

Introduction

Mennonites have lived in Canada for nearly 200 years. Statistically they can be regarded as insignificant since, no matter how they are defined or counted, they have never comprised more than one fifth of one percent of the population of Canada. Over the last two decades Canadian Mennonites have nevertheless attracted the attention of a number of amateur and scholarly researchers and writers. Some have studied the Mennonites simply because they are different and therefore objects of curiosity. Others have seen the Mennonite experience as a revealing test case or example in the evolution of a Canadian pluralist identity and policies of Canadian multi-culturalism. Most often, however, the Mennonite experience in Canada has been studied by writers and scholars who were themselves of Mennonite background and who wanted to discover more about their own heritage. As a result a surprisingly large literature on the Mennonite experience in Canada has been compiled. That literature includes work by scholars working in various branches of the humanities and social sciences, utilizing the particular theories, models, and methodologies of their respective disciplines. It also includes much writing by amateurs and enthusiasts intent on describing or commenting on their experiences and insights.

One of the problems in modern scholarship is that scholars working on the same subject, but applying the methods and insights of different disciplines, fail to communicate with one another or to allow work done in another discipline to influence and enrich their own work. Each academic discipline has developed its own particular methods, theories and interpretations, but scholars can also gain great benefits if they at least occasionally look over the disciplinary fences to see what others dealing with similar subject materials are doing.

The papers in this volume attempt to provide all people interested in Mennonite studies with a glimpse of what is going on in the field of Mennonite Studies in the various academic vineyards which are too often closed because of theoretical, methodological and ideological barriers.

The origin of this particular effort must be traced back to a decision made by the Ontario Mennonite Historical Society and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in Canada's centennial year of 1967. In that year these two societies established a Joint Committee charged with responsibility to commission and oversee the writing of a comprehensive history of Mennonites in Canada. That project has now been underway

for 15 years. The first volume, covering the period from 1786 to 1920 was published in 1974, and the second volume was ready for publication in June of 1982. The sponsoring agency, in the meantime, had been expanded to become the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

In the process of researching and writing these two volumes of what is expected to become a four volume series, it became obvious that not only historians but many other scholars in a variety of disciplines had done a great deal of work on Canadian Mennonite subjects. The history simply could not be written without extensive references to numerous works by non-historians, and the later volumes in the series dealing with more recent Mennonite history will rely even more heavily on work done by scholars in other disciplines who are particularly concerned about more contemporary affairs. Yet inter-disciplinary contacts between various scholars interested in Mennonite studies but working in different disciplines had been very limited. It therefore seemed appropriate to arrange a conference at which well-established scholars from various disciplines would report on work done on Mennonite topics in their respective disciplines. The conference was scheduled to coincide with the publication of Frank Epp's *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940. A People's Struggle for Survival*, Vol. 2. It was hoped that this book would provide a common focus in discussions of work already done, that it would provide greater understanding and new interdisciplinary insights, and that it would prove of benefit as research for the third and fourth volumes of *Mennonites in Canada*.

The papers published in this volume were all presented at that conference, held June 10-13, 1982, at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto. The theme of the conference — which was jointly sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and the Ethnic and Immigration Studies Program at the University of Toronto — was *Mennonite Studies — The State of the Art*.

Mennonite Studies were defined by one participant as "a field of scholarship which explores, reconstructs and articulates the Mennonite reality that has been, is, or ought to be. This field of study is multi-disciplinary and frequently interdisciplinary, using any tool or conceptualization based on critical methodology." Mennonite Studies, thus defined, is not a new discipline using its own unique methodology. The critical methodologies used to study Canadian Mennonites are those of the recognized disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, although scholars working in one discipline can be and have often been enriched and their understanding broadened by reading and incorporating in their own work the insights of scholars working in other disciplines. Specific tools or conceptualizations based on a particular critical

methodology may be well suited to examine and clarify one kind of human behaviour but quite unsatisfactory in other cases. Thus, an economist may be reasonably well equipped to explain the mysteries of human behaviour on the floor of the stock exchange, but find that his methodology is not equally well suited to studies of human behaviour at a religious revival meeting, or at a musical concert, or in the midst of military conflict. Individual people might well participate in all those activities and their behaviour in one setting will almost certainly affect their behaviour in the other. The papers presented here therefore seek to show what work has been done in Mennonite Studies in the various disciplines. Some assessments are also made about the limitations of the work done, and about promising new endeavours.

During the planning for the conference, and certainly at the conference itself, it became clear that Mennonite Studies will manifest an interesting duality. Some scholars are clearly very much concerned about pure research, scholarship and truth for its own sake. Others are more concerned about the application and relevance of discovered or revealed truth to current and practical problems. The debate between those demanding the purest possible objectivity in scholarship, and those fostering the more utilitarian and didactic aspects of intellectual endeavour has certainly raged for a very long time. Not surprisingly, many of the scholars specializing in the liberal arts and working at secular universities are more inclined toward the purest and most objective scholarship possible, while those working in theology and religious studies, often at church sponsored and supported institutions of higher learning, stressed more practical and applied scholarship. Each of the papers in this volume contains some aspects of both pure and applied scholarship but the relative emphasis differs.

The papers which follow were the major papers presented at the conference. In addition, two other papers dealing with more specific research being done by the two authors but not containing a general overview of the discipline, were presented and these are to be published in future issues of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. Finally there was a session at which *Mennonites in Canada, Vol. 2*, was subjected to critical scholarly review, together with a response from the author. For reasons of space and time the proceedings of that session will also be published in a future issue of the *Journal*.

Mennonite Studies, as the papers in this volume show, have attracted a surprisingly large number of dedicated and gifted scholars. Much more work remains to be done. The conference and this publication will have achieved their purpose if they inform readers of what has been done and stimulate more and even better informed work in Mennonite Studies. These papers, and this first issue of the *Journal of Men-*

nonite Studies, stand as an introduction to what we hope will be an exciting new phase of scholarly work in Mennonite Studies.

T. D. Regehr,
Guest Editor