

MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

*"WHAT WE HAVE HEARD AND KNOWN  
WE WILL TELL THE NEXT GENERATION."  
PSALM 78:3,4*

## NEWSLETTER

December, 1997

Dear Members and Friends,

As another year draws to a close the Directors of your Society are pleased to report some progress. We have not solved all of our problems, but on the whole, can look back on a reasonably successful year.

### NEW PREMISES

It took longer, and entailed far more work than anticipated, but we are now in our new quarters on the second floor of the Garden Park Tower. For those not familiar with the building, the address is 2825 Clearbrook Road [about two long blocks north of South Fraser Way.] We are open to the public at our regular hours, 9:00 - 12:00 Monday to Friday, but cannot yet give full service since much of our material has not yet been unpacked. Therefore, please come, but be a little patient.

Our records would be organized a little sooner if a few more volunteers would come forward to help for the short term. We also need volunteers who are prepared to commit their time on a part time but regular basis. If we have enough staff we can extend our hours of service to the public. If such work is of interest, please contact Hugo Friesen at the archives, 853-6177.

We apologize for the erroneous announcement of the Official Opening in the last Newsletter. We intend to schedule this event to coincide with the Official Opening of the entire Garden Park Tower complex. They are not yet ready and therefore we had to postpone. The official opening is currently scheduled for March 8, 1998.



## ANNUAL BANQUET

First we must thank all who attended our Annual Fund Raising Banquet on October 18th for your support and your tolerance of the shortcomings at this event. Some of the tables were not what they should have been; the regular PA system was not ready and therefore we had to rely on a rental; the heating/air conditioning system was not properly balanced and therefore some were too warm and some too cold; and, the speaker's dais and stage were in the wrong location. We can only plead that this was our first time in a new facility and that start-up bugs are inevitable. We will do better next time.

Otherwise the affair was again a great success with a record attendance of more than three hundred. Our principal speaker for the evening was Dr. John H. Redekop, who was supported by Rudy Baerg and the Valley Festival Singers. Both were well received.

Dr. Redekop's topic was "Can Mennonites be Proud of their Heritage?" To answer this question he developed the sometimes controversial theme that Mennonites are not only a religious or church denomination, but also a separate ethnic group. We are not a separate race. We are a mixture of Swiss, German, Dutch, Flemish, Polish, and maybe even some Russian stock and have inherited some of our characteristics from all of those peoples. However, through the centuries we have also tended to cling to our own and live separate from others to the extent possible. This has led to the development of a separate and distinct ethnic strain that is recognized as such by many authorities. Both this ethnic community and the creed that nurtured it, can point with pride to its past.

The banquet was also a success in more material ways. The meal provided by our caterer, Gerald Thiessen, was excellent, and we thank him. We also netted about \$6,500. to support the work of the Society, and we thank all of you.

## PROJECTS REPORT

During the past four years your Society has participated in a number of major projects that have greatly depleted our reserves. We hope to replenish these with surpluses from the Memorial Wall Project.

1994 - Peter Braun Archive \$25,000.

We were not original participants in this project but acquired a copy of these files at the captioned price. They consist of more than 300,000 pages of records covering the activities of the Mennonite community in Russia from 1800 to the 1920's. This material will provide resources for historians and genealogists for years to come.

1995 - Acquire B.C. Archives \$17,000.

We did not pay for the Archives as such, but we did incur substantial costs for shelving, storage and computer facilities when we accepted this responsibility.



1996 - The Zaporoshje Project

\$23,000.

We are a partner in this ongoing project to microfilm documents pertaining to Mennonites in the Russian State Archives in Zaporoshje. These records detail the times and trials of our brethren in Russia from the 1920's to date. The records contain a surprising amount of detail and are sometimes very personal. We expect several hundred thousand pages and should have indexed microfilmed copies in our archives sometime next year.

1997 - Move to New Premises

\$25,000.

We were fortunate to find much more convenient and accessible space in the Garden Park Tower to replace our former premises on the expiry of our lease. However, it was necessary to spend a significant amount for leasehold improvements, shelving, furniture and equipment. We expect these sums to be fully recovered over time through better visibility and greater use of the facility, but in the meantime had to advance the funds.

Funding these projects has drastically depleted reserves which must be replaced to provide a solid financial base for the work of this Society. Surpluses generated by the Memorial Wall project described in the enclosed personal letter from our President, John Konrad, will be dedicated to this purpose. If you feel that the preservation and presentation of our Mennonite Heritage is worthwhile, please support this project.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

We are now connected to the Internet so you may E-mail us instead of writing or phoning. We will attempt to respond to any messages or requests within one day of receipt. Our E-mail address is: [mennohis@rapidnet.net](mailto:mennohis@rapidnet.net)

You may use the web browser to scan worldwide libraries and web sites, among them, sites designed and maintained by other historical societies. There is a lot of family history information available on the Internet.

If you want to use our Internet terminal, please drop in or better still call ahead to make sure the terminal will be available when you come in.

**MEMBERSHIP**

All members who gave a donation at the banquet will be accorded membership and be on our mailing list for 1998. We appeal to all those unable to attend the banquet to also renew their membership and support us for the coming year. As you will note from the comments above, our needs are quite urgent.

We expect to change the format of this Newsletter next year. Its scope will be somewhat enlarged to include articles of special interest, in addition to information on the Society's work and coming events. It will also appear on a regular quarterly basis.



A third, and very important, section will be tied in with the Memorial 98 Project. On his last visit Dr. Harvey Dyck briefly outlined a national effort among Mennonites to declare 1998 as a year of memoriam to all of our brethren that suffered and died in the Mennonite Inferno in Russia. We will dedicate one section of our Memorial Wall to those that wish to remember grandparents, parents, or siblings who were persecuted in Russia from the 1920s to the present. Your memorial plaque may list only a name if all else is still unknown. However, when we receive a copy of the Zaporoshje Archives you may find specific information as to the fate of your honoree and record it accordingly. The choice will be yours.

Detailed information and application forms will be available at the official opening. The cost will be \$500 per plaque, with 80% of the funds dedicated to an endowment fund to support the work of the Society.

### COMING EVENTS

#### February 28, 1998 - Heritage Lecture

Speaker: Dr. Roy Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies,  
University of Winnipeg

Topic: Inheritance Practices Among Mennonites  
in Western Canada

#### March 8, 1998 - Official Opening

#### May 8-11, 1998 - North American Mennonite History Conference

The theme of this conference is "One People, Many Stories, Charting the Next Generation of Mennonite Historical Studies in the US and Canada." Scheduled keynote speakers are Dr. Theron Schlabach of Goshen College, and Dr James Urry of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

The Call for Papers has only recently been issued and therefore we cannot provide details on the program or the participants at this time, but we expect most of the better known names in Mennonite Historical Studies will attend. The specifics of the 'Call' indicate that the conference will focus on both the similarities and the differences in the US and Canadian Mennonite experience and their effect on their communities. The recent completion of both the 'Mennonites in Canada' and the 'Mennonite Experience in America' series, may also provide a focus for the conference and form the basis for papers suggesting a future direction for Mennonite Studies.

This event will be held at the Columbia Bible College and includes a banquet scheduled for May 9th. Further information as to the program, speakers, and how our members might participate in the conference will be provided well in advance of the event.

To close out this year we now wish you one and all a joyous celebration of the birth of Christ, and a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year.

The Directors



*Baird May 9*  
*Ray Lee ?*

## CALL FOR PAPERS

"One People, Many Stories: Charting the Next Generation  
of Mennonite Historical Study in the US and Canada"

Columbia Bible College  
Abbotsford, British Columbia  
May 8-11, 1998

An informal consortium of Mennonite historical societies invites papers and proposals to an upcoming conference entitled "One People, Many Stories: Charting the Next Generation of Mennonite Historical Study in the US and Canada." The sponsoring organizations include The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Mennonite Historical Society of the United States, the Historical Committee of the Mennonite Church, the Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. Held at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, British Columbia on May 8-11, 1998, the conference will be focused on the Mennonite experience in North America, north and south of the US/Canada border. The conference keynote speakers will be Theron Schlabach of Goshen College, editor of the Mennonite Experience in America series, and James Urry, of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

The conference will have two main areas of focus. One part of the conference will explicitly compare the Mennonite experience in Canada and the United States. Sessions (though not necessarily individual papers) should thus include an explicit comparative dimension. Topics could address, for instance, Canadian and US Mennonites' responses to social forces such as military service, nationalism, minority status, etc; similarly, comparative Mennonite initiatives in missions, issues of race, gender and ethnicity, service or peacemaking might be examined. Papers may be weighted towards, but are not restricted to, twentieth-century developments.

Secondly, with the completion of both the Mennonites in Canada and the Mennonite Experience in America series, the conference will also focus on the state of Mennonite historiography. Papers on the recent accomplishments and future direction of Mennonite historical writing in Canada and the United States will be especially welcome.

Proposals are welcome both for individual papers and for entire sessions (2-3 papers, comments and discussion in a 1 1/2 to 2 hour session). The proposals should include a short 1-2 page abstract by the presenters and commentator(s), along with a one page curriculum vitae from each participant. All proposals should be sent to one of two places: to Roy Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3B 2E9, tel # 204-786-9391, email: Loewen@uwinnipeg.ca; OR to Perry Bush, History Department, Bluffton College, 280 W. College Ave, Bluffton, OH 45817, tel # 419-358-3278; e-mail, BushP@Bluffton.edu. All materials must be received no later than September 15, 1997. A limited number of travel subsidies for conference speakers and for student participants will be available.

*Sab Feb 28/98*     *Inheritance Practices among Mennonites in*  
*Royden Loewen,*     *Western Canada*