



OMHGS NEWSLETTER

Volume 20, Issue 2

AUGUST 2007

OREGON MENNONITE HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

A REPORT OF THE VISIT OF JOHN L. RUTH TO OREGON

John L. Ruth of Harleysville, Pennsylvania was the guest speaker for OMHGS in March of 2007. John L. Ruth is a Mennonite pastor, author and historian as well as a fantastic story teller. He seems to have a story for every occasion. He says his university training was in literature, not history and calls himself an amateur historian. [If he is an amateur, where do the rest of us fit in?] He pastored at his home church, Salford Mennonite, and has authored numerous books including histories of both the Franconia and Lancaster Mennonite conferences of Pennsylvania.

At a dinner meeting on Saturday evening, March 24, John gave a power-point presentation entitled "A Contemporary Tour of Anabaptist-related Sites in Europe." He has been taking pictures in Europe for the past 40 years as he has led numerous tour groups. The evening's pictures were a travelogue of Anabaptist sites in Europe he and his tour groups have visited. What follows are a few general comments about some of the pictures that he made that evening.

Three Wise Men depicted in a picture in Strasbourg and one is African.

St. Christopher carrying Jesus across the water – a frequently seen statue.

An interesting picture seen in Colmar of Jesus rising from the dead while the soldiers obey gravity and fall to the ground.

You see numerous pictures in Europe of black Madonnas. They are black due to the fact that over the centuries so many candles have been burned near them that the pictures have turned black.

At the confluence of three rivers, the Inn, the Blue Danube and a third one, is the city of Passau in Bavaria. Anabaptists were imprisoned here in 1535 and many of them martyred. The Ausbund song-book, still used by today's Old Order Amish, contained many martyr songs composed by these people at that time. This song book is still reprinted today in large quantities.

The town of Asperen in The Netherlands where Dirk Willems was imprisoned in the tower, today considers him a hero; however, they consider him to be a member of the Reformed Church and are not interested in learning that he was an Anabaptist. Any child growing up in a Mennonite home today and not knowing the story of Dirk Willems has not been treated fairly!

There are no contemporary pictures of Menno Simons; only an artist's concept.

Refugees went north from Switzerland right after the end of the Thirty Years War, about 1650. People of the Palatinate say the Anabaptists of Switzerland brought them their agriculture.

Mennonites in The Netherlands became cultured and wealthy within a century after persecution ceased. The Dutch Mennonites

took culture along with them to Prussia. Architecture was taken from The Netherlands to West Prussia and from there to Halbstadt in Russia.

In Russia during the difficult days after World War I, the only village totally wiped out by the anarchists was Eichenfeld. This is where some young men got guns and decided to try to defend the town. The town was totally destroyed in revenge. In contrast, two sisters in the village of Gnadenfeld, when confronted by the enemy offered them a drink of water and thus their farm was spared. Eventually these sisters made it to the United States and settled in Kansas.

A letter in the Mennonite archives in Amsterdam is the only known extant item in Menno Simon's handwriting.

And a final more current story out of Germany. A Christian Landis family lived on a rented farm near Heilbruck. American Army soldiers hunting for German soldiers stopped there and asked if there were any German soldiers there. Mrs. Landis said no and that they may search the place. The leader noticed a picture of Menno Simons on the wall and asked if they were Mennonites. When she said yes, he called his men and told them to stop the search. He was from Pennsylvania and knew Mennonites and knew that if Mrs. Landis told him there were no Germans there, then there weren't!

ON SUNDAY afternoon, March 25, John Ruth was again the featured speaker for the regular Spring Meeting of OMHGS, held at the Zion Mennonite Church of Hubbard, Oregon.

Sheldon Burkhalter led in a devotional meditation in which, among other comments, he related a story about early Pennsylvania Quakers that he had heard from John Ruth. This, in turn, sparked John's memory further and he told the following stories before launching into the afternoon's program.

In Christopher Sauer's monthly magazine, there is a little story of an African man found hanged in the Philadelphia area with his pockets full of apples. An investigation having been made, it was determined that the man (having been captured in Africa and shipped over here) despaired and wanted to join his wife and family again so he had put these apples in his pockets to give them when he got to see them again when he died.

Another story is about a Quaker who said he had heard about a Mennonite man from Lancaster County determined to get some slaves because of the economic advantage and he knew he would have to give up his church because the Mennonites did not allow slave owners in membership and he had determined to get this slave. Then he had a dream of a ladder to heaven and like Jacob at Bethel decided to climb it. Jacob never decided to climb it, but this farmer wanted to climb it and he got all the way up to the top and

FALL MEETING

October 21, 2007, 2:30 p.m.
Albany Mennonite Church
3405 Kaiser Avenue NE, Albany, Oregon

Welcome Ray Kauffman
Devotional Meditation John Willems
Special Music Slavic Singers of Salem, Oregon
Necessary Business Bernard Showalter
"A Visit to the Ukraine"..... Jerry Barkman
Closing Song and Prayer

Welcome to one and all

apparently couldn't quite make it into the entrance of heaven; he couldn't quite get off the ladder because something was holding him back. He looked down and here was this slave that had him by the ankle. At that point, it was said, he gave up deciding to have a slave!

The other famous story is in the personal memoirs of John Woolman, the Quaker, a classic American writer of his time. He had traveled down into Maryland and on the way back had heard this story of a Menist (a Mennonite) who had been traveling through there and had needed lodging one night on his journey. Having arrived near the home of a friend, not a Mennonite, he decided to turn in there and get a night's lodging. However, when he got there he found slaves outside sleeping around the fire so he slept with them. According to Woolman, the story goes that when his friend later heard he had failed to come into the house, he reproached him by asking him why he didn't come in. "You know you would have been welcome in there, why didn't you come in?" And the Menist replied, "When I saw these slaves, the accommodations they had out there, I knew that if I was one of them I would have no better accommodations than that, so I decided to sleep with them."

There are other stories like that but those are just little beads on the string about slavery.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BEGINNINGS OF ANABAPTISM

Note: This was also a power-point presentation and we did not receive a printed script; therefore what follows are general comments about the flow of the program with commentary by John Ruth indented in the text. These edited comments are taken from the recordings made of both presentations.

This afternoon, regardless of the title given on the program, I would call my presentation Anabaptism 101. I am not a history professor. I went into something at which I am an amateur, but you may look up anything and correct me if I am wrong. I have been traveling in Europe for 40 years and in the meantime my eye has been caught by images, visuals, that speak of the logic of why there are Anabaptists. Not everyone is satisfied with my presentation because they have developed a certain picture of how it was and it isn't the same. But this is the way it appeared to me. This is all I am presenting you with, something that has spoken to my heart. Martin

Luther came to the gospel through his personal struggle over the sense of feeling able to face God, to be justified as a sinner. Even though he could be a monk and be everything else and do everything right, he still couldn't feel saved. It was in reading the Apostle Paul's works that he broke through. At that moment he realized that it was by grace; you couldn't be good but you could still be justified: simultaneously a sinner and justified! When that hit him, he said he could hear the birds sing, that the earth seemed to him like a paradise. And it was wonderful. We should all sort of replicate that experience as we get that insight.

But that was not the path by which the Anabaptists approached the gospel. Instead of reading Paul they read the Sermon on the Mount, and the good news to them was that they could be like that! God wouldn't play a trick on us and ask us to be something that we couldn't be. Martin Luther said (and he had a point, of course) that sure, you can aim at that but you know you won't be like that but you can still be forgiven. And the Anabaptists would say, "Well, what was it (the Sermon on the Mount) given for then?" Luther said, "Aha, to show you what you ought to be, and when you try for it, you will inevitably despair and then you will throw yourself on the grace of God."

That lies behind my view of the Anabaptists. Martin Luther called them enthusiasts, fanatics. He said a fanatic likes to swallow the Holy Ghost, feathers and all. He wants to be very literalistic, and it's true Anabaptists did take the Sermon on the Mount literally and Luther thought it was unfortunate. But that was the good news. That's why one person looked at this and said, "Oh, it's all about politics, is it?" No way; but there are political consequences when you hear the good news.

The first picture shown was a map of Europe on which John Ruth pointed out various places relevant to early Anabaptism, including Alsace where refugees went from Zurich and Bern after the Thirty Years War. Some of them were invited to the Palatinate, on both sides of the Rhine at that time (today it is only one side). As he went along, John pointed out various areas from which people bearing common Amish and Mennonite surnames today had emigrated to the United States.

This is in a Swiss church. To me it is highly symbolic. A sword is being given to Peter, the first pope, but what sword? That's the whole question. In Switzerland the sword protects the delicate baby; the bishop is there with his authority and the armor of the knight and the cross on the flag itself is all blended into one scene. It was the disentangling of these motifs that characterized the emergence of the Anabaptists.

This picture is from Prague. The hero of Prague is John Huss. A hundred years before Martin Luther he preached at a university there in a way that awakened people, not only to the abuses of the church of the time but of the Gospel itself. He, of course, was treacherously lured down to Constance where he was burned at the stake. As they prepared to burn him, he said, "Today you are roasting a goose (huss means goose), but in a hundred years will come a white swan. You will hear from him." Martin Luther came a hundred years later.

This picture on a pillar somewhere in Germany indicates the welding together of the authority of the bishop of the church

OMHGS Newsletter is published biannually by Oregon Mennonite Historical and Genealogical Society: President, Bernard Showalter; Vice-president, Goldie Heyerly Secretary, Eileen Weaver; Treasurer, Don Bacher; Librarian, Violet Burley; Newsletter Editor, Ronald G. Diener. Send general correspondence to Margaret Shetler, 5326 Briar Knob Loop NE, Scotts Mills, OR., 97375. Newsletter items may be sent to Ronald G. Diener at 3298 Nekia St., Woodburn, OR., 97071. Back issues of the OMHGS Newsletter are available at \$3.00 each from OMHGS, 9045 Wallace Rd., Salem, OR., 97304. "In the interest of free exchange of information, this publication is not restricted by copyright, except where specifically noted. OMHGS does not assume responsibility for errors in these pages, but welcomes all documented corrections if errors occur."

with that of the prince. In fact, the prince-bishop ruled large swaths of Germany. They were welded together. This is the warehouse of the bishop, the prince-bishop. The local peons all had to bring their tribute and he had to have a place to store it. That was his wealth because they worked for him. They didn't own their land; the prince-bishop owned it. He was the representative of Christ and of the force of government.

One picture showed what was common in Strassburg which during the Reformation became a Protestant city. Once a year officials read from the Oath Letter and all the young men 21 or older had to hold up two fingers and promise, at the cost of their own life, to defend the city.

This (a picture of a printing press) was to Europe what the internet is to us. I could compare it in so many ways. When information could travel from one end of Europe to the other in two weeks in multiple copies, something was going to change. As Marshall McCluren said, "The medium is the message; you change the medium and society changes with it."

Down in Switzerland at this battle there was a young chaplain named Ulrich Zwingli. As a Swiss soldier carried the cross of Christ against their enemies, maybe from the South, Zwingli looked on and said, "This can't be right." And he began to preach against the Swiss having commercial soldiers.

Up in Thuringia in Saxony, Martin Luther was walking home, a young lawyer-to-be, when lightning struck down a companion and in his own mortal fright, he promised God that he would be monk if God spared his life. And Luther did become an Augustinian monk.

On another path was the man from Rotterdam who taught at the University of Basel. He was one of Zwingli's professors, a humanist, that is not in the sense of anti-Christian, far from it, but he looked at the humanities; that is, the classics, Greek and Latin, and was a figure in the so-called Renaissance. He paraphrased into the German the Epistles of St. Paul. Now people can read; they can get the savor of the original scriptures.

A picture of the new tower on the wall of Zurich. Here's the moat. Conrad Grebel and about a dozen other Anabaptists spent the winter of 1525/26. Conrad and the group are just a block away from the house where the sophisticated and aristocratic Grebel family lived inside the wall and his wife and three annoying 'brats'. She was miserable living with her in-laws. Next is a drawing from that time depicting their escape. In early spring when the weather was very poor yet, they are in the dungeon but somebody left a rope there--they don't know who--and they all climbed out.

Conrad was a literary scholar. He dropped that. In a letter he wrote to Thomas Munster he quotes scripture after scripture, particularly the book of Matthew, chapters five and 18. To him it's good news. It's a new view of society. All Conrad got written the rest of his life outside of letters was a kind of concordance, or listing, of scriptures that Christians should turn their attention to. I think we have the list somewhere. Instead of him being an editor of Latin classics, he became a very fine young leader of the Anabaptists.

They caught Felix Manz again and put him in a little boat, took him to the fisherman's but in the middle of the Limmat River, tied his hands together, slipped them over his knees with a stick in between so he couldn't maneuver and drowned him. That was the best show in town. They buried him in the town dump. They did capture George Blaurock. They did not drown

him because he was not a native of Zurich. He was expelled, but they taught him a lesson first. He was beaten all the way down this long street which is the street of Zurich's night life today. Zwingli said that Blaurock was practically beaten to death. When they got to the end of the city, they forced him to make a promise — he wouldn't at first, but finally did — that he would not come back there. He wound up in what today is northern Italy in the south Tyrol and was imprisoned in a castle and then they burned him at the stake in the next town.

In 2004 a plaque was placed along the Limmat in Zurich for Felix Manz, 1527, the first Anabaptist martyr in Zurich and for the last one, Hans Landis, who was beheaded in 1614.

Michael Sattler, a Benedictine monk, at the same time Felix Manz was being drowned wrote up a confession, A Brotherly Agreement of Some Children of God Regarding Seven Points. That's the "Schleitheim Confession". They have a new museum at Schleitheim now. It is not Mennonites that have this, but they are being very careful to preserve the Anabaptist story. They have a room or two for it. A plaque for Michael and Margaret Sattler reads: "They died for their faith. He was burned at the stake here on the Gallows Hill and she was drowned in the nearby Neckar River."

In this interesting picture the man with the thick neck is Martin Luther and he is with Zwingli. This is up in Marburg, Germany, and they are debating over communion. Zwingli held the line against Luther. He would not compromise and as a result everybody was disappointed. There were two kinds of Protestants in German-speaking Europe: Reformed and Lutheran. What happened to Zwingli? He had started to preach in 1520. Ten years later he led, as a chaplain, a campaign against the Catholics of the next canton. He led them to battle. He drew up battle plans. I guess he must have been reading in the book of Joshua and he thought God was leading him to bring Protestantism to all of Europe. Instead, he was killed and his body violated there at Kappel, south of Zurich. There he stands in this picture in effigy today with a double grip on the sword of the Spirit but also the sword of the Flesh. That is how he is remembered behind the Grossmunster Church there in Zurich.

Henry Bullinger wrote a history of the Anabaptists that sort of fixed a negative picture of the Anabaptists for centuries in Switzerland.

This is Vadian, Conrad's brother-in-law, married to Martha Grebel, standing in St. Gallen--the Renaissance scholar gesturing back where his books are stored. There is a Vadian Street and a Zwingli Street but no Grebel street.

A picture of Pilgrim Marpeck's Rottenberg. Pilgram Marpeck led cells, whether in the Inn River Valley or Strassburg. He had to leave both because of that. He was the Menno Simons of the South.

Briefly about Munster. This fellow, Jan Matthies, a baker from Harlem, took over and kicked everybody out of Munster that wouldn't get baptized. Then he was killed and another Jan even worse took over. The leaders that took over Munster and acted crazy were tortured and killed, their bodies mutilated and then their bodies were put in cages. Replicas of the cages are there to this day. It was Munster that brought Menno Simons out, pointing to the Scriptures, saying, "No; you can have all the enthusiasm you want, but no other foundation can be laid than is Jesus Christ." And he had to do it like the disciples. You know, Jesus was killed on false charges. So specific Menno who taught

total nonviolence had to take the opprobrium of Europe for those violent Anabaptists. There are millions of Europeans today who, all they know about Anabaptists is that they took over Munster. So at the bottom of every page of Menno's books, I Corinthians 3:11 (in German): "No other fundament than Jesus Christ." He was a fundamentalist, but not in the poor sense.

How would you memorialize the radicals of Munster? Today in the square in Munster (picture of a memorial): flames, names, dates, a cylinder of water buried under the cobblestones with water made from two sources: the water of an old well that was opened up in Munster that would have been contemporary with the Anabaptist takeover in the 1530s mixed with water from the River Jordan, remembering the Anabaptists.

There wasn't time for Menno Simon's story. He did show a picture of the hidden church in Pinjum and told the story of Munster. The final picture was of the so-called Linden tree that Menno is supposed to have planted, with the I Corinthians scripture printed in Dutch. The Dutch Mennonites are wanting to build a visitor's center there, somewhere close by.

One final thought from John Ruth: Theirs (the Anabaptists) was not a religion only of the heart; it was a religion that made a difference in the way people treated each other. You had a conscience and you couldn't do certain things.

Through the Years

A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

by Ruby Friesen

On June 23 and 24 I participated in an event that happens only once in an organization--the celebration of a centennial. It was 100 years since the First Mennonite Church in Aberdeen, ID, was organized. Former members, attendees, pastors and interim and student pastors joined the local congregation to swell numbers for the Sunday morning program and the fellowship meal afterwards to over 300 individuals. We came from 14 states, some as far away as New York and Pennsylvania, and one foreign country, India. The Friesen name was very prominent for many of those 100 years, but at present only one of my nephews and his wife live in the area and actively participate, and his name is not Friesen!

I had flown to Boise where a niece met me and took me to Caldwell to visit with my sister and brother-in-law. We drove to Aberdeen for the weekend. Also there for the celebration was my only surviving brother who had come from North Newton, KS, with my sister-in-law, so this was also a little family reunion for us. At the city park and the church, where festivities occurred, it was impossible not to run into old friends and acquaintances, some no longer recognizable because of the time elapsed since last seen.

Earliest pioneers in the community were Mennonites. Mennonites owned the businesses: hardware store, retail store, grocery stores, grain elevators, or were the banker and postmaster, etc. The church was the first organization of any kind in the town. It was fitting, therefore, that the centennial was celebrated during the annual Chamber of Commerce observance of Aberdeen Daze. We joined in the free breakfast in the park on Saturday morning, long lines forming from 7 a.m. until everyone was served at 10:30. The parade started in front of the Mennonite Church with two of the oldest men of the congregation as Grand Marshals. (One, at nearly 95, with his wife, had just celebrated a 73rd wedding anniversary.) A community concert was led by

Daniel Hege in the new Middle School. Hege, now director of the Syracuse, NY, Symphony Orchestra is son of Carl and Anne who were the Overall Planning Coordinators for the Centennial and descendants of the very first minister to serve back in 1907.

I especially enjoyed the Sunday worship programs. The church was filled almost to capacity and included even a few Mormon neighbors. There was no Sunday School. The service led by the last interim pastor, Dave Stutzman from Salem, consisted of joyful songs of praise, letters read from previous pastors and family members of deceased ministers, also short talks from those who had served at some time and were present. There were many — Aberdeen had had summer student pastors for many years. Invariable, the welcoming congregation, the summer youth retreats at Palisades camp and potatoes were mentioned. Letters written in behalf of one previous pastor's wife who is now 102 years old and a choir director's wife now 104 were read. Both presently live in other states. The first segment of the service concluded with baptism of three new members. Communion was served at the end of the second segment. A continuation of the morning's programs followed the fellowship meal. At this time we also heard from Barry Bartel whose wife Brenda hails from Aberdeen and who had come from the PNWC convention Saturday evening.

My attendance at the Centennial exceeded all expectation. Even the open vistas of the area showcasing verdant green potato, beet and grain fields at this season, added to the celebratory occasion. The Lord has truly blessed First Mennonite Church. I highly value the heritage passed on to me through this, my home church.

*Reprinted from the Salem Mennonite "Salemennonews" for July/August 2007 and used with permission from both the author and editor of the publication.

IN MEMORIUM

Jon A. SNYDER who was serving as vice-president of OMHGS at the time, died March 4, 2007 from injuries received in a single car accident on I-84 several miles east of The Dalles. Jon, born April 3, 1941, was the oldest son of Albert and Ethel (Nickerson) Snyder. He was a graduate of Western Mennonite School, Hesston College and Goshen College. He served in PAX in the Congo during the turbulent political unrest there in the 1960s. Jon is survived by his wife, Janet (Green), two sons, Philip and David, and five grandchildren.

Charity KROPF who was librarian for OMHGS died March 19, 2007 following a fall that resulted in a broken hip. Charity was born August 20, 1915, daughter of Harvey and Polly (Miller) Kropf. She graduated as an R.N. from LaJunta (Colorado) School of Nursing in 1943 and spent the majority of her nursing career as Director of Nursing Services at the Lebanon Hospital, retiring in 1981. She also received a B.A. degree from Linfield College in 1979. She served as the head librarian for Zion Mennonite Church for more than 40 years.

Verelda ROTH, wife of Oscar Roth, died at Goshen, Indiana May 24, 2007. She was born August 12, 1924 at Eureka, Illinois, daughter of Walter and Alvina (Wagner) Zook. Oscar is the son of Amos and Sarah (Stalter) Roth and was born and raised in the Woodburn area; both he and Verelda have been long-time members of OMHGS. Oscar, three children and five grandchildren survive.