missions and \$955.50 for foreign missions. In 1938, despite the depression, total contributions had risen to \$195,678; by

1959 it had grown to \$3,203,904, an increase of over 1,600 percent in twenty-one years.¹⁴ In 1972 foreign mission income was \$1,329,731.98. In the Southern District of the Mennonite Brethren, a total of all offerings in 1974 was \$1,691,036.96.¹⁵ The M. B. Churches of the Washita were included in this total with substantial amounts, and the per family income for Mennonites is said to be substantially higher than the American average.

Many Mennonite historians and thinkers express a warning that this prosperity might be a hindrance to the continuation of Mennonite ideals. Frank H. Epp stated, "...the prosperity of the post-World War II era was allowing some Russländer to forget the sufferings and hardships of yesterday, while it is also threatening to sap their moral and spiritual strength."¹⁶ J. A. Toews spoke in a similar somber vein when he said:

Material progress and prosperity in the life of a brotherhood has the potential for either blessing or curse. Money invested in the salvation of man, wealth dedicated to the expansion of Christ's kingdom, material means used for the alleviation of human need and suffering--all this can be a great blessing. But when wealth is used for self-indulgence and self-glory, it constitutes a grave spiritual danger and undermines the effective witness of the church. In Russia, many Mennonite Brethren viewed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent confiscation of all property as God's judgment on Mennonite materialism. May history not have to repeat itself in America.¹⁷

Education

For a short period of time, after the Mennonite people began to drop the German language, it seemed superfluous to retain an insistence on church schools. A number of them were closed. In Kansas several academies, teaching at the high school or secondary level, were phased out. In Oklahoma the sentiment in some communities favored a similar disposition, as Mennonite schools at Enid and Fairview joined the list of

extinct institutions.

However, the churches in the Washita area have continued their support, the M. B. Churches with Corn Bible Academy and the G.C. Churches with Oklahoma Bible Academy at Meno. In recent years, with the Supreme Court rulings on Bible reading and prayers in schools, the Mennonites have felt more and more threatened in their freedom to educate their children. This, too, was a major cause for the Great Migration, the forced takeover of the German-language schools where the Bible was a basic subject. Language itself is not the issue, for German can be taught and is being taught as a foreign language; however, the threat of the study of the Bible is very real. Additional controversial subjects, such as sex education, taught without emphasizing the moral principles of a religious background, and biological science, which is usually taught in public schools from a humanistic standpoint, especially concerning evolution versus Divine creation, which disturbs the Biblical literalism of the staunch Mennonites, has given added impetus to Church-supported schools.

In the field of higher education, Mennonites as a whole have made great strides. While there are no colleges in the Washita area, the Churches all share in Conference higher education. The United States Mennonite Brethren Conference, with a membership of 14,767 (1972) supports Tabor College at Hillsboro, Kansas, a four-year liberal arts college; Pacific College, in Fresno, California, a four-year liberal arts school; and the M. B. Biblical Seminary, also in Fresno. The General Conference Churches support colleges and a seminary, although they have a larger membership. Large numbers of Mennonite young people enter institutions of higher learning. The statistics of CPS men in World War II showed

that the Mennonites averaged a year of schooling more than other enlisted men in the Army and Navy. It would be interesting to discover the actual percentage of Mennonite young people attending college compared to the average in the United States. In a certain high school operated by Mennonites, with the average graduating class of forty students over a four-year period, only three or four out of the 160 graduates did not attend college. One reason why this is higher than the average American high school is that Mennonite families have a higher average income, by several thousand dollars, than the American norm. Also, there are few Mennonites that could be classed as poor. Most are in the upper middle class and realize the importance of education. Thus Mennonites of the Washita are cognizant of the need and are keeping the tradition of education in Mennonite communities.

Industry

There is no heavy industry in the Washita area that is controlled by Mennonites. In their expansion into surrounding towns and cities, there are a number of small businesses operated by them. In Kansas, Mennonites have made a mark in industry, notably in flour milling, at least in the early years, and lately with farm machinery. The Hesston Manufacturing Company, said to be the seventh largest manufacturer of implements in the United States, was organized by Mennonites. This parallels their industries in Russia which specialized in farm machinery. In other areas, both on the east and west coasts, Mennonites control some large industries.

Will There Be Another Great Migration?

At first thought, one might be tempted to say, "God forbid!" But then, as one weighs the question, the answer could be either "Yes" or "No." Any conclusion would be speculative, yet it need not be mere guesswork. Possibly at this time the answer would have to be "No," although that depends on many variables. The factors which led to the migration from Russia most likely would not all be present at one time. Their military exemption was taken away; their language was threatened by being forced to study Russian in their schools; their autonomy in operating their schools was lost, for they were to be under Russian supervision; and it could well be that their very religion would be infringed upon, for the other freedoms of their Privilegium had been revoked. There also was the question of land. As farmers, they were unable to find a supply of cheap and abundant land. A comparison of conditions in Russia and current freedoms in America reveals:

1. Freedom of conscience is stronger in America today than ever before. World War II did not impose the serious consequences for COs that World War I did. In succeeding conflicts, especially the Vietnam War, objectors have had more popular support than at any time in the history of the nation. It has been impressed upon the consciousness of the people at large that there possibly are alternate ways of settling conflict other than war, especially since modern warfare, even without the use of nuclear weapons, approaches genocide, indiscriminately killing and maiming women and children as well as the men. Legislators have had to recognize that there are men who honestly and completely renounce killing as a legitimate exercise in time of war.

2. The language question is rapidly being erased as a factor. For the first time in four hundred years, Mennonites have voluntarily relinquished their beloved mother tongue. Few of the generation now approaching military age know anything of those languages, at least not in the Washita valley. If they do know a few words, most likely they took classes in German in school, unlike their fathers and mothers, many of whom learned Platt-Deutsch at home, heard German in Church services, and spoke English after they began attending school.

3. In those areas where there were no German schools, local control of the public schools satisfied earlier Mennonites, although the children of pioneer days attended a German school, taught by some local individual, far more zealously than they attended the five-or six-month session of the public school. Presently, there is still a choice, for there are Church-supported schools, although financially the choice is a painful one. The freedom is still there, albeit not as great as in past years.

4. Freedom of religion is still in tact, at least to the extent that no one is forbidden to hold some faith and doctrine. In some other areas of the United States this has been held synonymous with freedom of schools, and it has definitely been infringed upon, for schools must conform to state laws. This is sometimes equated with the Russian demand for control of schools. Otherwise, as far as actual freedom of worship is concerned, there has been no interference. During the two world wars, when the German language was still used, this became a question of loyalty. Now practically all services are in English, so there is no interference in any way.

5. Because Mennonites in Russia had their Privilegium, revocation

of any part of it immediately caused suspicion that the government was using high-handed and illegal tactics to undermine their freedom. In the United States Mennonites were promised equal protection of the laws and the courts. No special document promised immunity or privilege. They came in faith that the constitution would be upheld, and it has been more or less upheld, the verdicts of the courts applying to all.

In view of the above answers to the problems as they beset our forefathers in Russia, one would perforce have to say: "No, we will never again migrate--." To many Mennonites, the greatest argument would be the question, "Where to?" Migrations require not only a cause, but also a place of refuge, where the refugee can go with a reasonable expectation of finding those goals he was denied in his former home. The last reason given for leaving Russia was to acquire land for the landless, an absolute imperative for a people who equated tilling the soil with worship of their God--Bibel und Pflug (Bible and Plow). Thus the argument "where to" asks where there would be land in abundance as well as freedom of worship, of schools, of language, or conscientious objection to war. There are places in South America, where there are thousands of Mennonites, that ostensibly meet these requirements, but with governments that are not stable; thus the situation could be reversed overnight and become more menacing than elsewhere. It has sometimes been suggested that a move might be possible to Australia, but it has never engendered a serious response.

Taking all these arguments into consideration, one would feel that the proper answer to the question: "Will there be another migration?" would have to be an absolute "No!" But the situation could change with great rapidity. Even if we discount the language factor entirely, the

remaining factors could influence the Mennonites to consider a change. It is not inconceivable that at some time in the future, whether near or distant, another great power would mount an invasion. Under the stress of urgency, the American government could require absolute universal military service or guerilla warfare. The Mennonites would then be plunged into a situation comparable to that faced by their counterparts in Russia during the German invasion of both world wars. There would be one great difference: the Germans were welcomed as liberators in World War II, for churches were opened, worship services restored, and other freedoms extended to those who had just recently experienced the famines, bandit hordes, confiscations, and purges of the Stalin era.¹⁸ American Mennonites today would welcome no invader.

Nevertheless, if an invasion or other extraordinary circumstance should cause the United States government to refuse a consideration of conscientious objectors, what would the reaction be? One can point to several circumstances in looking for an answer. First, during World War I many Mennonites sold their farms and goods and moved to Canada. As was pointed out in another chapter, half of the membership of the Herold Church on the Washita was among those who made the move because they felt the government was not living up to their expectations about the military conscription laws, while the Canadian government had specifically exempted Mennonites from such service. This action by the people on the Washita was by no means an isolated case. Large numbers also left Kansas to migrate to the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. About eighty-five persons left the Hoffnungsau community near Inman, Kansas. Others were from Hillsboro and Goessel. In all, an estimated 600 to 800 Mennonites made the move. Most of these were

from the Midwest where they experienced the most fanatical opposition. Allen Teichrow, in writing about this phenomenon, said, "A common attribute was the determination not to be conscripted...a startling steadfastness.... The war threatened their identity as a religious and ethnic community, and demanded emotional and financial commitments antithetic to their way of life."¹⁹ This incident would prove that, given sufficient reasons and aggravated by contrary laws, many would consider migrating.

Yet at no time in the history of the Mennonites has a migration been universal. Beginning in Holland, only those most deeply concerned moved to Prussia and Poland, those with the deepest convictions and the courage to carry out those convictions. Others bent with the tide and remained. Again, when the migration from Prussia to Russia took place, only a minority made the trek. Some were poor, some landless, others well-to-do, but all were sternly resisting the pressures of the government to accept military service. As a result, they received their Privilegium and a century of freedom. The greater number, the majority who remained, again bowed to the tide of imperial law, and within a few years non-resistance, and conscientious objection to war became only a memory.

Again in the 1870s, when the Privilegium was revoked, the greater majority accepted the inevitable--service in forestry and the sanitation corps and hospital duty. They remained in Russia, in what has been called "...the historical error...."²⁰ Only a nominal percentage of the Mennonite population of Russia migrated; 18,000 out of an estimated 60,000 to 100,000 made their way to America. However, these were the ones who were the staunchest, the most iron-willed in rising to protect

their faith and convictions, even to the point of leaving everything to find a place where they again would have freedom. In today's membership of approximately 200,000 in the United States, this would mean a migration of 36,000 to 60,000. This would be almost incredible, yet not impossible in view of the immeasurably greater mobility of today's people compared to those of a century ago.

However, it is a startling conclusion that must be reached in a study of the migration that the steadfastness and virility of faith was by far the greatest among those who did suffer "the loss of all things," to quote the Apostle Paul (Philippians 3:8). Those who chose to retain their property and goods eventually were forced to discard some of their most cherished doctrines and eventually became a weak and vitiated Church. Those who chose the hard and difficult path became the leaders of the movement in a strong and healthy Church.

One Mennonite Brethren leader, Henry H. Dick, who until recently was president of the seminary, wrote: "...In the later years of the (Vietnam) war military participation by Mennonite Brethren dropped from 60% to 40%." In other words, those stating their objection to war rose in reverse ratio.²¹

In view of the growing trend toward non-resistance, and with the stated argument that it would only take a small percentage of the total Mennonite membership to begin a migration, one might answer the question, "Would Mennonites migrate again?" in the affirmative. "Yes, they would, if given provocation and if they felt they could find a suitable place to which they could go."

Kauffman and Harder mentioned this dilemma indirectly. They quoted one of Niebuhr's theories:

Rarely does a second generation hold the convictions it has inherited with the fervor equal to that of its fathers, who fashioned those convictions in the heat of conflict and at the risk of martyrdom. As generation succeeds generation, the isolation of the community from the world becomes more difficult. Furthermore, wealth frequently increases when the sect subjects itself to the discipline of asceticism in work and expenditure; with the increase of wealth the possibilities for culture also become more numerous and involvement in the economic life of the nation as a whole can less easily be limited. Compromise begins and the ethics of the sect approach the churchly type of morals.²²

Thus the theory seems valid as applied to the Mennonites. But Kauffman and Harder point out that Anabaptism has survived at least twelve generations and yet remained live and vital. The Mennonites have not returned to "churchly morals" as long as they continue to uphold their traditional doctrines and beliefs, for many are still refusing to bear arms, swear oaths, upholding the other facets of their faith, thus are ideologically and historically continuous with the forbears.²³

However, it may be well to quote a public announcement that Brigham Young made to his Mormoms when gold was discovered in California and the fever of wealth began to afflict his people. Young insisted they remain in Utah, concluding with this statement:

Take courage, brethren.... Plow your land and sow wheat, plant your potatoes.... The worst fear that I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and his people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of the church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greatest fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth.²⁴

Mennonites Today

The world center of Mennonite population is in America today, with 200,000 in the United States and 80,000 in Canada out of a total of 433,000 scattered in five major countries in Europe, in a number of

Asiatic nations, in Africa, and in South America. Most of those in Asia and Africa are Mennonites by religion, not by descent.

The settlements on the Washita are but a tiny part of this far-reaching faith. Yet they have played a part in sustaining this heritage far greater than one would suspect from their numbers. They have sent out more missionaries, preachers, and church and community leaders than any other center of Mennonite faith according to a leading Mennonite historian and scholar, Dr. J. B. Toews. An interesting subject for research would be to find the basic reasons for such an influence.

It most likely could be traced to the raw courage, vitality, and absolute devotion to the basic principles of the faith by the early settlers, who had to go an extra mile in arriving at their final place of peace and freedom. This courage, vitality, and tenacity of purpose has been transmitted to their posterity, and is still making itself felt after several generations have passed.

The Reverend B. J. Braun, in an address delivered to the Mennonite Brethren General Conference at Reedley, California, in November of 1960, made these statements that can well be applied to the people of the Washita communities today:

Our fathers...in simplicity read---

1. 'Teach your children'--so they built schools.
2. 'Heal the sick'--so they built homes and hospitals.
3. 'Go ye--preach'--so they sent out missionaries.
4. 'Publish tidings'--so they built a publishing house.
5. 'Walk honestly'--so their word was as good as their bond.

Braun says all of these things have been done, but he also warns of these things:

The threat of complacency.

The threat of materialism--too involved with financial goods.

The threat of worldliness--too busy for primary things.²⁵

Too often individuals are merged within a larger group. In many of

their accomplishments, the Mennonites of the Washita are so merged--in the M.C.C., the MDS, in CPS, and in other undertakings of the Conferences. But the story of the group is, after all, the story of the individual as he works with one major purpose--to live out the faith as he has received it in compassion and love, two attributes the world has rediscovered are of utmost importance in the world community.

If man is to keep from annihilating himself, he must take a page from the book of these gentle, quiet people who have simply lived their life and faith and, in so doing, have built a prosperous community on the banks of the Washita River as a culmination of four hundred years of migrations--four hundred years of a search for a place where they could carry on their religion, educate and nurture their young, and be cared for in old age, asking only to be left in freedom and peace.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Fritz Blancke, Brothers in Christ (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1961), p. 34.
- ²Cornelius Krahn, From the Steppes to the Prairies (Newton, Kansas, 1949), p. 3.
- ³Cornelius J. Dyck, An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967), p. 156.
- ⁴Krahn, Steppes, p. 11.
- ⁵Dyck, Introduction, p. 113.
- ⁶J. Howard Kauffman and Leland Harder, Anabaptists Four Centuries Later (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1975), p. 284.
- ⁷John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), p. 184.
- ⁸Ibid., p. 343.
- ⁹C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), p. 453.
- ¹⁰Kauffman and Harder, Anabaptists, p. 292.
- ¹¹Toews, History, p. 334.
- ¹²Melvin Gingerich, Service for Peace (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1949), p. 87.
- ¹³Toews, History, p. 337.
- ¹⁴Year Books, Mennonite Brethren General Conference, 1889-1974 (Hillsboro, Kansas).
- ¹⁵Yearbook, Southern District Conference of Mennonite Brethren (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1974), p. 39.
- ¹⁶Frank H. Epp, Mennonite Exodus (Altona, Manitoba, 1966), p. 489.
- ¹⁷Toews, History, p. 338.
- ¹⁸Epp, Exodus, pp. 353-358.

¹⁹Allen Tiechrow, "World War I and the Mennonite Migration to Canada to Avoid the Draft," Mennonite Quarterly Review (Goshen, Indiana, 1971), Vol. XLV, No. 3, p. 219.

²⁰Epp, Exodus, p. 26.

²¹Henry H. Dick, "Pulsebeats," The Christian Leader (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), p. 17.

²²Kauffman and Harder, Anabaptists, p. 27.

²³Ibid.

²⁴LeRoy Hafen, W. Eugene Hollon, Carl Coke Rister, Western America (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), p. 252.

²⁵Yearbook, Mennonite Brethren General Conference (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1960), 48th Session, p. 8.

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Interviews

The following people were interviewed, with many of the interviews taped, for information concerning the early days of settlement on the Washita River area.

Mrs. C. Bergmann
K. J. Kliever
C. J. Funk

Mrs. C. F. Reimer
A. G. Duerksen
Mr. and Mrs. Henry H. Hinz
J. D. Schlichting
Peter Rogalsky
Mrs. Mathilda Dalke
Mrs. A. E. Krause
Vester Kliever
Marvin Vogt
Reverend J. W. Vogt

NOMENCLATURE

The following are designations, abbreviations, or expressions that are in common use, and may be found in the body of the paper.

M. B. Mennonite Brethren. It may refer either to the Church, or to individual members, of that particular denomination.

G. C. General Conference Mennonite. A different denomination, and again it may refer to either the Churches, the individuals, or to the Conference as a whole.

M. B. General Conference. The entire denominational association, especially applied to the convention where the delegates meet for their triennial business sessions.

M. B. Southern District. A section of the M. B. General Conference, comprising the states of Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Colorado. They have an annual conference, or convention.

G. C. Western District. The area of the General Conference Mennonites, which includes Oklahoma, as well as several other states.

K.M.B. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Churches, so-called because they originated in the Crimea, in Southern Russia. They were almost identical in doctrine with the Mennonite Brethren, and merged with them in 1960.

Jugendverein. A Young People's Fellowship, an organization of young people, usually presenting programs at stated times, consisting of singing, music, and other presentations. It now goes by the name of Christian Endeavor.

C. E. The Christian Endeavor, a young people's organization in many Mennonite Churches.

Nähverein. The Ladies' Sewing Circle, or Mission Society, usually specializing in sewing garments or quilts, which were either sold and the money given to the Mission enterprise, or were sent directly either to the Mission stations or to the M. C. C., which then disbursed them.

Sängerfest. A Song Festival, where choirs and other ensembles from various churches gathered for what was often an all-day program of music and song.

Chortitza. The first settlement of the Mennonites in Russia, on the Chortitza River, a small tributary of the Dnieper. In later years this was known as the "Old Colony."

Molotschna. The second area of settlement in Russia, approximately seventy-five miles southeast of the Chortitza area, on the Molotschnaya River, also a tributary of the Dnieper. This became the largest and most prosperous of the colonies.

Privilegium. A special charter of privileges granted to the Mennonites, and reaffirmed by Paul I in 1800. This was a beautiful gold-embossed document that spelled out the rights of the colonists. It was carefully kept in a special vault until the Bolsheviks found and destroyed it during the Revolution.

Ältester. Elder. The highest rank in the ministry of the Mennonite churches.

Arbeiter am Wort. Associate ministers, who assisted the Elder, if there was one, or did the preaching and pastoral work if there was not an Elder in the Church.

VersammlungsHaus. A Meeting House. This was used to denote the building, since technically a Church is the congregation of believers, not a building.

M.C.C. The Mennonite Central Committee. An association of the various Mennonite groups or denominations, in which they work together in areas of mutual concern or interest, specifically in the work of Relief. Another area is in promoting and sustaining the care of the young men who are called into military service, in sustaining the camps in which the young men served, and in the doctrines and beliefs of non-resistance.

M.D.S. Mennonite Disaster Service. A layman's organization, begun to broaden the idea of reconstruction instead of destruction, particularly in the area of natural disasters, such as tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other so-called 'acts of God'. It is now coordinated and directed by the M.C.C.

C.O. Conscientious objectors to military service or war. Men who accepted the historic Mennonite doctrine of non-resistance, and objection to military service in any form.

C.P.S. Civilian Public Service. This was the work 'of national importance' that the C.O.s were assigned to do in World War II, in which they were placed in camps throughout the country, in lieu of military service.

V.S. Voluntary Service. After the CPS camps were closed, the military still was calling men in the draft. C.O.s were allowed to enlist in the Voluntary Service program, still in lieu of military service. They volunteered into this work.

PAX. Volunteer units that worked on reconstruction in Europe and in many other countries and continents later, to give a positive witness of sacrifice and sharing. A Mennonite Peace group, antedating the Peace Corps of the government.

C.B.A. Corn Bible Academy, the Mennonite Brethren high school in Corn.

Russländer. The Mennonites who came from Russia, as contrasted to those who came from other countries. More specifically, those who came in the later waves of migrations.

VITA²

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Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE MENNONITES ON THE WASHITA RIVER: THE CULMINATION OF FOUR CENTURIES OF MIGRATIONS

Major Field: Secondary Education

Minor Field: History

Biographical:

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Education: Graduated from Felt High School, Felt, Oklahoma, in May, 1932; received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Tabor College, 1950, with majors in History and Bible; attended Panhandle State College, 1958; Southwestern Oklahoma State University, 1965-1967, receiving the Master of Education degree in 1971. Also did work at Western State in Colorado, and Emporia State in Kansas. Entered Oklahoma State University in January, 1972, completing all requirements except dissertation in 1973; dissertation completed in 1976.

Professional Experience: Pastor of churches, 1948-1974. Substitute teacher, secondary school, 1962-1965; teacher of History, Corn Bible Academy, 1965-1967; teacher of History, Berean Academy, Kansas, 1967-1971; Superintendent of Corn Bible Academy, 1973-present.

Professional Organizations: Phi Alpha Theta, honorary history society.