

# Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia

## **N E W S L E T T E R**

May 1997

Dear Members and Friends,

At the Annual Meeting of your Society two new directors were elected to the board.

David Loewen - Teacher/Vice Principal at MEI, Abbotsford  
Henry Neufeld - Social Worker, Delta

The Board of Directors held its first meeting on May 22, 1997 and elected the following officers:

Chair	- John Konrad
Vice Chair	- Henry Rempel
Secretary	- Ruth Derksen Siemens
Treasurer	- Edward Hildebrand

The Board also set up the following sub-committees, with chairmen as noted:

Heritage Lectures	Henry Rempel
Archives and Genealogy	Peter Neudorf
Endowment Fund	William Riediger
Memorial Wall	Lillian Toews
Special Events-Premises	John Konrad
1998 N/A Conference	David Giesbrecht

### Heritage Lecture

The Heritage Lecture at the Annual Meeting was almost cancelled when our scheduled speaker, Dr. John B. Toews became gravely ill a week before the event. [We are pleased to report that he is now recovering nicely at home.] The situation was saved when Dr. Toews volunteered to tape his lecture, even though he was literally confined to a hospital bed. This taped message, when coupled with a thoughtful introduction by David Giesbrecht and especially when framed by appropriate music before and after by Wilmer Neufeld, was in all ways equal to a live performance.



Dr. Toews lectured on the development of singing in four part harmony among Russian Mennonites. The quality of congregational singing in Mennonite Churches is today well known. Many of us, including this writer, assumed it had always been so. [It has even been said that Mennonites were born singing in four part harmony.] This of course was not the case.

During the first half century of the Mennonite's sojourn in Russia their hymnals contained only words. Congregational singing was very simple and in what might be called 'free form,' with the cadence and often the melody determined by the congregational 'vorsaenger,' [song leader] who often scrambled about, trying different tunes, until he found a melody that seemed to fit the text.

A number of leaders and teachers felt this was quite inadequate, particularly when they compared their own congregational music with the beautiful singing of their Russian neighbours. Among the leaders were the teachers Heinrich Heese, Tobias Voth, Friedrich Lange, and Heinrich Franz. They were all trained in Prussia where they had been influenced by the teacher Bernhard Nastrop, A major force in the development of Prussian music. Nastrop had devised a system off 'Ziffern' [numbers] that was applied to each syllable of text to control tonal quality.

In 1837 Heinrich Franz produced a handwritten 'Choralebuch mit Ziffern' for use in his school. This was soon copied, and within a few years most schools and school choirs began singing this 'Zahlmusic' [number music], often in four part harmony. In 1860 Franz published his book for general distribution and soon some congregations began using his hymnal. Franz's hymns were too slow and somber for many, especially the new Mennonite Brethren congregations, and therefore other hymnals were added.

The new hymnals, and the new style of singing, were not immediately and enthusiastically accepted by the congregations. In fact, as often happened among our forefathers, change was born in a climate of disputation and acrimony that lasted many years. Members stormed out of meetings in anger - under no circumstances would they accept such 'militaristic regimentation' in their services. However, the reformers persisted and by about 1880, twenty years later, the new music was universally accepted and has continued ever since.

Dr. Toews' complete lecture is available on tape. If you would like a copy, please phone the Archives at [604] 853-6177 to place your order.

Price - \$10.00.

## The Zaporoshje Project

Dr. Harvey Dyck has recently returned from his latest visit to the State Archives in Zaporoshje. We will provide further information on this project after we have received his progress report.



## Archives

The Archives continue to be the other principal focus of your Society's activities. Almost daily we receive visitors seeking information on some aspect of Mennonite history. The majority are interested in genealogy, but a significant number also research other topics. We expect this traffic to increase as our new premises which will be much more visible and accessible.

Our new premises will be located on the second floor of the new Garden Park Tower at the Clearbrook Community Centre. They will be accessible from both the inside of the building and directly by an outside stairway off Clearbrook Road. The move will be some time in August. A date for the official opening will be announced in our next newsletter.

Moving into, and furnishing our new premises will be quite costly. Over the longer term we expect this move to be self-funded by increased interest and activity, but in the interim we must draw from our endowment fund to pay these costs. We hope to replace these funds as soon as possible and therefore any special donations to finance our move will be greatly appreciated.

The Archives will be closed to the public for the month of August 1997 to facilitate our move. If you can, and wish to help with this work, please call the Archives at 853-6177 and volunteer.

We regret to announce that Karletta Munchinsky will be leaving us about mid-July. Karletta has served us exceedingly well for the past two years. We thank her most sincerely and wish her and her future family well.

## Coming Events

Date to be announced - Official Opening of the Archives

October 18, 1997 - Annual Fund Raising Banquet

May 1998 - North American Mennonite History Conference

## The Directors