

# Our Heritage

Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter

Fall 2013

Volume 26, Issue 2

*PNMHS Spring Meeting*

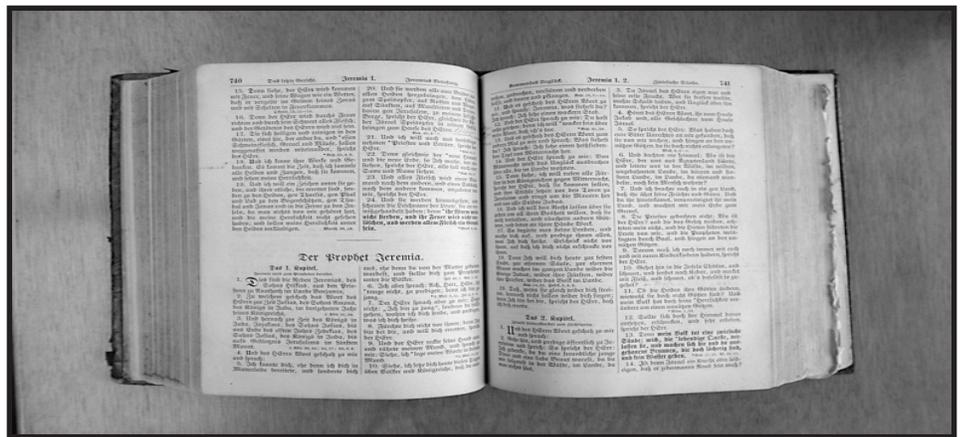
## Jacob A. Wiebe and the Founding of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren *by Jerry Barkman*

During my early years at Gnadenu M.B. Church in Hillsboro, I heard much about Elder Jacob A. Wiebe from my parents and their families.

They spoke about his interest in medicine and his ability to set bones. Less was said about his spiritual pilgrimage but it was always agreed that he was a man of God, the one who led the Gnadenu Church from the Crimea to Kansas.

I remember visits to the Gnadenu Cemetery, two miles south of Hillsboro, Kansas, where I would see the graves of Elder Wiebe and his wife Justina. Theirs were the only graves with a “fence” around the plot with a tree growing inside it!

Many articles and books have been written about Elder Wiebe and the founding of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. When contacted



*Jacob Wiebe's Bible, published in 1902, and used by Wiebe late in his life. (Photo courtesy Jerry Barkman.)*

by Peggy Goertzen (Identify) about writing an article on Elder Wiebe, I wondered what I might contribute to this body of material.

After some weeks of study and research, I concluded that some light needed to be shed on the conversion experience of Jacob A. Wiebe. Much has been said about his stress on immersion baptism and what became peculiar about the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, the for-

ward immersion. Before that, however, what forces were at work that led Wiebe to the conversion experience and then to seek re-baptism? Why did the small church in the Crimea align itself with the Kleine Gemeinde and why did it then separate?

Mennonites first came to South Russia from Prussia in 1788 when the Chortitza Colony was founded. This settlement was overwhelmed initially by a number of serious problems. A

## Duplicate Periodicals Available For Free

With	1969, 1970-1993 (issues missing)
Guidelines for Today	1969-1989
Marketplace	1990-1997
Sharing	1974-1994 (issues missing)
Herald of Truth	1957-1962 (issues missing)
Our Faith	2001-2009 (issues missing)

Contact the Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center at 503-266-6447, before October 31, 2013, if interested.

plot of ground near the new city of Kherson had been promised to the Mennonites.

When 200 families moved to South Russia, they were told that the land promised to them was not available due to unsettled conditions between the Russian army and the Turks. They finally settled along the Dnieper River next to the Chortitza Island on land that was far less fertile and deeply cut by gullies and streams which made farming much more difficult.<sup>1</sup>

In 1803, approximately 193 families moved from Prussia to an area southeast of Chortitza along the Molotschnaya River. This colony ultimately covered some 330,000 acres and was much better land than the Chortitza. In 1804 another 165 families made their way to the Molotschna Colony as it came to be known.<sup>2</sup>

It was anticipated that the new colonies would consist of

one congregation with its ministers and elders. Unfortunately, the settlers from Prussia brought with them the Flemish/Frisian differences and divisions. The largest number of immigrants to South Russia came from the Flemish congregations in Prussia but when a number of Frisians came, it was apparent that a second congregation was necessary for them.<sup>3</sup>

Under the Priviligium,

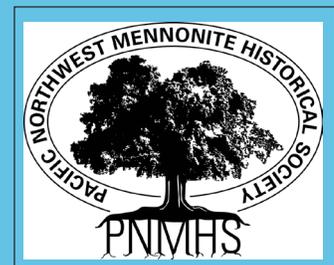
the agreement with the Russian government, the Mennonites of South Russia were given the right to self-government and complete religious freedom. It might appear that this was an ideal situation for them, but problems between church leadership and the colony administrations soon developed.

Who was to have the final say regarding life in the colonies? How was discipline to be administered? When should disputes be taken to the Russian government responsible for the colonies in South Russia? One needs only to read of the early history of Molotschna to realize that these questions were pressing ones not easily solved.

In addition to the Flemish/Frisian divisions in the Molotschna, a small group formed around a Flemish minister named Klaas Reimer. Reimer was married to the daughter of

### THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President: Jerry Barkman  
 Vice President: Goldie Heyerly  
 Secretary: Gloria Nussbanum  
 Treasurer: Don Bacher  
 Newsletter editor: Melanie Springer Mock  
 Archivist: Margaret Shetler  
 Conference Historian: Ray Kauffman  
 Librarian: Violet Burley



This newsletter is published biannually by the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society. Send general correspondence to Margaret Shetler, 355 Leo Street, Mt. Angel, OR 97362. Newsletter items may be sent to Melanie Springer Mock at [mmock@georgefox.edu](mailto:mmock@georgefox.edu) or 110 SW Spruce, Dundee, OR 97115. Back issues of the newsletter are available for \$3.00 each from PNMHS, 6030 S. Whiskey Hill Road, Hubbard OR 97032-9406.

Peter Epp, the leader of the Danzig Congregation, and ordained as a minister in 1801 in Prussia. He moved to Molotschna and there ordained three new ministers for their new congregation.<sup>4</sup>

Although he was the senior minister of the congregation, he was not elected to the eldership (Aeltester) in 1805. In spite of this, Reimer was called upon to help resolve disputes between the Molotschna district mayor and one of the ministers.

Reimer became the focus of opposition to the more liberal stands of the mayor. When the Russian government asked the Mennonites to contribute to the war against Napoleon, Reimer opposed the decision to comply.

Out of these conflicts came the formation of a separate congregation which came to be known as the Kleine Gemeinde (small fellowship). The emphasis of the group was upon ethical living according to Anabaptist teachings. Members of this group stressed Bible study, and followed the writings of Menno Simons and encouraged the reading of *Martyrs Mirror*.

While the Kleine Gemeinde never attracted a large number of Mennonites, it played a significant role in the spiritual life of the Molotschna Colony and in the subsequent development of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church under Elder

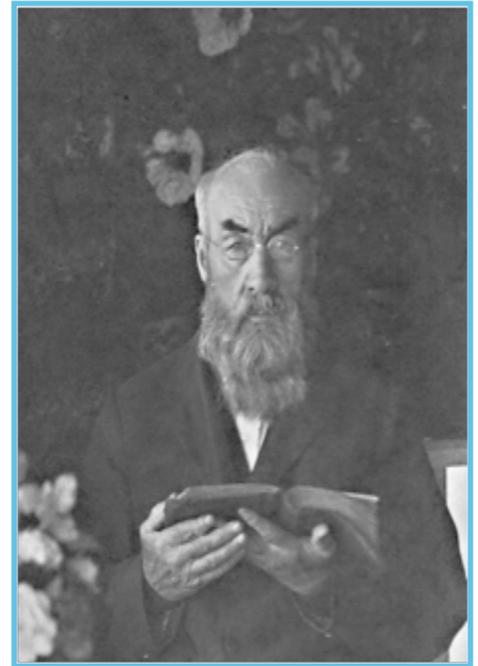
Jacob A. Wiebe.

Jacob A. Wiebe was born on August 6, 1836 in Margenau, Molotschna, South Russia. His paternal grandparents, Dietrich and Aganetha Thimm Wiebe emigrated from Prussia to the village of Neukirch, Molotschna colony in 1819. His father, Jacob Wiebe (Sr.) was the eldest in the family.<sup>5</sup>

Wiebe's maternal grandparents, Franz and Katerine Friesen Wiens, immigrated to the Molotschna in 1825. Their daughter, Anna Wiens, married Abraham Groening of Halbstadt in 1831. Abraham and Anna Groening had two sons before Abraham died in 1834. Anna remarried Jacob Wiebe (Sr.) in 1834. After their marriage, they purchased a "half farm" (87 acres) in the village of Margenau where Jacob A. Wiebe was born.

Wiebe's mother played a major role in the formation of his spiritual life. Anna Wiebe was a deeply spiritual woman who had undergone much difficulty in her life. She was well aware of the spiritual conditions which existed in many of the Mennonite villages and tried to teach her children that to follow those ways would be to incur the coming wrath of God.<sup>6</sup>

It has been generally agreed that the spiritual conditions in the Molotschna colony were far from ideal. The church



*The Rev. Jacob Wiebe (Photo courtesy Jerry Barkman.)*

experience consisted of weekly meetings at which the ministers read sermons from the past.

The other center of life was the tavern or saloon. One of the main criticisms of the reformers was that not only was little done about the activities around the saloon but those same persons were permitted to take communion in the church on Sunday.<sup>7</sup>

In an article describing his conversion, Wiebe stated that his early years were filled with a mindset of seeking the pleasures of life:

"It cost the Lord a lot to rescue me and win me over completely, although I had been warned about my sins by the earnest admonitions of my dear mother. As much as she knew,

she protected us children from being lost.

“She often prayed at our bedside with her tender hand on my brow, ‘Dear Children, may we finally all be with the Lord!’ But we still had to contend with the enemy, who constantly tries to tempt humankind, for I was unsaved during this time of my youth and lived in sin.

“My schooling, during that dark time was very poor, so that I could hardly read or write. At one end of our village was the church, where copied sermons were read every Sunday; and I cannot remember ever seeing a Bible or Testament in that church.

“Edification through the Word of God was unknown, not really fostered. It was like we read in 1 Samuel 3:1, ‘And the Word of the Lord was rare in those days.’

“In our village at that time there was a tavern, which today we might call a saloon; and that’s where many (of us) gathered in the pursuit of drunkenness and godlessness. Moreover, it was not unusual for the youth to gather in homes to entertain themselves with ungodly music and dancing, joking and foolishness.

“This is how we spent our time, and I have to confess to my sorrow: ‘I spent my whole youth smoking tobacco, playing and

dancing.’”<sup>8</sup>

As Wiebe stated, his elementary school experience was spotty at best. He barely learned to read, which bothered him to the end of his days, for he developed a hunger for reading the scriptures, the works of Menno Simons and other allowed books.

A later translator of his letters said that “the transcription of the Jakob A. Wiebe letters was very difficult because of his poor spelling and handwriting, probably the worse of any of the letters in the Peter Toews collection.”<sup>9</sup>

When Wiebe was 17 years old, his father died. Being the eldest son, he inherited the farmstead and much of the farm responsibilities fell on him.

This was complicated by the onset of the Crimean War during which the Mennonites were pressed to haul food materials to the Crimea and to bring back wounded soldiers, many of whom were housed and nursed by the Mennonites in Molotschna. Wiebe’s mother participated in these nursing activities, adding more stress to her family’s life. She is said to have offered her farm “to anyone who would relieve her of these duties.”<sup>10</sup>

During this time, Wiebe decided to become a blacksmith and apprenticed himself to a blacksmith in Lichtenau. Within a year, his health broken by the

heavy work needed, Wiebe returned home to be nursed back to health by his mother.<sup>11</sup> She read to him from the Bible and reminded him of the need to live a life that would help him avoid the coming wrath of the Lord.

As soon as his health returned, Wiebe turned his father’s farm over to his half-brothers and moved to Halbstadt, the administrative center of the Molotschna colony. How Wiebe decided to make this move is not known.

There, Wiebe came to the attention of David A. Friesen, Oberschulze of the Molotschna. It seems that he exhibited personal bravery during the annual wolf hunt: “On his fast steed, he overtook a wolf before Friesen and others caught up and killed it singlehandedly with a swing of his club.” Friesen offered Wiebe the coachman’s job on the spot.<sup>12</sup>

Working for David Friesen opened up another world to Wiebe. Here was the world of the rich and the powerful. Oberschulze Friesen had little sympathy for the landless Mennonites and usually sided with the wealthy farmers as they fought reform movements within the colony.

It was Friesen who later tried to stop the recognition of the Mennonite Brethren by the Russian government. It does not take much imagination to

see how Wiebe would become ensnared in the mindset and the activities of the people around the Oberschulze.

During this time, Wiebe was able to work on reading, writing, and arithmetic. He was also able to meet the many leaders of the Mennonites during a time when there was much strife in the colonies.<sup>13</sup>

Years later, reflecting on this time, Wiebe wrote, "I loved the world and the world loved me. Reminded of my youthful years How Satan plagued me with his lures Into ways and acts that were not wholesome As I chose that sinful evil Of smoking, theatre and dances I marred my youth to shame."<sup>14</sup>

However, there were two other benefits of working with the Oberschulze. First, Wiebe was able to work with horses, a skill for which he was well known and which he never forgot. Secondly, he met Justina Friesen, who was soon to become his wife and partner.

In his biography of his brother Jacob A. Wiebe, Peter A. Wiebe stated that it had been family tradition that Justina Friesen was the daughter of David Friesen, the Oberschulze. That tradition is most likely not accurate. Genealogical records seem to indicate that she was either no relation to David Friesen or that she was his niece.<sup>15</sup>

Jacob A. Wiebe and Justina Friesen were married on April 11, 1857 in Halbstadt. In 1856, prior to their marriage, Wiebe was baptized in the Petershagen Mennonite Church. Soon after their marriage, they purchased a half farm and an oil press in Ohrloff, Molotschna and moved away from Halbstadt and the position with the Oberschulze. Their first child was born in September of 1859.<sup>16</sup>

Ohrloff was the home village of Johann Cornies, the renowned agriculturalist and leader. Although Cornies was no longer living (he died in 1848), his legacy lived on in the methods of farming and the educational reforms which Cornies had initiated. The Ohrloff congregation, of which Cornies was a lifelong member, was the most advanced and most tolerant of the Molotschna churches. In the 1860s, under its elder, Johann Harder, Ohrloff was the first to recognize and have friendly relations with the emerging Mennonite Brethren.

It is not known if Jacob and Justina Wiebe attended services at the Ohrloff Mennonite Church, but they certainly lived in an area where new ideas about education, agriculture, and faith were being developed. The effects of the educational reforms begun by Johann Cornies were being felt in the Molotschna.

Increasing contacts with outsiders such as the Pietist preacher, Eduard Wuest (whose work among the Mennonites from the Molotschna helped in the formation of the emerging Mennonite Brethren) and other evangelical preaching brought ferment into the spiritual life of the Mennonites. How much contact did Wiebe have with these events? If Wiebe was a person of spiritual sensitivity, he could not keep from absorbing something of what was happening around him during his days in Ohrloff. Certainly these experiences could have impacted his thinking when the pressures of the move to the Crimea caused him to look at his own spiritual condition.

In his biography of Wiebe, Leland Harder makes the following statement: "Here, also, as Jacob later wrote, 'we got together with people who strove after a higher aim in this world.' This is a curious comment, dropped with no further elaboration." To Harder, the implication was that a group of seekers began to meet to explore the deeper "spiritual meaning of life."<sup>17</sup>

Delbert Plett, in his response to Harder's biography, disputes this conclusion. He believed that Wiebe's statement could easily have been centered on "getting rich," and making life better for themselves materially.<sup>18</sup> It may have been both.

Following the Crimean War, Russia had new lands to settle. In 1861, Jacob and Justina Wiebe decided to join a group of Mennonites who together purchased a Tatar village in central Crimea and renamed it Annenfeld. This group most likely included Mennonites from the Kleine Gemeinde as well as others like Wiebe who came out of the Grosse Gemeinde. [The author's great-grandfather, Peter M. Barkman came from Rueckenaue where his father and uncle were members of the Kleine Gemeinde. He and his family moved to Annenfeld in 1869 and he was re-baptized in 1870.]

Wiebe says, "Being still worldly minded we moved with other like-minded people to the Crimean peninsula and bought land there with the idea of becoming rich quickly with earthly goods."<sup>19</sup> However, things did not turn out as Wiebe expected. They suffered droughts, an invasion of poisonous spiders, and plagues of grasshoppers and beetles.<sup>20</sup>

The pressures grew so great through all of this that a neighbor of the Wiebes became discouraged and committed suicide!<sup>21</sup>

On a personal level, Jacob and Justina Wiebe suffered multiple personal tragedies in the deaths of a number of their children. Their first daughter had

died in Ohrloff, Molotschna and seven more children died in Annenfeld, Crimea, and one son in America.<sup>22</sup> This must have added heavily to their spiritual turmoil as they struggled with their lives.

The effect of these disasters drove Wiebe back to the Lord. "Wiebe said they experienced it exactly as the prophet Amos relates it in Chapter 8:11, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, 'that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.'"<sup>23</sup>

"I felt like the prodigal son. I realized I had sinned and felt condemned. This created in me a deep hunger for God's word and with great determination learned to read the Bible well for myself.

"I felt God's hand upon me as His word very directly spoke to me. The load of sin became so heavy, I felt by God's word condemned. In full repentance I asked the Lord to forgive my sins and accept me as his child."

"Then it seemed to me, a still small voice told me, 'why don't you read God's promises about how willing He is to forgive sins if we come to Him with our confession.' My first comfort I found in Isaiah 1:18, 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as

white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'"<sup>24</sup>

Many other such passages from Scripture came to Wiebe as assurance of his forgiveness and salvation. He recognized that his former lifestyle was worldly and did not honor his Lord who gave his life for him. Leland Harder states that Wiebe's assurance of salvation was confirmed in a subsequent revival meeting led by the evangelist Bernhard Harder somewhere in their area. Following the benediction, Harder approached Wiebe with a word of assurance, "Yes, the Lord has loved you so much that he gave his only son Jesus to you and to all of us."<sup>25</sup>

Although Justina Wiebe rejoiced that her husband had found his peace in forgiveness of sins, she could not yet claim the same for herself. Later on, she, after much praying and searching in God's word, could accept God's forgiveness. As Wiebe says, she was able to write about her experience in a tract.<sup>26</sup>

She also wrote a letter to her family in Halbstadt dated April 11, 1866, "Examine your own relationship to Christ," she wrote, "I have examined my life and am trying to change things that are not right.... I am sorry that I exhibited such pride in the past, especially in my dress... I don't want you to change just

because of my letter, for each must be accountable for himself.”<sup>27</sup>

Having found forgiveness of sins and a new life, Wiebe did not hesitate to share this with his friends in the Crimea. One of the first persons he told about his experience of salvation was his friend Aaron Schellenberg who also had experienced salvation.<sup>28</sup> This revival led to mid-week meetings held for Bible study and prayer. Several questions arose during this time: What about communion? What about the “baptism of faith”?

During the earlier years, the people of Annenfeld had contact with the Kleine Gemeinde. As they sought answers to their questions, they remembered the Kleine Gemeinde as a people of faith “who had earlier separated themselves from the coming decline of the Grosse Gemeinde in order to strive for holiness, at least outwardly.”<sup>29</sup>

Delbert Plett states that a small Kleine Gemeinde group had developed in the village of Schwesterthal, Crimea, 18 km from Annenfeld. In 1864, Peter Baerg had joined the Kleine Gemeinde and this formed the nucleus of the congregation. Wiebe would have known about these nearby developments and made contact with them.

During this time, Aeltester Johann Friesen visited this

small group in Annenfeld, and was willing to organize them as a congregation. As Wiebe later indicated, “I discussed many things with the Aeltester concerning the sound teaching of the Gospel. We agreed in most points concerning the atonement, conversion, nonresistance, oath swearing, nonconformity to the world and to the large worldly church.”<sup>30</sup>

The only point on which they could not come to agreement concerned “baptism upon our salvation producing faith.” At that point, Wiebe did not feel pressed to decide on the issue of baptism and so in 1864, the group at Annenfeld became a congregation of the Kleine Gemeinde.<sup>31</sup>

In describing this discussion of Aeltester Friesen with Wiebe, Delbert Plett concedes that the Aeltester made an error in not taking Wiebe’s concern

about baptism seriously. As Plett says, “this was to have disastrous consequences for the Crimean congregation.”<sup>32</sup>

However, the question of leadership for the two small congregations was not settled in 1864. Because of the developing controversies in the Kleine Gemeinde in the Borosenko and Molotschna colonies in 1866, this task was postponed. Wiebe and Peter Baerg took up the leadership responsibilities over the two congregations despite the fact that they were not ordained by the Kleine Gemeinde.

In fact, Wiebe was recognized for his abilities as minister and was asked to come to the colonies of Borosenko and Molotschna to help resolve the issues. He apparently was successful. Wiebe was formally elected to the ministry on December 3, 1867 with Aeltester Heinrich Enns and fellow Kleine



*A funeral picture taken in 1916. Jacob Wiebe is seated, and standing in back are Peter J. Wiebe and his wife, Sarah Dohner. Seated behind the coffin are Jacob J. Wiebe and John F.D. Wiebe. (Photo courtesy Jerry Barkman.)*

## The Ivan and Pearl Kropf Heritage Center Needs Volunteers

If you are available to help one or more days a month at our library and archives, located in Hubbard, Ore., please contact Jerry Barkman at [jbarkman@canby.com](mailto:jbarkman@canby.com).



Gemeinde ministers present. However, being elected minister in the Kleine Gemeinde was not the end of Wiebe's involvement. In the beginning of 1869, Wiebe was elected Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde churches in the Crimea with an installation service to follow on Easter of that year.

Although it might appear that the question of being re-baptized upon confession of faith was forgotten, it was not. In a letter dated October 4, 1864 to Aeltester Peter P. Toews and others, Wiebe brought up the subject of baptism and here admitted that he was baptized "without faith. But now, our compassionate and sympathetic God . . . has revealed the simple truth unto me, poor sinner."<sup>33</sup>

In a declaration to the Kleine Gemeinde of Borosenko and Molotschna, written on August 1, 1869, Wiebe wrote the following: "After I was called as Aeltester I was on a mission tour

through the congregations of the Molotschna and Borosenko on the urgent wish of the congregations to serve them with baptism and communion. You will remember that I told you that I felt like Paul in I Corinthians 2:1-5. I did it with fear and trembling because I was still not content with my baptism, which I received before I was really converted.

"So after much struggle and prayer, I have come to the conviction that I cannot continue to serve in this way anymore unless the [Kleine] Gemeinde can resolve to accept the biblical baptism unto the death of Christ according to Romans 6:3."<sup>34</sup>

Later in this same declaration, Wiebe turned his attention to the issue of assurance of salvation: "It is well known by everyone that the question has arisen in our [Kleine] Gemeinde whether or not one can be aware of one's forgiveness of sin. One part of the Gemeinde, among

which I also am, is sure of this; and our little group here in the Crimea is clear about this, for God's Spirit has given us the sign that we are children of God (Romans 8:14-16).

"Oh, how great an affliction this has made for me! Menno taught so seriously about the new birth, and that a Gemeinde shall consist of sincere children of God who know their filial relationship to God (Romans 5:1-5). How shall it be then when for pride and haughtiness one part of the Gemeinde is intolerantly opposed to the position we have obtained through much prayer and tears on our knees?"<sup>35</sup>

Here would be the real issue standing between Wiebe and the Kleine Gemeinde. Although many have said that baptism was the issue, the question of salvation and assurance stand behind it. Throughout his writings, Wiebe referred again and again to the joy that was his when he turned in repentance to his Lord. He knew that his previous life was leading him to damnation and to know that Jesus died for his sins was to flood his life with peace and joy.

The controversy within the Kleine Gemeinde regarding the assurance of salvation was known to others in the Mennonite colonies. The contrast between the older community-

based religiosity, and the new individualized faith was best summed up by an early Brethren minister, Jacob Bekker; “among the Kleine Gemeinde” he noted, “conversion was not mentioned among them.

As late as 1855 the truth that whosoever wants to die saved must first be certain that he possesses salvation was strange to them. Many said, “You will only find out whether you are saved only up yonder.”<sup>36</sup>

Historian James Urry commented on the nature of Mennonite faith, relative to the Kleine Gemeinde: “At the heart of Mennonite faith, probably since its earliest days, has existed a deep sense of personal faith, but a faith which was poorly expressed because it lacked not only the means for open expression, but also because any public exhibition of such faith was condemned as a sign of pride. Instead, in the public domain, Mennonites expressed the subordination of self to the external ethic of congregation and community (Gemeinde). Individual salvation was something which one could only live in hope of, by existing in a sustaining community of believers who guided the committed Christian along the narrow path of life.”<sup>37</sup>

Robert Friedmann in his introduction to Heinrich Balzer’s essay observed: “Later on the

Krimmer Mennonites separated from the Kleine Gemeinde, affirming that joyfulness has a rightful place in the Christian’s life. The Kleine Gemeinde opposed all joyfulness as a worldly temptation. In America many of the Kleine Gemeinde united with the Church of God in Christ Mennonites (the Holde-man group).”<sup>38</sup>

Wiebe was exposed to more than the Kleine Gemeinde when he found forgiveness of sins. Given the ferment in the spiritual realm in South Russia, he was also exposed to the changing ways of talking about personal experience which came to the Mennonite colonies through Pietism and Christian Evangelicalism. When he came to understand his faith better and as he shared that faith with others, he ran up against the Kleine Gemeinde’s view as expressed by both Jacob Bekker and James Urry. Ultimately, his joy in finding salvation and need to be re-baptized upon confession of his faith outweighed the benefits of remaining with the Kleine Gemeinde.

The resolution of that conflict found its outlet in the issue of baptism. As noted previously, this issue was with Wiebe before his involvement with the Kleine Gemeinde and for a time, was shelved. However, as he expressed it, his need for baptism

was based on the fact that his experience of salvation occurred not before his first baptism but after it.

Therefore, since it was not based upon faith, it was invalid. For Wiebe, the issue of re-baptism spoke to the issue of assurance of salvation. He experienced grace and he knew that grace brought salvation and sonship. God had called him and he responded with joy and peace for he knew in whom his life was centered. That conflicted with the Kleine Gemeinde view of salvation and the resolution was to seek re-baptism and withdrawal from the Kleine Gemeinde.

Despite pleas from Wiebe to the Kleine Gemeinde to work at reconciliation on the matter of baptism, it didn’t come about. On September 21, 1869, there was a service of re-baptism in Annenfeld. It was decided that Cornelius Enns [the author’s great-great-grandfather] would baptize Wiebe and he in turn would then baptize the others. When the service was completed, 17 persons had been re-baptized and formed the new Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. It is not clear if the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren withdrew from the Kleine Gemeinde or vice versa. There are signs that Wiebe did not want to leave the Gemeinde but that he

was the one who felt rejected!<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note that Aeltester Peter Toews, who was leader of the Kleine Gemeinde in both South Russia and in Canada and who played a significant role in the formation of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (although in a sense, a negative one), began to question the tenets of his own faith. His spiritual search led to a relationship with John Holdeman, and eventually Toew's re-baptism by John Holdeman in 1882.<sup>40</sup>

A significant number of Kleine Gemeinde immigrants joined the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman) along with Elder Toews. Influenced by the writings of the Anabaptists and Menno Simons, Wiebe began to espouse the principle of non-resistance and when rumors began to circulate that the Russian government was about to require all young Mennonite men to enter government service, Wiebe was one of the first leaders to see the ramifications of the change in policy.

He became an active advocate for immigration to the United States or Canada. The result was that the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren in Annenfeld, Crimea put their farms up for sale and in spring of 1874, they moved the entire church to rural Hillsboro, Kansas where it was known as Gnadenu.<sup>41</sup>

Wiebe's ministry in Kansas came to include more than spiritual leadership but a physical healing ministry, taking very literally the admonition to not only preach the Word but heal the sick. Leland Harder concluded his biography of Wiebe with descriptions in this regard: Despite being conservative and "other worldly," Wiebe had a mystical personality that inevitably attracted strangers as well as his own people.

This is well illustrated by his gift for healing, a legacy he undoubtedly inherited from his mother. He was a "bonesetter" of no mean reputation - patients coming from near and far. For his expert services he charged nothing and accepted, when pressed, only the cost of liniment and splints. He based his refusal to accept pay on the words of Jesus, "Go preach, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: Freely you have received, freely give."

Strangers would arrive in Hillsboro on the train and ask directions to the house of Jacob Wiebe, the healer. Occasionally, the stranger's quest was not for personal healing but a search for truth. The story of one such person's search was told in a booklet form with the title, *Brother Jakob*.<sup>42</sup>

Wiebe continued to serve as the leader of the Gnadenu

Krimmer Mennonite Church until ill health forced him to retire in 1900. He was succeeded by his younger brother, Heinrich Wiebe. Jacob and Justina Wiebe celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on April 11, 1907. It is said that approximately 2,000 people attended the celebration.<sup>43</sup> Justina Wiebe passed away in 1916 and was followed by Jacob A. Wiebe in 1921.

Wiebe's response to the issues involving baptism and the church came directly from his experiences as a young man when he realized his sin and asked for forgiveness; this response became the defining issue in his life. His leadership of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church was a working out of that joy of conversion and baptism. He never forgot that joy and peace that came to him in the Crimea. ~

*Jerry Barkman of Canby, Ore., is a graduate of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, Calif., May 1977. He is a retired nursing home administrator, and currently president of the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society.*

This article is reprinted by permission of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas. It was published in the CMBS Newsletter, No. 35, Spring 2013.

## Endnotes

- 1 James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Hyperion Press Ltd., 1989) Chapter 2. An excellent description of the settling of South Russia by the Mennonites.
- 2 Urry, 75.
- 3 Urry, 68.
- 4 Urry, 76.
- 5 Delbert Plett, editor, *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874* (Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada: Crossway Publications, 1993). Includes material by Leland Harder. Also Joel A. Wiebe, Vernon R. Wiebe, and Raymond F. Wiebe, *The Groening-Wiebe Family 1768-1974* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, Second edition, 1974).
- 6 Peter A. Wiebe, *Kurze Biographie des Bruders Jacob A. Wiebe*, trans. W.W. Harms, 1.
- 7 Bekker, Jacob, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church*, trans. D.E. Pauls and A.E. Janzen (Hillsboro, Kansas: The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), chapter 4. Also Peter A. Wiebe's *Kurze Biographie...*, 1. Both are excellent summaries of spiritual conditions during this period.
- 8 Leland Harder, "Jacob A. Wiebe 1836-1921," in Delbert Plett, *Leaders*, 774-745.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 743.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 743.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 743.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 745.
- 13 C.F. Plett, *The Story of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kansas: Kindred Press, 1985), 17.
- 14 Wiebe, 2-3.
- 15 Grandma 6, A Russian Mennonite Database, Notes on Justina Friesen, #27780. Alan Peters, in Grandma 6, suggests that the mother listed for Justina is not correct and if the alternative name listed would be used, then she would be his niece.
- 16 Wiebe, 3.
- 17 Leland Harder, "Jacob A. Wiebe 1836-1921," in Delbert Plett, *Leaders*, 746.
- 18 Delbert Plett, *Leaders*, 808.
- 19 Harder, 747.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Wiebe, 3.
- 22 Joel A. Wiebe, et al, *The Groening-Wiebe Family*, 52.
- 23 Peter A. Wiebe, 3.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 25 Harder, 748.
- 26 Peter A. Wiebe, 5.
- 27 Harder, 748.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, 749.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph* (Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada: D.F. Plett Publications, 1986), 190.
- 33 Delbert Plett, *Leaders*, 782.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 800.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 800-801.
- 36 Bekker, 235.
- 37 James Urry, "Servants From Far: Mennonites and the Pan-Evangelical Impulse in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (Vol.61, April 1987), 234.
- 38 Robert Friedmann, "The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered, in a Treatise of 1833 [by Heinrich Balzer]" in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (Vol.22, April 1948), 80.
- 39 Harder, 763.
- 40 Wiebe, David V., *They Seek A Country* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959), and *Grace Meadow: The Story of Gnadenu* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1967). Both books are excellent portrayals of the settling of Gnadenu. David V. Wiebe was a nephew of Elder Jacob A. Wiebe.
- 41 Delbert J. Plett, *Pioneers & Pilgrims* (Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada: D.F.P. Publications, 1990). This volume contains a biography of Jacob A. Wiebe written by Leland Harder in response to the Delbert Plett books.
- 42 Harder, 772.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 775.

In addition to the comprehensive research of Delbert Plett, Leland Harder and James Urry, and the sources cited above, the author also drew from J.A. Toews' *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1975), P.M. Friesen's *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia 1789-1910* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1978); H. Goerz's *Mennonite Settlements in Crimea* (Winnipeg, Man.: CMBC, 1992); and B.E. Ebel's *Brother Jakob* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1968).

## PNMHS FALL MEETING

SEPTEMBER 15, 2013

### HISTORY IN THE KITCHEN

WHAT MENNONITE COOKING TELLS

US ABOUT OUR PAST

ALBANY MENNONITE CHURCH

3:00 p.m.

A Faspa will follow the presentation

## WHAT MENNONITE COOKING CAN TELL US ABOUT OUR PAST

For Mother's Day this year, my eldest son gave me the *Mennonite Community Cookbook*. This was his idea, unaided by my husband or parents. He did research about the cookbook, requesting my husband's help only when he needed a credit card.

In some ways, getting the *Mennonite Community Cookbook* from my son was unusual. I'm not a savvy cook, and am more comfortable making Papa Murphy's pizza than whipping up a masterpiece.

Still I was touched that my son, Benjamin, recognized that my Mennonite heritage is important to me, but also that my heritage is tied, in some ways, to the foods I eat. After all, we don't live in a Mennonite community, nor do I make Mennonite food often.

Still, somehow, Benjamin knew that there was a connection for me between my Mennonite ethnicity and some of the foods I enjoy, just as I'm sure there is for many other people as well.

Historians are spending more time looking at how Mennonite domesticity--its foods, cookbooks, and in-home practices--reflect changes in the North American Mennonite church at large. There is an intricate

connection between food and culture, obviously, and so also a close connection between food and history.

In *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*, Marlene Epp writes about Mennonite cookbooks, arguing that "Cookbooks, initiated and produced by women, shaped both Mennonite cultural understanding and generated external perceptions and knowledge about Mennonite historical development and sociological identity."

You can see this shift clearly in a cookbook like the quintessentially Mennonite *More-With-Less*, first published by Herald Press in 1976. In many ways, Doris Longacre's text marked a transformation occurring in the Mennonite church at large, the book's pages reflecting the denominational shifts rocking the church.

The *More-with-Less* also holds in tension the paradox facing Mennonites in the late 20th century. The cookbook reaches into the past, and into the deep roots of traditional Mennonite faith and praxis, while also looking to the future, and to the assimilated identity many Mennonites were assuming.

The Mennonite Community Cookbook reflected its

generation in the same ways the *More-With-Less* was a symbol of late-20th century Mennonites.

Similarly, the cookbooks created by congregations reveal what was significant for a particular people in a particular time, the importance of community together written into recipes for fellowship meals and Sunday evening get-togethers.

And, in a broader sense, Mennonite food connects us to the regions and the ethnicity that gave it birth: from the rollkuchen prized by Russian Mennonites to the many international dishes appearing in *More-With-Less*.

Historians often write about the larger movements that help to define a nation or a people group: wars, elections, the activities of powerful leaders. But, just as often, the seeming minutia of life can give us clues to history and to what was important to a certain people, in a certain time.

So it is with Mennonite food, cooking, cookbooks. I hope you'll join us at this fall's meeting, held September 15 at 3 p.m. at Albany Mennonite, to consider the ways the kitchen--and what we eat--might be part of our denominational story. ~

*Melanie Springer Mock is Professor of English at George Fox University, Newberg, Ore.*