

BROTHERHOOD AND FAMILY: IMPLICATIONS OF KINSHIP

IN MENNONITE BRETHREN HISTORY

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The writing down of history is, by necessity, a translation. The "languages" of our lives are many--those of breathing, feeling, acting, dreaming and, above all, relating in many mysterious, surprising, and often indescribable ways to the people and forces around us. The compelling challenge to the historian is to listen sensitively to all these unwritten languages and somehow, perhaps miraculously, learn to translate them adequately into the hard, cold, printed word.

One unwritten "language" of our lives is that which speaks out of the relationship which each of us has in the family. Clearly, history does provide us with an abundance of examples where kinship and family have provided a startling influence upon the broader course of human events. Much of the Old Testament is filled with family records. The New Testament contains not only two separate tracings of the ancestry of Jesus himself, but also numerous comments regarding significant relatives of Jesus--parents, brothers, sisters, and even cousins. The Gospels and Epistles frequently allude to the family relationships of the apostles and other early church leaders. Not only does Scripture emphasize the sanctity and importance of the family, but it even uses "family" vocabulary to describe relationships within the Godhead and within the church. Anyone who demeans the importance and impact of the family is in conflict with the teachings and the examples of scripture.

More recent history draws attention to such families as the Hapsburgs, Plantagenets, Stuarts, Rothschilds, Adams, and even the Kennedys, whose influence affected the history not only of their own countries, but of the entire world. Long

stretches of world history are indeed more concerned with the dynastic rule of notable families than with the rising and falling of nations and states.

Our attention then naturally turns to the church. With the Wesleys--John and Charles--as a conspicuous exception, historians rarely emphasize or consider family relationships as having any noticeable impact upon the history of the church. It almost seems as if the family, while having enormous influence upon secular history, suddenly becomes an insignificant force when the history of the church is being considered.

Obviously, such an observation raises certain questions and concerns, and indeed creates a nagging suspicion that most church historians may have overlooked a matter of great importance, and failed to recognize the special and remarkable influence which the family experience brings into every recordable life situation.

To some extent, P. M. Friesen was an exception. His history of the church pinpoints, in both text and footnotes, a surprising quantity of revealing family information, which leads the careful reader to the inescapable conclusion that Mennonite Brethren history has been deeply affected by family concerns and relationships. Just as important, Friesen made it possible for the student to delve further into this matter by carefully naming names and giving addresses and other identifying information for the many participants in his history of the church.

*R. Bainton  
wonder of the  
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However, Friesen commits some of the same oversights common to most other church historians. He, like others, virtually ignores the role of women in the history of the church. With the single notable exception of several references to Katharina Claassen, the wife of Johann Claassen, Friesen overlooks the unquestionable importance of wives, mothers, sisters and daughters in the history of the Mennonite Brethren.

Related to that oversight is another. Friesen does comment relatively frequently about certain family relationships between men, particularly men of the

same last name, mentioning that they are father and son, uncle and nephew, or brothers. But he seldom notices or mentions the family relationships which occur through marriage, ignoring the fact that a startling number of important men in Mennonite Brethren history were fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, and sons-in-law of others significant in the history. (Toews)

However, it was because of P. M. Friesen's tantalizing comments about the several family relationships which he does emphasize in his history, that I began twenty years ago to explore the family kinship patterns among the Mennonites and began to discover the intriguing complexity and significance of family relationships throughout the course of Mennonite Brethren history.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to remedy this traditional oversight, and call attention to the often-overlooked, but apparently very significant, occurrence of family relationships in Mennonite Brethren history, and to comment upon the implications of these relationships.

#### The Phenomenon

The beginnings and early history of the Mennonite Brethren Church are documented by a number of skilled historians. The most voluminous and most complete account is that written by P. M. Friesen.<sup>1</sup> Bekker, a participant in it all, provides an important, contemporary description of the early history,<sup>2</sup> while Lohrenz<sup>3</sup> and Unruh,<sup>4</sup> from a later perspective, write accounts that are based to a considerable degree on the earlier writings of Friesen. Most recent of all is the excellent historical analysis written by Toews.<sup>5</sup>

After reading all these accounts, the reader might briefly reconstruct the beginnings of the Mennonite Brethren Church as follows:

Confronted by the realization that a continual spiritual decline was occurring in the Mennonite colony known as the Molotschna Colony, a small group of men, who had been influenced by the preaching of a Pietist minister named Wuest, and by other experiences of careful spiritual self-examination, decided to register their objection to the corruption around them by requesting that they be served communion separately from the remainder of the church.

When their request was denied, they responded in November 1859 by meeting together and, without authorization from the church, observing communion under the leadership of a local school teacher, Abraham Cornelsen.

Denounced by the leaders in the established church, and rebuked at a stormy church meeting at the Gnadenfeld Church, the small group asked Cornelsen to prepare a document of secession. On January 6, 1860, they met to consider the document, and agonized over it with prayers and earnest reflection. Of those present, eighteen men then signed the document, breaking their ties with the established church.

Asked by the elder of the Ohrloff Church to explain their action, another document was signed on March 19, 1860, by thirty-two or thirty-three men (the sources differ!). Despite subsequent opposition and persecution, the church continued to grow. Johann Claassen, one of the members, represented the interests of the new church to officials at St. Petersburg, while the assistance of the Ohrloff Church elder provided some relief to the members back home.

Seeking a place where they could live unprovoked, the church requested new land in the Kuban region, which the government finally granted them. With governmental recognition, persecution gradually subsided. The young church continued to grow, through efforts of evangelism among the Mennonites, other German-speaking colonists around them, and even among the Russians. By 1885, twenty-five years after the founding of the church, there were 1800 members in Russia, in contrast to the original eighteen.

Unfortunately, this "bare-bones" description of the historical events, while accurately reflecting most scholars' understanding of the founding of the church, overlooks the important "language" of the impact of the family, and takes no notice of the surprisingly close family relationships among the early members of the church. We shall now reexamine the beginnings of the church, this time concentrating upon the individuals who participated in the founding of the church, and considering the hitherto-unexamined family aspects in the establishment of the church.

To assist us, we shall refer to the early lists of Mennonite Brethren Church members which are included in the appendix to this article, just as they appear in Friesen's history and some other early sources. For the purpose of this paper, we will concentrate basically upon those who signed the documents of January 6 and March 19, 1860, thus considering the very earliest members of the church.

## The Persons

### The Cornelsen/Gaede Family

Much has been written in the existing history books about Abraham Cornelsen, the school teacher in Elisabeththal, and the mastermind of the secession. Like with the others, however, little has been written about his background and family ties. Abraham Cornelsen was born on August 11, 1826 to Abraham Cornelsen and Maria Vogt.<sup>6</sup> He was probably born in the village of Wernersdorf, where his parents had settled in 1824. He is known to have had two older brothers, Heinrich and Wilhelm, and one older sister, Agatha.<sup>7</sup>

While nothing is yet known about his brothers, there is an interesting family connection involving both his marriage and that of his sister. On February 1, 1849, he was married to Aganetha Gaede. His wife happened to be the sister of a certain Heinrich Gaede, who had earlier married Cornelsen's sister, Agatha. Consequently, from the very beginning, the Gaede family became closely involved with the early Mennonite Brethren Church.

The first Gaede mentioned significantly in Mennonite Brethren history was Cornelsen's nephew, Peter Gaede, who was an evangelist of sorts in the Kuban area. As a member of the Kuban Mennonite Brethren Church, he was instrumental in bringing the principles of the so-called "Ueberfroehlichen" <sup>exuberant</sup> into the Kuban community. After a rather stormy history, he and a number of his relatives and friends established a Kuban congregation of the church known as the "Bread-Breaker Church."<sup>8</sup> Gaede later was converted to Seventh-Day Adventism. Despite this rather unusual episode, many members of the Gaede family remained in the Mennonite Brethren Church, and many members of that family have played significant roles in the growth of the church.

Abraham Cornelsen and his wife raised a family of ten sons, each of whom also had a large family. Consequently, many Cornelsen descendants continue to represent the influence which Abraham Cornelsen began within the church.

Perhaps the most significant contribution, however, which Abraham Cornelsen made in influencing the family composition of the Mennonite Brethren Church was his early evangelization of German-Lutheran families in the Don River region of Russia. Earlier, when other families were leaving for the Kuban, Cornelsen settled instead in the Don region and there established, and became elder of, a small Mennonite Brethren church, composed largely of the Lutherans in the area. When he later migrated to Hillsboro, Kansas, many of these families of Lutheran background accompanied him and settled in the Ebenfeld community near Hillsboro. Because of Cornelsen's influence, these families--the Seibels, the Hagens, the Reiswigs, the Reddigs, the Ollenbergers, the Heins, and others--became the latest families to achieve the status, within barely more than a single generation, of bearing what many call a "Mennonite" name.

#### The Klaassen/Wiens/Becker Connection

In this amazing collection of early M.B. church members, we find one of the most intricate and intertwining family networks in the church. Indeed, it was this intriguing group of relatives that first came to my attention, causing me to begin my exploration of all family ties among the early members of the church.

The historical accounts speak of old Franz Klaassen, who was apparently the oldest among the eighteen. He was called upon to lay hands upon the first elected minister, Heinrich Huebert, when no other "elder" could be found who would ordain the newly-chosen chief minister of the newborn church.<sup>9</sup> What the history books do not tell us is that this man, on January 6, 1846, married the Widow Abraham Wiens, assuming responsibility for her eight Wiens children, among them Cornelius Wiens of Elisabethtal, also one of the eighteen. Indeed, it was in his home that the fateful communion service of November 1859 was held. Yet another Wiens step-son of Franz Klaassen was Abraham Wiens of Elisabethtal, another signer of the secession document. One step-daughter was Anna Wiens, who was married to Bernhard Janzen of

Blumenort, a signer of the two Kuban letters of 1862 and 1863. Still another step-daughter was Margaretha Wises, who would shortly marry Jacob P. Becker, another of the eighteen original Brethren. To complicate matters even more, this Jacob Becker was the brother of Benjamin Bekker of Rudnerweide, a signer of the "Explanation" document of March 19, 1860. And then Maria Becker, the sister of Jacob and Benjamin, was to become the wife of Abraham Regier of Rudnerweide, another signer of the March 19 document. Last but not least, Benjamin Bekker, was soon to marry Anna Neufeld, the daughter of Heinrich Neufeld of Einlage, one of the founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Chortitz Colony.

This intriguing web of family relationships among early members of the church certainly excites conjecture regarding the degree to which these family relationships influenced the very birth of the new church. Family Compact

#### The Strauss/Reimer/Claassen Network

Here we see another amazing and intricate family system. Little is known about the Strauss family, except for the fact that August Strauss of Schardau was one of the four signers of the secession document who later withdrew from the fellowship when, against their advice and convictions, baptism by immersion was made mandatory in the brotherhood. Indeed, August Strauss is the only one of the four who is specifically named in any of the sources.<sup>10</sup>

Before he withdrew, however, he apparently influenced a good number of other Strauss family members, namely Gottlieb Strauss, Friedrich Strauss, and either one or two men by the name of Johann Strauss, all from the village of Waldheim, to join the movement and sign the March 19 document. David Doerksen of Waldheim, another signer of the March 19 document, was married to Karolina Strauss, a daughter of Gottlieb Strauss.<sup>11</sup> Jakob Reimer of Gnadenfeld, who also signed the March 19 document, was married to Wilhelmine Strauss, another daughter of Gottlieb Strauss.<sup>12</sup>

This Jakob Reimer of Gnadenfeld was, in turn, the brother of Cornelius Reimer, a

signer of the Kuban letter of October 10, 1862, and an early settler in the Kuban. In addition, Katharina Reimer, a sister of Jacob and Cornelius Reimer, was the wife of Johann Claassen, perhaps the most renowned of all the original eighteen brethren. The relationships then become almost unbelievably complex when we realize that Dietrich Claassen of Mariental, an older brother of Johann Claassen, was another of the eighteen, and P. M. Friesen carefully itemizes and identifies still another four Claassen family members among the signers of the Kuban letter of 1862.<sup>13</sup>

It is rather significant to note that Katharina Reimer, Mrs. Johann Claassen, is the only woman member of the early Mennonite Brethren Church whose opinions and correspondence are recorded in the various histories, especially that of P. M. Friesen. Even here, however, her influence is only a matter of record during the times that her husband was away, either in St. Petersburg, representing the interests of the young church, or off exploring the Kuban region, soon to be settled by a group of Mennonite Brethren.

#### The Huebert/Harms Family

Relatively little is known of the family circle of the first elder of the Mennonite Brethren, Heinrich Huebert. P. M. Friesen makes virtually the only references to Elder Huebert's family by mentioning that Simon Harms, a signer of the March 19 document, was his son-in-law.

#### The Koop Family

Likewise, little is currently known about the father and son team from Elisabethtal, Isaak Koop Sr. and Isaak Koop Jr. The father, however, is recorded as one of the eighteen founders, and P. M. Friesen reports that both father and son signed the Kuban letter of December 30, 1863.<sup>14</sup>

#### The Penner Family

Bernhard Penner, a signer of the March 19 document, is one of the more colorful personages in the early history of the M.B. Church. According to P. M.



Friesen, he was still unmarried when he signed the document of March 19.<sup>15</sup> He later was one of the primary participants in the so-called "Ueberfroehliche Richtung." Indeed, Bernhard Penner, Benjamin Bekker, and Gerhard Wieler, who was from the Chortitz, became the self-appointed "apostles" of the movement. Friesen also provides some clues about Penner's identity by reporting that he eventually became an Adventist,<sup>16</sup> and at one point Friesen calls him Bernhard Penner Jr.<sup>17</sup>

Because of these various clues in Friesen, I am inclined to identify this Bernhard Penner with one whose family ties are recorded in a privately published genealogy of the Dyck family.<sup>18</sup> This Bernhard Penner, a son of Rev. Bernhard Penner (a minister of the Gnadenfeld Church) and Anna Dyck, was born August 12, 1838, and is recorded in the genealogy as residing in the village of Gnadenfeld. He was married to an otherwise unidentified woman with the surname Neufeld. Most significantly, the genealogy states that many of his descendants are members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The most interesting family involvement of this Bernhard Penner is the fact that his brother, Aron B. Penner was an ordained minister in the earlier-mentioned "Bread-Breaker Church." This Aron B. Penner migrated to the United States and established the church as the "Church of God" in Fairview, Oklahoma. Because his son, Aron A. Penner, followed him as leader of this church, it is frequently called the "Penner-Church." This would provide yet another family linkage between the Mennonite Brethren Church and the "Bread-Breaker Church" established by Herman Peters, who himself was, interestingly enough, a signer of the Kuban letter of December 30, 1863.

#### The Kroeker/Janzen Family

Jakob Kroeker, a resident of the village Lichtfelde, signed the March 19 document. He had been born in 1822 in the village Margenau to Julius Kroeker and Anna Janzen. Of the early M.B. members, for whom family records and data are

available, he has the singular distinction of being remarkably free of family relationships with the others. His wife was a Maria Janzen, and many of her family some time later became Mennonite Brethren. One of Jakob's younger half-brothers, David Kroeker, also later joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. However, in rather stark contrast to the others we have mentioned, no known relationship exists between Jakob Kroeker and the other founders and early adherents of the Mennonite Brethren.

Perhaps this accounts in part for the very interesting pilgrimage of this particular family. Jakob Kroeker and his family moved to the Kuban in 1869, and his children attended school in the village of Tempelhof under the teacher Friedrich Lange, a founder of the "Templar Church" in the Kuban. Indeed, Jakob Kroeker's son Jakob states that he was converted, baptized by Rev. Lange, and joined the Templar Church. He later married Anna Neufeld, another member of the Templars. They remained members of that church until 1877, when they joined the Mennonite Brethren Church of the Kuban.<sup>19</sup>

The father, Jakob Kroeker, was one of the few Kuban residents who joined the trek to Central Asia under the leadership of Elder Abraham Peters, who took his independent Mennonite congregation to Turkestan, believing that the Second Coming of the Lord would occur in that region. It was only after the death of Elder Peters in 1882 that the Peters-Church decided to become the Nikolaipol Mennonite Brethren Church.<sup>20</sup> It is of great interest to notice that the Janzen family, namely the brothers and sisters of Maria Janzen (Mrs. Jakob Kroeker), were hearty supporters of Elder Peters and the migration to Asia, and thus the family relationships there appear to have influenced the Kroekers to join with Peters, rather than remain in the Kuban among the Mennonite Brethren, where few of their relatives were church members.

### The Other Signers

Family information regarding the other signers of the early documents, namely Martin Klaassen, Abraham Wiens of Lichtfelde, Daniel Hoppe, Isaak Regehr, Andreas Voth, Jakob Wall, Peter Stobbe, Abraham Peters, Wilhelm Bartel, Heinrich Flaming, and Johann Hiebert, is almost totally lacking at this time. Hopefully, such information will be uncovered, providing further details about their family connections. What does seem significant is the fact that virtually every early member of the Mennonite Brethren Church for whom family records are available, shows close family relationships with others among the founders of the church.

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There are several other persons of importance to the early Mennonite Brethren Church, who, while not becoming members themselves, have family relationships that add a new dimension to our understanding of Mennonite Brethren history. The following two men are of particular interest.

### Johann Harder

All accounts of the early years of the Mennonite Brethren Church give much credit to the support given to the struggling young church by the elder of the Ohrloff Church, Johann Harder. In fact, Johann Claassen quoted Senator von Hahn, <sup>Finance Committee</sup> a Russian official, as saying, "For your deliverance you are indebted to Elder Harder."<sup>21</sup> Without the support of the Ohrloff Church and its elder, the young Mennonite Brethren Church could hardly have survived. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that many of Harder's descendants are now members of the Mennonite Brethren Church. His oldest son, Johann, born in 1836, became a leading minister of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church, and assisted Elder Jakob A. Wiebe in the leadership of the Gnadenau Church in Kansas. Descendants of this Johann Harder are found throughout the United States as members of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Elder Harder's second son, Abraham J. Harder, was likewise a teacher and

minister in Russia, and his son Johann A. Harder was minister of the Borden (Saskatchewan) M.B. Church for many years. It is also interesting to note that the above-mentioned Abraham J. Harder was married to Anna Fast, a daughter of Bernhard Fast, elder of the Ohrloff Church immediately before Johann Harder. This Elder Fast was himself considered to be an earnest supporter of religious reform within the Mennonite community of the Molotschna Colony, and was himself sympathetic toward the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

#### David A. Friesen

The influence of this man was also unmistakable in the early years of the Mennonite Brethren Church. As the Colony Administrator, or Oberschultz, in the Molotschna, he was the outspoken and powerful opponent of the young church. Indeed, as long as he was Colony Administrator, he vociferously opposed any toleration of the new church, and persuaded most of the colony leaders--both secular and religious--to join him in that opposition. The ironic fact, however, is that Friesen's daughter, Justina, had married Jakob A. Wiebe in 1857. This Jakob Wiebe, of course, was soon to establish the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. That body, by merger in 1960, joined hands with the Mennonite Brethren Church, bringing many of Oberschultz Friesen's descendants into membership in the very church which he opposed so energetically.

#### Some Perceptions and Proposals

We could explore the impact of the family on Mennonite history both before and after 1860. Even the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1814 had the earmarks of a "family" affair. Klaas Reimer, the founder and first elder of the church, was married to a certain Helena Friesen. Her brothers and sisters constituted much of the membership of that new church, and ever afterward the surnames Reimer and Friesen dominated the history of the Kleine Gemeinde. For example, the second

elder of the church was Abraham Friesen, the brother of Helena Friesen Reimer. The third elder was Johann Friesen, her nephew. Even today, the membership of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Canada, the Canadian portion of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, and the Emmanuel Mennonite Church of Meade, Kansas, all of which find their roots in the Kleine Gemeinde, are populated by a host of Reimers and *Carl Bangs* Friesens, the descendants of Helena Friesen Reimer and her brothers.

We could also look into recent Mennonite Brethren history and see ongoing examples of the influence of the family. One need only mention the name Hiebert among Mennonite Brethren, and immediately a certain Minnesota-based family comes to mind, from which have come a long succession of ministers, missionaries, and scholars. This very symposium, and the one held several years ago to commemorate the publishing of a new history of the Mennonite Brethren Church, show ample evidence of what impact the family Toews has had upon both Mennonite history and the recording of it.

However, the patterns of family relationships we have discovered among the early members of the church, and the continuing, historic impact which certain families have had upon the ongoing life of the church, clearly demonstrate that family and church are closely related concepts. There are unmistakable lessons we can learn by observing that church and family go hand-in-hand--indeed, perhaps, that church is family, and family is church! <sup>22</sup>

#### Proposal #1: New Movements Originate out of the Family

I propose that this phenomenon is true in both secular and religious movements. This could be the natural outcome of a hitherto undiscussed assumption that deeply-felt convictions are most quickly relayed to persons closest to you. There is a natural tendency for one to share his revolutionary and somewhat dangerous thoughts and ideas first with someone whom he trusts not to betray him, and with someone from whom he has regularly received comfort and support. The logical

sounding board for new ideas is the family. The very same line of reasoning can be used regarding evangelism. The proponents of a new idea--particularly an idea which calls for commitment, allegiance, and sacrifice--will seek to share their newfound commitment first with those they care for, namely their family.

#### Proposal #2: New Movements try to Duplicate the Family

The family is such a recognized, obvious source of strength and support, that each new movement seeks to follow its example as a model of cohesiveness, acceptance, mutual concern, and respect. It is no accident, and certainly not a mere affectation, which causes adherents of a new movement to address each other as "brothers" and "sisters." It is likewise no coincidence that newly-created, closely-knit organizations frequently speak of themselves as "brotherhoods," "fraternal orders," "fraternities," "sororities," "la nuestra familia," or even "Bruedergemeinde." The model of the family is so powerful in its influence that every organization concentrates upon duplicating it in spirit, closeness, and strength.

#### Proposal #3: The Survival of a Movement Depends upon its Faithfulness to the Family Concept

The welcome of a new member to an established group must also be understood as an acceptance to the family. The power and witness of the early Mennonite Brethren Church, for example, was so all-encompassing that the conversion of Lutherans and Catholics from the surrounding colonies meant not only acceptance in the church, but also an invitation into the family. That invitation was so strong that many current so-called "Mennonite" family names were "Lutheran" and "Catholic" family names only a century ago. The Kuban Mennonite Brethren Church membership list of 1878, reproduced as an appendix to this article, shows the presence already in Russia, of a large number of new families who had been welcomed into both church and family. One of the shortcomings of the Mennonite Brethren Church during much

of its recent history has been its duplicity in evangelizing and seeking the conversion of all types of persons within its reach, while simultaneously refusing to welcome these converts into the family as sons-in-law and daughters-in-law. You cannot call someone "brother" and at the same time forbid him your daughter's hand in marriage. Hopefully, we have learned this lesson. Just as hopefully, a century from now there will be a long list of new "Mennonite" family names!

Proposal #4: The Influence of the Family Upon a new Movement Implies the Related Powerful Influence of Women Upon that Movement

Historians have traditionally overlooked the role of women upon history. That oversight has particularly plagued writers and recorders of church history. Certainly, if families have an impact upon history, we must recognize that those families contain mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. The difficulty for the historian, however, is the fact that the role of women has generally been subordinated to that of men, and thus it is nearly impossible to isolate the influence of women from that of the significant men around them. The pronouncements of the great men of history are seldom identified as reflecting the insights of their mothers, wives, or sisters. But this was virtually the only way that a gifted woman's influence could be expressed until recently--through her father, husband, brother, or son. I propose that the nature of relationships among the early Mennonite Brethren is indicative that the women had considerable influence. The frequency of "in-laws" among the founding brethren implies that the common relative of both, a woman, had exercised some influence in causing both of the men involved to join in the common task of religious rebirth. Since the early Mennonite Brethren Church forbade women to speak in church,<sup>23</sup> they were constrained to speak in the only way they could, through their husbands, brothers, and sons.

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The study of the impact of the family upon history is still in its beginning stages. Because of the scarcity and remoteness of the relevant and specific resources, the discovery of family influence is often an exercise in detective work, deduction, and reading between the lines. This paper represents the current state of this exercise, as it relates to the family in Mennonite Brethren history. As the power of the family becomes more widely understood, and as family records and reminiscences are discovered and interpreted, there will hopefully be a more comprehensive and definitive examination of that linkage between history and the family.

I challenge each of you to consider the impact of the family in history, as it has been described in this paper. More important, I call upon each of you to reflect upon your own personal history, and evaluate the impact which your family has had upon you and your own pilgrimage. Perhaps we can, all together, learn to understand that family "language" well enough, so that historians will no longer have reason to ignore it.



## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> P. M. Friesen, Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910) (Halbstadt: Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911).
- <sup>2</sup> Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1973).
- <sup>3</sup> John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro: The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950).
- <sup>4</sup> A. H. Unruh, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brudergemeinde 1860-1954 (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1955).
- <sup>5</sup> John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro: The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975).
- <sup>6</sup> These are the names of his parents as recorded in the church records of the Ebenfeld (Kansas) Mennonite Brethren Church. The Mennonite Encyclopedia errs when it gives his mother's name as Agnetha.
- <sup>7</sup> Der Deutsche Westen, August 13, 1908.
- <sup>8</sup> Bekker, op. cit., pp. 158-166.
- <sup>9</sup> One account is found in Lohrenz, op. cit., p. 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Friesen, op. cit., p. 247.
- <sup>11</sup> Records of the Corn (Oklahoma) Mennonite Brethren Church.
- <sup>12</sup> Gerhard Reimer, Reimer Family Materials, unpublished manuscript.
- <sup>13</sup> Friesen, op. cit., pp. 337-338.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 343.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 199 (footnote).
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 201-202.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 295.
- <sup>18</sup> Genealogy of Berend Dyck, privately published.
- <sup>19</sup> Marcellus Duerksen, A History of the J. J. Kroeker and John Warkentin Families, privately published.
- <sup>20</sup> My grandfather, Dietrich D. Peters, personally recounted to me that his grandfather, Elder Abraham Peters, who had come into contact with the Mennonite Brethren when he was a minister of the Ohrloff Church, encouraged his followers from his deathbed to become a Mennonite Brethren congregation. This they did after his death in 1897.

<sup>21</sup>Toews, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>22</sup>For further discussion of this matter, see Alan Peters, "The Impact of the Family in Mennonite History," Direction, I (July, 1972), 74-81.

<sup>23</sup>Bekker, op. cit., p. 95.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A--The Signers of the Secession Document,  
January 6, 1860

Abraham Cornelissen	Elisabethhtal
Cornelius Wiens	Elisabethhtal
Isaak Koop	Elisabethhtal
Franz Klaassen	Elisabethhtal
Abraham Wiens	Elisabethhtal
Martin Klaassen	Lichtfelde
Abraham Wiens	Lichtfelde
Daniel Hoppe <sup>1</sup>	Schardau
August Strauss	Schardau
Jakob Boecker <sup>2</sup>	Rudnerweide
Isaak Regehr <sup>3</sup>	Pastwa
Andreas Voth	Pastwa
Jakob Wall	Pastwa
Johann Claassen	Liebenau
Heinrich Huebert <sup>4</sup>	Liebenau
Peter Stobbe	Ladekopp
Abraham Peters <sup>5</sup>	Ladekopp
Diedrich Claassen	Mariental

<sup>1</sup>Unruh calls him David Hoppe; both Friesen and Bekker say Daniel.

<sup>2</sup>His last name is spelled differently in all three sources. Friesen gives Boecker, Bekker gives Bekker, and Unruh gives Becker.

<sup>3</sup>Both Friesen and Bekker say Regehr; Unruh says Regier.

<sup>4</sup>Friesen says Huebert; both Bekker and Unruh say Hiebert.

<sup>5</sup>Friesen and Bekker correctly state name as Abraham Peters; Unruh errs in naming him Abraham Klassen.

APPENDIX B--The Signers of the "Explanation" Document  
of March 19, 1860

David Claassen	Ladekopp
Abraham Peters	Ladekopp
Peter Stobbe	Ladekopp
Heinrich Huebert	Liebenau
Simon Harms	Liebenau
Johann Claassen	Liebenau
Gottlieb Strauss	Waldheim
Johann Strauss <sup>1</sup>	Waldheim
Friedrich Strauss	Waldheim
David Doerksen	Waldheim
Jakob Reimer	Gnadenfeld
Heinrich Bartel	Gnadenfeld

Bernhard Penner  
 Jakob Boecker<sup>2</sup>  
 Benjamin Bekker  
 Abraham Regehr  
 Jakob Wall  
 Isaak Regehr  
 Andreas Voth  
 Wilhelm Bartel  
 Isaak Koop  
 Abraham Cornelissen  
 Franz Klassen<sup>3</sup>  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Cornelius Wiens  
 August Strauss  
 Daniel Hoppe  
 Heinrich Flaming  
 Martin Klassen  
 Jakob Kroeker  
 Abraham Wiens  
 (Johann Hiebert  
 (Diedrich Claassen

Gnadenfeld  
 Rudnerweide  
 Rudnerweide  
 Rudnerweide  
 Pastwa  
 Pastwa  
 Pastwa  
 Berdjansk  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Schardau  
 Schardau  
 Schardau  
 Lichtfelde  
 Lichtfelde  
 Lichtfelde  
 Wernersdorf)<sup>4</sup>  
 Mariental)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Friesen lists two men by this name as being signers from Waldheim; Bekker lists only one.

<sup>2</sup>Friesen, in a footnote, emphasizes that Jakob signed his name Boecker, while Benjamin signed his Bekker. Bekker gives both as Bekker.

<sup>3</sup>Friesen gives name as Klassen; Bekker says Klaassen.

<sup>4</sup>Johann Hiebert is listed only by Bekker.

<sup>5</sup>Diedrich Claassen is listed only by Friesen.

#### APPENDIX C--Participants in the Election of Leaders, May 30, 1860

Martin Klassen  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Jakob Kroeker<sup>1</sup>  
 Franz Klassen  
 Kornelius Wiens  
 Abraham Wiens  
 August Strauss  
 Daniel Hoppe  
 Heinrich Flaming  
 Dietrich Claassen  
 Isaak Regier  
 Abraham Regier  
 Jakob Boecker  
 Benjamin Bekker

Lichtfelde  
 Lichtfelde  
 Lichtfelde  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Elisabeththal  
 Schardau  
 Schardau  
 Schardau  
 Mariental  
 Pastwa  
 Rudnerweide  
 Rudnerweide  
 Rudnerweide

Jakob Reimer  
 Bernhard Penner Jr.  
 Heinrich Bartel  
 Gottlieb Strauss  
 Johann Strauss  
 Friedrich Strauss  
 David Dirksen  
 Johann Huebert  
 Heinrich Huebert  
 Simon Harms  
 Peter Stobb  
 Abraham Peters  
 David Claassen  
 Andreas Voth

Gnadenfeld  
 Gnadenfeld  
 Gnadenfeld  
 Waldheim  
 Waldheim  
 Waldheim  
 Waldheim  
 Wernersdorf  
 Liebenau  
 Liebenau  
 Fuerstenau  
 Ladekopp  
 Ladekopp  
 Pastwa

<sup>1</sup>Friesen mentions that the name of Jakob Kroecker was crossed out in the original document, and no vote is recorded for him.

APPENDIX D--Signers of the Letter of  
 October 10, 1862

Abraham Peters  
 David Claassen  
 Johann Claassen  
 Peter Stobbe  
 Peter Martens  
 Heinrich Nickel  
 Benjamin Bekker  
 Peter Nickel  
 Johann Claassen  
 Cornelius Reimer  
 Johann Claassen  
 Cornelius Knelsen  
 Simon Harms  
 Johann Huebert  
 Peter Dyck  
 Johann Martins  
 Cornelius Penner  
 Jakob Reimer  
 Dietrich Claassen  
 Bernhard Penner  
 Johann Strauss  
 Friedrich Strauss  
 David Duerksen  
 Abraham Dyck  
 Franz Claassen  
 Isaak Koop  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Cornelius Wiens  
 Heinrich Flaming  
 Abraham Regier  
 Heinrich Neufeld

(older brother of the Deputy)  
 (David Claassen's son)

(the Deputy)

(nephew of the Deputy)

(Older brother of the Deputy)

Dietrich Claassen  
 Bernhard Janzen  
 Martin Klaassen  
 Jakob Kroeker  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Wilhelm Loewen  
 Heinrich Huebert  
 Jakob Boecker

(Dietrich Claassen's son)

APPENDIX E--Signers of the Letter of December 30, 1863  
 Regarding the Kuban

Heinrich Huebert  
 Jakob Reimer  
 Bernhard Penner  
 Jakob Boecker  
 Heinrich Neufeld  
 David Duerksen  
 Friedrich Strauss  
 Franz Klaassen  
 Isaak Koop  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Isaak Koop  
 Peter Stobbe  
 Heinrich Flaming  
 Wilhelm Loewen  
 Andreas Voth  
 Dietrich Claassen  
 Jakob Kroeker  
 Johann Friesen  
 Gerhard Friesen  
 Franz Friesen  
 Hermann Peters

(son of the above)

(founder and elder of the Hermann  
 Peters Church)

Jakob Martens  
 Heinrich Boldt  
 Abraham Eidzen  
 Daniel Eidzen  
 Johann Martins  
 Cornelius Penner  
 Heinrich Penner  
 Abraham Penner  
 Franz Wall  
 Abraham Deleske  
 Jakob Deleske  
 Jakob Devehr  
 Cornelius Wiens  
 Abraham Wiens  
 Bernhard Janzen  
 Abraham Neufeld  
 Heinrich Friesen  
 Wilhelm Giesbrecht  
 Cornelius Claassen  
 Peter Siemens

David Claassen  
 Cornelius Pauls  
 Franz Martens  
 Johann Claassen  
 Cornelius Reimer  
 Abraham Dyck  
 Johann Claassen  
 Benjamin Bekker  
 Klaas Huebert  
 Jakob Giesbrecht  
 Peter Nickel  
 Dietrich Claassen  
 Johann Claassen  
 Peter Buhler  
 Cornelius Knelsen  
 Peter Dueck  
 Abraham Huebert

APPENDIX F--List of Members of the Wohldemfuerst (Kuban)  
 Mennonite Brethren Church on January 1, 1878

Living in Wohldemfuerst

Br. Karl Kalweit and wife  
 Br. Jakob Neufeld and wife  
 Br. Simon Harms and wife  
 Br. Abraham Wiens and wife  
 Br. Johann Gudwin and wife  
 Br. Johann Gudwin and wife  
 Br. Heinrich Flaming and wife  
 Widow Huebert  
 Br. Jakob Peneer and Sister P.  
 Br. Ernst Stark and wife  
 Br. Kor. Prachtnau  
 Br. Kornelius Jantz  
 Br. Franz Schinkowsky  
 Br. Julius Grosmann  
 Br. Wilh. Krampe  
 Br. Heinrich Huebert  
 Mrs. Clas Huebert and Karolina  
 Br. Kor. Reimer  
 Br. Jakob Engbrecht  
 Br. Peter Blok  
 Br. Abraham Peters and Daughter  
 Br. Daniel Fast  
 Kor. Wiens  
 (illegible) Dueck  
 (illegible) Gaede  
 Br. Abr. Gaede  
 Sister Agatha  
 Sister Martens  
 Br. Joh. Klass.  
 Br. Isbrand  
 Sister Anna Regehr

Sister Susanna Isaak  
 Br. Peter Baerg  
 Sister Pauls  
 Sister Buller  
 Sister Goertzen  
 Br. Peter Goertz  
 Br. Georg Rueffel  
 Sister Krause  
 Sister Kornelsen  
 Br. Abr. Loewen  
 Br. Gottlieb Goertz

Living in Alexanderfeld

Sister Friesen  
 Sister Helena Friesen  
 Br. Jakob Martens and daughter  
 Br. Gerh. Freisen  
 Br. Bernh. Pener  
 Br. Jakob Kroeker  
 Br. Johann Pener  
 Br. Heinrich Peters and son  
 Br. Abrah. Peters  
 Br. Kornel. Krause  
 Br. Peter Pener and son  
 Br. Siebert Goertzen and son  
 Sister Helena Friesen  
 Br. Abrah. Huebert  
 Sister Defehr  
 Sister Reimer  
 Br. Gerhard Goertzen  
 Br. August Lierman  
 Br. Johann Nefeld  
 Sister Margr. Kr.  
 Br. Abrah. Goertzen and his son Abraham  
 Brud. Freumark (?)  
 Br. Kornelius Funk  
 Brud. Heinrich Nickel  
 Br. Peter Nickel  
 Br. Bernhard Janzen