

Foreword

The JMS Forum for this year grapples with a global Mennonite history, literally from the ground up. Mennonites around the world are familiar with the Mennonite World Conference and its leaders' efforts to relate historic Anabaptist ideas to global issues. This year's *Journal* considers how ordinary Mennonites, and Mennonite farmers in particular, have related to the land and the natural environment in a global context. The issue makes no case for an 'Anabaptist' approach to the land, rather as mostly history pieces, these sixteen articles trace the disparate ways Mennonites have related to the land. The conference that generated these papers was based in large measure on a global research project, titled 'Seven Points on Earth,' funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and based in the Mennonite Studies program at the University of Winnipeg. The seven points are seven communities located in seven countries, and were studied by seven researchers – John Eicher (Iowa), Hans Peter Fast (Friesland), Susie Fisher (Manitoba), Aileen Friesen (Siberia), Danang Kristiawan (Java), Belinda Ncube (Matabeleland) and Ben Nobbs-Thiessen (Bolivia) – each of whom is published in this issue. In addition, another ten papers on communities somewhat more broadly conceived are also part of this collection.

Another ten fascinating, and in some instances ground-breaking papers, by Martin Entz (West Prussia), Steven Reschly (Iowa), Paulus Hartono (Java), Peter Epp (Siberia), Simon Evans (Alberta), Daniel Leonard (Manitoba), Mussie Tesfagiorgis (Zimbabwe) and Kerry Fast (Bolivia) on specific places noted in parentheses, as well as reflective papers by Elaine Enns, Nathanael Inglis and

Gordon Zerbe on issues of theology and ethics, were not submitted for publication, some because they were works in progress, others as they were slated for other venues.

The papers published in this volume appear in clusters related to each of the 'seven points' and appear in order of the historic founding of the respective communities. Thus the first set of papers focus on Friesland, one of the points of genesis of the Anabaptist movement. Nina Schroeder presents evidence from art history that Dutch Mennonites had a deep appreciation for nature and rural life even as they embraced a distinctly urban and bourgeois culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cor Trompeter makes a similar argument, albeit from Mennonite investment and taxation records in northern Netherlands that reveal an interest in rural life but also the fact that farming itself was not a dominant vocation among early Dutch Anabaptists. Hans Peter Fast's paper, based on ethnographic research conducted among today's *Doopsgezinde* farmers, concludes that farmers from Friesland who are Mennonite are just that, 'Mennonite' in a religious sense and not in any particular way 'Mennonite' farmers.

The second and third sets of papers deal with two settler communities in North America, the first of these, Iowa (first settled in the late 1840s), and linked to other farm communities in the greater Midwest and Pennsylvania, and the second, Manitoba (first settled in the 1870s). For the United States communities, Rebecca Horner Shenton considers a debate begun in the early twentieth century on just how modern and how engaged with government agencies (cajoling farmers to greater productivity), Mennonites should be. In his paper, John Eicher argues that Iowa farmers found their traditional community bounds severely threatened by the 1980s farm crises and ironically found it easier to focus on transnational food aid than to support their own neighbours as they struggled for survival in a new farm economy. The two papers dealing with Manitoba focus on the Mennonites' early years of settlement. Joseph Wiebe, in a re-reading of well-known references to Métis neighbours in Mennonite memoirs in the early 1870s and to lesser known newspaper letters published during the 1880s Métis Resistance in western Canada, argues that Mennonite settlers were quite aware of the Métis presence in Manitoba and their historic land claims. Susie Fisher in an innovative recasting of the traditional Mennonite narrative, considers the alterations Mennonite settlers made to the land, especially with regard transplanted and adapted horticultural traditions that served to establish their cultural 'possession' of the land.

The fourth and fifth foci are on mission farms, the first located in Java and begun by Dutch and indigenous missionaries, mostly in the mid-1880s, and the second rooted in Matabeleland, in present-day southwestern Zimbabwe, where Brethren in Christ Church missionaries from the United States established a similar village in the late 1890s. The story of the very idea of the 'Christian' farm village in Java is introduced by missions historian Lawrence Yoder who shares work from his new book and contrasts the rural visions of missionary Pieter Janz and Javanese mystic Tunggul Wulung. Danang Kristiawan provides another perspective on the Javanese Christian village by focusing on the transformation of the farm village of Margorejo as it underwent the modernizing effects of the Green Revolution of the 1960s amidst competing historic Javanese and Christen teachings on nature and cycles of life. For Zimbabwe, Eliakim Sibanda uses his considerable historical knowledge to contrast two competing cosmologies, one based on an overtly racialized missionary effort and the other on an indigenous tradition of resistance to land injustices rooted in the mystical traditions of the Matopos Hills. Belinda Ncube, basing her work on an oral history project among women from the same community, argues that although the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 did not fully address the issue of discrimination against women farmers, their own strong sisterhood and long-standing culture of farming has served to address some of those very injustices.

The sixth and seventh farm communities are again European settler societies, albeit founded in the twentieth century and set in the much wider diaspora of the global Mennonite community. David Moon, basing his work on his watershed book, *Ploughing the Steppe*, lends his authoritative voice to consider the specific role Mennonites played in the rural transformation of the Ukrainian steppes during the nineteenth century. Hans Werner finds this impulse still strong in the decade after the Russian Revolution and traces the founding of a Mennonite agricultural society and its bid to settle the semi-arid plain of the Siberian Kulunda Steppe. Aileen Friesen reports on an oral history project, mostly with Baptists of Mennonite descent who were part of a massive collective farm during the Soviet Era that ended in 1989 and whose pietistic faith often was at odds with the collective's demands. Ben Nobbs-Thiessen's oral history set in the Old Colony Mennonite farm community of Riva Palacio in Bolivia, traces how these 'horse and buggy' farmers developed a bifurcated economy, based simultaneously on a household commitment to cheese production and the commodification of soybean production, the latter making a significant impact on the physical environment. Finally, in a research

note, Caroline Vargas and Martha García Ortega report on the Old Colony Mennonite farm frontier in southern Mexico where the “social vulnerability” of being propelled to feed large families is intertwined with other vulnerabilities linked to clear cutting jungle, dealing with Mexican law and encountering indigenous Mayan culture.

We end the research component of this issue with two articles that invoke sixteenth-century Anabaptism in very distinct ways. Rebecca Plett suggests that modern day Mennonite narratives of medical suffering in a Canadian city, that is, stories she heard from patients dealing with cancer and mental illness, relate to sixteenth-century narratives of martyrdom and suffering in Christ. Berit Jany considers how Anabaptist narratives were interpreted by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Protestant writers during the newly formed Germany's pitch to diminish the power of Catholicism by romanticizing an Anabaptist discipleship and anti-clericalism, even as they withstood state church persecution.

Again we feature about two dozen book reviews on both the historical and literary impulses in the mostly North American Mennonite world and thank Rob Zacharias and Brian Froese for their work in shepherding this conversation. And then a hearty thank you to Andrea Dyck for her work both as copy-editor and layout manager of this issue and to Muriel Smith for her first year as copy-editor.

I hope you as readers enjoy this historic issue, one that just begins to understand the global nature of the Mennonite world, and one that signals the strong commitment we have at our newly established Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg to telling that story.

Royden Loewen, editor