
Foreword

We are pleased to offer once again interesting new scholarship on Mennonite society and culture. Each of the sections—the annual symposium-based “JMS Forum”, the general “Articles” section, the “Literary Selections,” the book reviews, and the new “Primary Source” segment—should stimulate debate and further our knowledge.

This year’s “JMS Forum” is based on the “Mennonites and the Soviet Inferno” symposium. This conference, a lively and well-attended event, was held at the University of Winnipeg on September 26 and 27, 1997; it was jointly organized by Professor Harvey L. Dyck (University of Toronto) and the Chair in Mennonite Studies (University of Winnipeg). The “JMS Forum” presents four pieces from the symposium. Colin Neufeldt’s work mines the recently opened Soviet archives to document the terror of arrest, deportation and death in the Soviet Union during collectivization in the early 1930s. Peter Letkemann argues convincingly that the history of the 1936-38 Stalin purges needs to be revised and takes into account the disproportionate suffering of “ordinary, innocent” people such as Mennonites. He also offers an explanation for high number of Mennonite arrests. Marlene Epp adds the variable of gender to the analysis as she chronicles the lives of women who lost their men in the 1930s and who fled the Soviet Union during World War II; Epp argues that “as women” these refugees experienced and perceived the trek in unique ways. Harry Loewen’s article blends his own experience as a boy who lost his father with later research to explore a range of themes, including those of suffering, martyrdom, complicity and forgiveness. Finally, we reproduce the comments of the conference’s two respondents, Leonard Friesen and Gerhard Ens.

These are followed by the first of the book review essays; in it Harvey L. Dyck celebrates the contribution of Sarah Dueck in publicizing the stories of the victims of the Soviet Inferno and helping to break the silence on this dark chapter of Mennonite history.

The first work in this year's "article" section continues the story of the "Soviet Inferno" in Canada. Krista Taves suggests that while suffering may have undermined the Mennonite communities in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, those very stories of suffering as printed in the Canadian Mennonite newspaper, *Der Bote*, became "cultural icons" and served to strengthen Mennonite identity and community structures in Canada.

The next three articles deal in various ways with works of literature. Jacob Loewen's article builds on earlier works to develop a linguistic description of Plautdietsch phonemes and an orthography that reflects the new reality that most speakers of this language now live in Spanish or English and not High German host communities. This is followed by two pieces that examine the impact of two very different novelists on the Mennonite readership. Edna Froese critiques novelist Arnold Dyck's well-known work, *Lost in the Steppe* and shows that this popular Mennonite writer knew how to recreate the Russian-Mennonite world he grew up in with gentle irony, but without compromising his "aesthetic integrity". Levi Miller surveys the influence of Tolstoy on Mennonite thinking and demonstrates that the Slavophile pacifist novelist held a particular attraction for twentieth-century American Mennonite historians, theologians and novelists.

The last article and the new "Primary Source" section feature important stories from Southern Manitoba. Janis Thiessen's article contributes to the much neglected field of the history of labour relations in the Mennonite business world; she not only documents the remarkable success of Friesens Corporation (D.W. Friesen Printers), but traces the evolution of what Thiessen calls "a paternalist management style." This is followed by the fascinating and provocative 1883 essay by the French-Canadian Catholic, Father Bitsche, who visited Manitoba's Mennonite West Reserve shortly after its founding; the essay was translated by Ingrid Riesen and introduced by James Urry.

In our literary section we present a trio of short stories whose focus is the central but persistently vexing issue of revivalism, at least as practiced a generation ago in many North American Mennonite communities. These stories depict youthful characters forced, in one way or another, to confront the highly emotional, often terrifying processes of dramatic conversion, with their concomitant feelings of guilt and fear of damnation. All three authors deal with this highly charged theme by defusing it through techniques of irony. "Saved", by Warren Kliever, describes the plight of a six-year-old boy who is forced to learn through the loss of his pet dog that even a famous evangelist can display human weaknesses which strip him of his glamorous spiritual charisma and expose him as a flawed saint, at best. "Revival", by Al Reimer, dramatizes the harrowing emotional ambivalence experienced by many adolescent Mennonite "sinners"

in the era of the big, high-powered evangelical campaigns so popular during and after World War II. And Lloyd W. Ratzlaff's "Willy Becker and the Great White Throne" presents a slightly older protagonist who waits for his fate to be sealed by the coming evangelist from Nebraska

The final section offers a lengthy list of different book reviews. In a second book review essay Walter Klaassen examines Denny Weaver's *Keeping Salvation Ethical* and takes issue with Weaver's interpretation of the role that classic atonement theology played in the thinking of nineteenth-century Mennonite leaders. This is followed by shorter reviews of two novels, three histories of Russian and Soviet Mennonite life, four works of women's history, four illustrations of 'border crossings' of American Mennonites, two works about church leaders, other works dealing with Mennonites in India, evangelicals in Canada and members of a variety of ethnic groups in Ukraine. Finally, given the importance of Paul Toews' *Mennonites in American Society, 1930-1970*, we offer two reviews, one by a Canadian historian, the other by an American sociologist.

Mavis Reimer, Professor of English, University of Winnipeg and Abe J. Dueck, Director for the Centre of MB Studies have been appointed as book review editors for the journal. They take over from Victor G. Doerksen who kindly lent his hand in ensuring continuity by working as book review editor even after his 'official' retirement in 1996.

In the last section we bid farewell to our friends George K. Epp and Roy Vogt: they were envisioned, energetic community leaders and Mennonite scholars. Both men were of special importance to us at JMS. Dr. Epp was the inaugural director of the Menno Studies Centre (University of Winnipeg) and Dr. Vogt an invaluable member of our editorial board.

The Editors