

The History of
THE EMMAUS MENNONITE CHURCH
of Swift Current and South.

(1961)

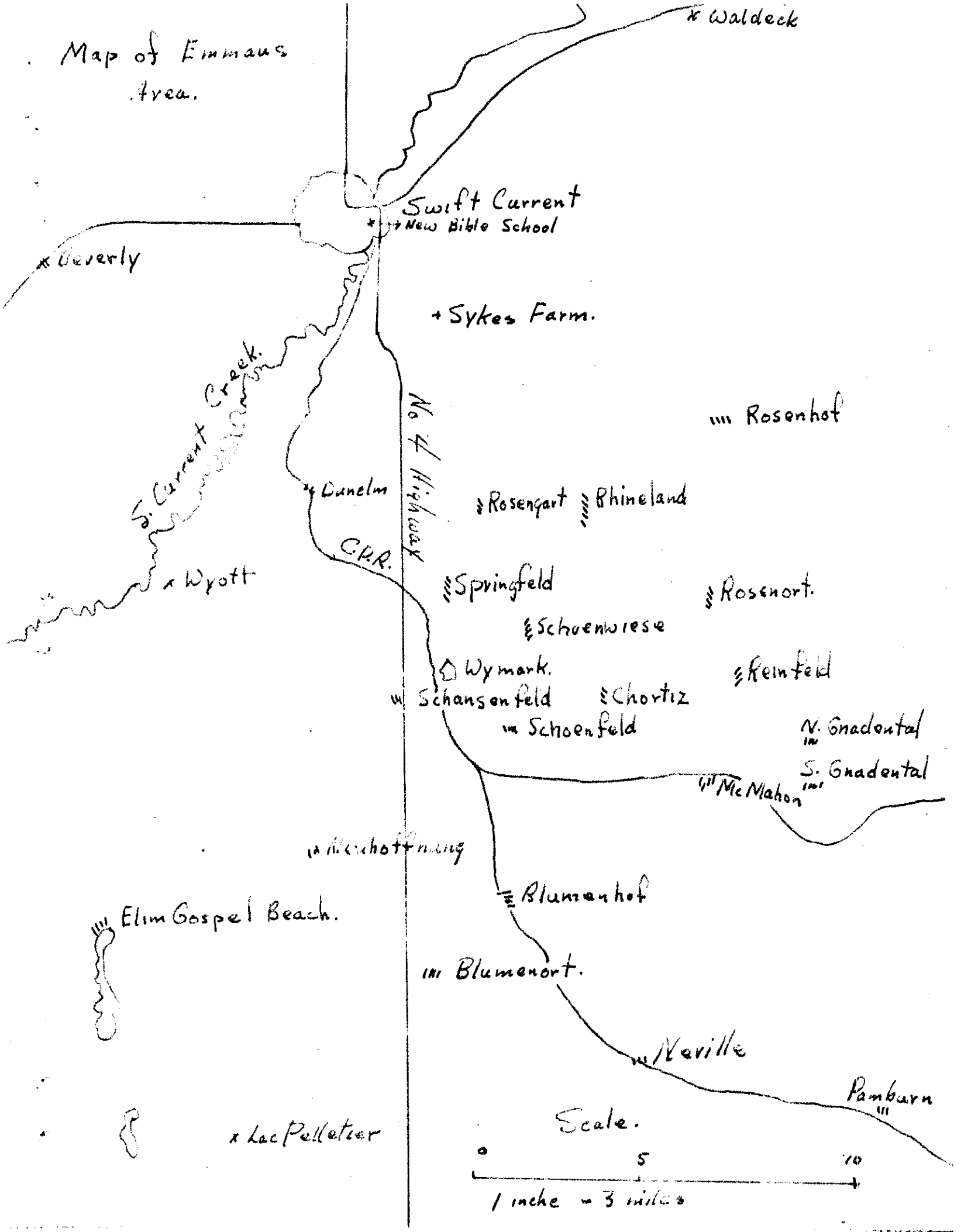
MENNONITE HISTORY

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SUBMITTED BY

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Map of Emmaus Area.



Swift Current
* → New Bible School

+ Sykes Farm.

||| Rosenhof

||| Rosengart ||| Rhineland

||| Springfield

||| Rosenort.

||| Schoenwiese

△ Wymark.

||| Reinfeld

○ Schansenfild

||| Chortiz

N. Gnadental
|||

||| Schoenfeld

S. Gnadental
|||

||| McMahon

||| Merchottmang

||| Elim Gospel Beach.

||| Blumenhof

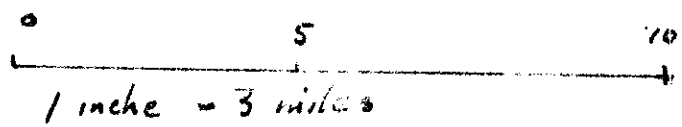
||| Blumenort.

||| Neville

||| Pamburn

x Lac Pelletier

Scale.



THE FIRST MENNONITES IN SWIFT CURRENT

Beginning in 1900¹ a group of Mennonites from the Sommerfeld and Old Colony settlements in the West Reserve of southern Manitoba began settling and founded a reserve south of Swift Current. This reserve was a level island plateau of very rich soil surrounded by a less productive area. Originally the settlement consisted of at least fifteen (some claim there were as many as thirty) villages, the majority being Old Colony at this time. Actually some of these settlers came from the Rosthern where a reserve was started in 1893 and by 1900 was getting crowded so the overflow went to the Swift Current reserve.

These two groups of Mennonites emigrated from Manitoba primarily because the English language was threatening to become compulsory in the Manitoba school system. They saw the assimilation of this language as the first in a series of influences which would endanger their faith and way of life. They grew restless under its threat and finally in 1893 started going to Saskatchewan. At that time what is now Saskatchewan still belonged to the Canadian North West Territories with few restrictions and less conformity required. The movement from Manitoba to Saskatchewan can be considered a protest against adjustment to the environment.

ETHNIC ORIGIN

Ethnically they were almost exclusively of Dutch origin. Emperor Charles V decreed the extermination of Protestantism in Holland which was at that time a Spanish Catholic possession. The persecution which set in after the Münster episode in 1535 was directed mainly against the Anabaptists. After 1535 there was a constant stream of Dutch refugees seeking a new home in Eastern Europe especially in Prussia. The Refugees, who were soon called Mennonites, came to Prussia for several reasons. One, Prussia was one of the first countries to declare itself for Protestantism. Second, Prussia needed rebuilding after years of war and devastation and the industrious hardy refugee farmers appealed to the Duke as just right for the job. Consequently he encouraged immigration. As a result they first settled in the western part of the country and in 1539 established villages farther east. Between 1540-50 they began draining the swamps of the Danzig Werder and later other areas, which became one of their greatest economic contributions to Prussia.

ORIGIN OF NAMES

It is from West Prussia that most of the names in the Swift Current settlement can be traced. Names like Classen, Dyck, Dieck, Enz, Harder, Neufeld, Epp, Penner, Regier, Reimer and Wienz appeared in the families of the Flemish communities of the Grosse Werder and Danzig. A second group of names that we find in Swift Current today appeared in the Frisian families of Orloffxfelde in the Grosse Werder and Thiensdorf in the Kleine Werder near Elbing i.e. Dirksen, Froese, Friesen, Funk, Grunau, Jantzen, Martens, Nickel, Quiring and Unger. A third group is found in the Vistula Delta near Graudenz, Culm and Schwetz i.e. Bartel, Schroeder and Unrau. Among this group one finds names of East European origin like Ratzloff, Schapansky, Sawatzki and Telitske.

1. One report indicates that settlers came as early as 1893, Leo Driedger, Mennonite Life, Jan. 1958 "Hague Osler Settlement"

The latter group became Mennonites through various associations with them.

IN PRUSSIA

The Mennonites underwent constant change under the Protestant Reformed Kings of Prussia and the Roman Catholic Polish Rulers of West Prussia. The real hayday came under Fredrick the Great 1740-1786 who granted them tolerance and religious freedom. Here the communities of Mennonites developed a Congregational Organization which has survived almost to the present. The Leaders of the community, elected by all baptized members, consisted of the elder, preachers, deacons, and precentor (vorsänger). In the eighteenth century the German language was adopted not to the liking of the older people. By adopting High German the people from the Netherlands really became "Germans". However, many Mennonite farmers spoke the so called "Werderplatt" in their homes, today known as "low-German".

The Mennonites fared well under Frederick the Great, but under the fourth Prussian King, Frederick William II circumstances changed. Mennonites were not allowed to obtain new land for their ever increasing families. The State Church (Lutheranism) felt they would be undermined if they did not stop their growth. Exemption from military service was upheld on the basis of payment to maintain an Army training school. Newcomers and their descendents were taxed. Children of mixed marriages were automatically Lutheran. In their distress the Mennonites considered envoys from Petersburg as messenger from God when they explained that they were recruiting settlers for the wide open, uninhabited fertile uncultivated steppes of the Ukraine of South Russia. Czarina Catherine II offered, along with free land, a great number of civil and religious rights including separation of Church and State, military exemption, and freedom from the oath.

TO RUSSIAN

In 1787 the first four families left Prussia. In 1788 another two hundred and eighty eight families with all their movable possessions set out for the Ukraine South Russia and established two colonies near the Black Sea, Chortitza and later Molatshhna. The Swift Current Mennonites especially the early settlers of 1900 were all from Chortitza or its daughter settlements. Many of these new settlements were named after places in their native land eg. Tughenof, Radenkapp, Rosenort, and Ohrloff. These from the Danzig area named their new places, Eenlage, Neuendorf, Schoenhorst, Schoenviese and others. These names were again used on the Manitoba Reserve and also in Saskatchewan. By 1924, one hundred thousand Mennonites possessed some three and three quarter million acres of the best arable land in Russia. They could all read and write.¹

In the earlier pioneer days in Russia the Chortitza or "Old Colony Mennonites" were poorer, less educated and more conservative than those who came later. "This religious and cultural conservatism furnished the roots for the spirit and characteristics of the Old Colony (and Sommerfeld) Mennonites of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and Mexico."² Two main reasons can be given for

1. William Schreiber, The Fate of the Prussian Mennonites, 1951

2. Cornelius Krahn, Menn. Ency., "Old Colony Menn." Vol IV p.38-Brackets my own

the emigration in 1873-1880. One, in 1870 the Russian government introduced the Russian language into the Mennonite schools, raised the curriculum requirements, and made the educational system of the Mennonites subject to the Russian Department of Education. Second, some form of Government service became unavoidable. Complete isolation became impossible. Thus the more conservative of Chortitza and its daughter colonies Fürstenland and Bergthal had willing and receptive ears for the news that Canada would again give the freedom they considered essential. From 1873-80 some eight thousand Mennonites from the three settlements just mentioned found a new home in the East and West Reserves of Manitoba.

By the time immigration ceased in 1890 they were again thinking of moving. The greatest problem was the school question (discussed on page 1). Also in 1880 the provincial government intended to replace the Mennonite self-government of the Schulze and Oberschulze as based on old Russian practices, by regular civic government. These two factors caused a reaction which resulted in some of each of the Sommerfelder and Old Colony Mennonites to migrate to Swift Current, Saskatchewan at the turn of the century. The Old Colony Mennonites settled in villages near the railroad stations of Dunhelm, Wymark and Blumenhof. One report² indicates that in 1914 there were still fifteen villages in existence. The total Mennonite population of Swift Current and Herbert area was estimated at 4,590 in 1911.

In 1916 school attendance became compulsory in Manitoba with the passing of the "School Attendance Act". The Old Colony and Sommerfelder Mennonites of Swift Current saw similar danger approaching. Saskatchewan passed an act requiring the use of English in their schools in 1922 and some joined the Manitoba "conservatives" in search of freedom again.

TO MEXICO

In July 15, 1919 Julius Wiebe and David Rempel from Swift Current along with others from Hague, Sask. and Man. left to investigate settlement possibilities in South America but returned without the anticipated results. Jan. 24, 1921 another delegation left for Mexico. They returned with the Privilegium signed by the president guaranteeing military exemption and complete religious freedom. As a result some 100,000 acres of land were sold by the Old Colony Mennonites at Swift Current for 44 dollars per acre. "The sale however, became so involved that it had to be taken to court and resulted in the loss of 10,000 acres."³ Slightly more than 1000 Old Colony Mennonites left Swift Current in March 1922. The number of Sommerfelders who moved was much smaller but has continued up until the present to various parts of South America and Mexico.

The mass immigration after the war resulted in valuable broken land being available. It was bought up mainly by the remaining Sommerfelder, Americans who had money, and also a small new contingent from Russia. The Old Colony Mennonites from here on did not retain their identity. The few that stayed joined the Sommerfelder. Some of the Americans were farmers but others were

1. Krahn in his article on "Ukraine" in the Menn. Ency. sets the figure at 8,000. Jacob Y. Shantz who kept a list of all Mennonites who passed through Ont. on their way to Man. reports 7,442.

3. C. Krahn, Old Colony Mennonites, Menn. Ency., Vol IV, p.41

2. C. Krahn, Swift Current Menn. Ency Vol IV, p 669.

merely speculators.

These new Mennonites who came to Swift Current (1923-1929) were also of the Dutch, Prussian South Russian stock the same as the earlier settlers. In fact most them also came from Chortitza colony and its daughter settlements with very few from the Molotschna. (I do not know of any who came directly from Russia to Swift Current). Because there was not enough Old Colony evacuated land available, some surrounding territory also was bought e.g. the "Sykes Farm" (so called because six families purchased several sections of land from a land owner by this name) just five miles south of Swift Current. These families were later immigrants in 1924.¹

To appreciate the differences religiously and culturally between those who immigrated into Manitoba in 1873ff. and those who came fifty years later it will be necessary to take a brief look at the influences at work and the changes which took place during these additional years spent in Russia.

EFFECT OF ANOTHER FIFTY YEARS IN RUSSIA

Culturally these were years of advance. Economically they were years of prosperity. The Chortitz and Molotschna settlements developed a pattern of education which spread to other parts of Russia. Agricultural and industrial developments in the Ukraine were decisive for all daughter settlements in the rest of Russia. Out-posts of industries such as factories and flour mills were established in Mennonite and non-Mennonite communities which attracted business men and workers. They developed hard winter wheat one of the most desirable export items.

However, the changes in their religious life was even more significant. A certain integration of the Mennonites who came from various places in Prussia had taken place. Some later immigrants from Germany who came to the Ukraine transplanted elements of Pietism which had an effect on many Mennonites. Already in 1812² Klaas Reimer challenged the leadership to greater spiritual life. He and eighteen others started the Kleine Gemeinde which unfortunately resulted in narrow protest toward certain adjustments and progress. In 1835 Gnadenfeld (a Molotschna daughter settlement) became a sort of revival center, starting Bible study, Prayer meetings; missionary interest grew; they invited outside preachers.

In 1845 Edward Wüst, a pietistic Lutheran came to Gnadenfeld to preach. Mennonites began to read Baptist literature. Even some Plymouth Brethern entered in an attempt to do evangelistic work. In Gnadenfeld there were several who had new and deep conversion experience and claimed that all others were only traditional Christians which was often true. All this not only influenced a large segment of the Ukraine but also led to schisms culminating in the establishment of the Mennonite Brethern, Krimmer Mennonite Brethern, Templers and others. The M.B.'s strongly emphasized evangelism, missions, abstinence, and baptism by immersion. Particularly the former two aspects served to leaven the total brotherhood.³ Wüst and other evangelistic and pietistic leaders had many friends and followers among the Mennonite Brother-

1. Can. Conf. Jarbuch, 1929

2. H.S. Bender, Mennonite History unpublished lecture notes as I recorded them

3. Mennonite Ency., Vol. IV, p.766-C. Krahn "Ukraine"

hood like Bernard Harder, August Lenzmann and Cornelus Jansen who considered it their duty to remain within the brotherhood and revive and strengthen its spiritual life. This new spiritual life and the universal conscription law of 1870 caused the more conservative element to immigrate to Manitoba and other places. Those who remained made adjustment by accepting the Government responsibility of forestry service. They participated more actively in affairs of the country in which they lived. They used Russian in their schools.

With the outbreak of World War I a severe anti-German feeling sought to destroy the prosperous Mennonite settlements by confiscating their property and removing them to uninhabited areas. In March 1917 the Revolution began. Ukraine was under the temporary government of Kerensky. From April to Nov. 1918 it was occupied by the German Army. When the latter withdrew many of the villages were occupied by Machno's bands until July 1919. Then Denikin's army took over until October of the same year. From October 1919 to January 1920 Machno and bands reigned again until the Bolsheviki returned. In June 1920 General Peter Wrangel tried once more to restore the Czarist government. In fall 1920 the Communist regime took over.¹

All the entire Ukraine Mennonite settlements suffered severely during these years. The civil war, typhoid fever, confiscation of property, starvation and plundering caused almost unbearable hardships. There was a gradual adjustment to the new regime after 1920 but many thought the Communist program was too radical. As a result thousands left for North America in 1923-27 and again 1929-30. Several families of the 1923-27 emigration settled in the Swift Current area. The experiences of the last fifty years, the religious awakening, the economic prosperity, the cultural adjustment and living under anarchy constituted the differences between them and the Sommerfelder already in Swift Current area.

FIRST WORK IN SWIFT CURRENT

According to one report during the period 1910-1917 the General Conference Mennonite (Canadian Mennonite Conference) which was organized in 1902 assigned a certain Rev. Epp to visit Swift Current and vicinity (Nedpath, Neville, Blumenhof, Wymark and Gouldtown) for the purpose of holding services about once a year.

One letter indicates that the Home Mission Board of the Canadian Conference began to serve the scattered families living in the area of Swift Current and in 1914 the first twelve candidates were baptized by Elder Gerbrandt. It appears that in addition to Rev. Epp, Elder Johann Gerbrandt of Mrake Sask. and Gerhard Buhler of Herbert, Sask., Abraham A. Hamm, and Franz Sawatsky also served this group. The same letter states that the first meeting house was built near Neville in 1916, which was later called Pella.

When in 1923 new immigrants started coming in the Canadian General Conference appointed Elder Ben Ewert as "Reiseprediger". On his annual or bi-annual visit to Swift Current he visited a great many homes, conducted catechism classes and baptized those who so desired. Those who settled on the "Sykes Farm", mentioned previously, from the start met in private houses with

1. This paragraph is mainly a paraphrase of C.K. Ukraine, Menn. Ency.

Sunday School for the children and worship services on Sunday.

At the Drake Conferencel 1929 Elder Ewert expressed a deep concern for the conditions of the scattered families, individuals and communities across Western Canada. He said that the solidarity of the Russian settling was lost in the new environment, and new immigrants especially, were not attaching themselves to any established group because in many cases this was not possible. Farming was no longer the only occupation and with industrial occupation came further dispersion. The result of this concern issued in several suggestions. Among them were six which especially effected the Swift Current community. He suggested the Conference should keep itself informed, pray much and be concerned. He went on to say that the Home Mission Board should designate workers for the various areas, organize the groups into congregations as soon as possible and financial aid should be given to these churches to help them get started.

ORGANIZATION OF THE EMMAUS CHURCH

This concern, hard work and numerous visits had already on June 16, 1928 resulted in the organization of The Emmaus church in Blumenhof.² Elder Benjamin Ewert also ordained its first minister, Rev. Isaac Wiens on June 19, 1928 with the assistance of Elder Johann Gerbrandt. Rev. Wiens was born on June 17, 1895 at Winkler, Man. In 1906 he moved with his parents to Herbert, Sask. where he spent the remainder of his youth. He went back to Man. (Gretna) for some high school in 1911-12. In 1914 he took Normal School in Saskatoon but went back to Gretna in 1914-16. On June 17, 1928 he married Katherna Reddekop and four years later accepted Christ as his own personal Savior. At the time of his ordination in 1928 he was teaching school at Blumenhof where he lived until 1946 and then moved to Herbert. Though he served under the Home Mission Board eight days less than five years his energetic devotion to his call was not without the Lord's blessing.

In 1929 Elder Ewert visited the Swift Current (S.C., Blum., Wymark, Neville) area three times. In 1929 Home Mission Board Report states that he baptized some fourteen and accepted another thirty by hand clasp. Baptism from the very beginning has been pouring. A communion service usually followed immediately to which all baptized believers who felt they were in right relationship with God and fellow man were invited. This custom has remained unchanged to the present. A rough constitution was drawn up by Elder Ewert. He had several copies printed and distributed. One report indicates that several months later, probably Rev. Ewert's second visit of the year, the Mission Board of the Canadian Conference was represented by Elder Ewert, Elder P. Epp from Morden, Man., Elder Gerbrandt from Drake and I.P. Friesen from Rosthern and with them founded the Emmaus Mennonite Church of S.C. and South. (The same report indicates that the farmer residents and immigrants amalgamated very well.) It would seem from this that there were already Sommerfelder or Old Colony Mennonites joining Emmaus Church at Swift Current. Another report indicates the following people were present. B.Ewert, F. Bechert, C.C.Peters, J.F. Sawatzky, G.Warkentine, Pete Brown, Springfield, and Abe Bergen. From the Sykes farm there were W.W. Rempel, Jake Brown, Peter Epp and G.Sawatzky and G.Wakentine. What percentage of the people in the church

1. Can. Conf. Jarbuch, 1929
2. Can. Conf. Jarbuch, 1931
3. When I use Emmaus from now on I have the Emmaus Menn. Church of S.C. and South in mind.

at this time were recent immigrants I was unable to determine. Those that joined from the "Sykes Farm" had all immigrated after the First World War. Though they only joined the Emmaus at this time they had had their own worship services regularly since their immigration. The "sykes farmers" had a minister in their group, Rev. Gerhard Warkenteen who was ordained in his home village Gr^uafeld, South Russia. He was their regular minister until 1940. They immediately upon arrival started their own Sunday School and Christian Endeavor. Some of the earliest teachers were Julius Klassen, Mr. Jake Brown, Isaak Epp, Peter Epp, Lena Rempel, and Mary Warkenteen.

Several times a year the Swift Current group would be visited by Ewert and also Rev. Wiens who worked out from Blumenhof. The latter says of 1929 that the field is very large. One winter Sunday he walked eighteen miles for a morning worship service and back to his home church for a service in the evening. He reported that on one Sunday he had two regular services with a wedding and a funeral sandwiched in between.

FUNERALS AND WEDDINGS

Both the funerals and weddings were conducted in the custom practised in Russia. The weddings were usually held on Sunday afternoon. They lasted from two to two and one half hours. After this a common meal was served ("faspa") which had to include buns, coffee with cube sugar. Later these lunches became more elaborate developing into a full meal. In more recent times most of the weddings take place on Saturday. The ceremony has been shortened to half an hour including an English sermon. Along with this innovation has come the use of attendants. The weddings in the Sommerfelder Church are still carried on in the original Russian custom.

The funerals were simple because anything that cost money could not be afforded--there was no money. This persisted until after the depression at the end of the thirties. The body of the deceased was usually placed in a home made coffin and buried in the villages on the church yard. Those on the "Sykes Farm" had no church yard and could not afford the city's cemetery prices. Consequently they buried their dead on a knoll in their pasture. This was also an occasion for a joint meal, usually very simple.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

Already in 1930 Rev. Wiens reported that during the previous year regular services were held at Pella, Wymark School, and Blumenhof. In the latter location there were also a weekly choir practice and Christian Endeavor. Rev. Wiens portrayed the spirit with which he served when he said that workers must always trust in the Lord. God had given him this field, this work, and God's promises were being realized.¹ During April 13-May 2 Rev. Ewert was again in this area visiting the many scattered families and looking up the sick. At several stations he served with baptism and communion. News of his coming always created joyful anticipation in the hearts of those whom he visited. Farmers would often leave pressing work to arrange and attend week-day services when they had this rare opportunity.

The Home Mission Board Report of 1930² in reporting on the S.C. district

1. Jahrbuch, 1930
2. Jahrbuch, 1930

stated that in S.C. itself there were sixty families. However this district included another five villages and four settlements (Syke's Farm, McMahon, Neville, and Wymark). The sixty families in S.C. were composed of post war immigrants, and Sommerfelder. The five villages were predominately Sommerfelder while the four settlements were composed of the previous groups mentioned plus American Englishmen who lived in very close proximity with the Mennonites. All these were included in what the Can. Home Mission Board considered the Swift Current and south field. It has been estimated that by 1931 there were some 1500 Mennonites in the Swift Current area¹ and eighty families in Swift Current itself.²

In 1931 several significant events took place which influenced the Emmaus Church. The work in the south under the direction of Rev. Wiens continued to grow. The latter reported during that year that all stations (S.C. Syke's Farm, Wymark, Blumenhof, Neville, McMahon) had been served regularly. His work required some three hundred miles of travel a month done mostly by horse and buggy. Rev. Wiens had been able to establish a well rounded program in his home church by this time including two services on Sunday, weekly choir practice, prayer meetings, and Sunday School. At Wymark Elder Ewert baptized several souls and at Blumenhof thirteen were accepted into the church by the handclasp. As sister church called Kidron was organized in the Gull Lake, Tomkins, Gabri area which later had a part in Emmaus development. The Home Mission Board decided in that year that it would look for a full time permanent worker at S.C. which did not materialize till some nine years later. Then also during 1931 already several left the Emmaus from the Syke's farm group. According to one report a man by the name of Martins as minister of the Alliance³ in Russia visited the "Syke's Farm" and had four that were members of the General Conference baptized by immersion. Because this denomination had no established work in the area they joined M.B. church at Blumenort. One of these who joined the M.B.'s was the Conference minister Rev. Gerhard Warkentine from Russia who had been regularly serving the "Syke's Farm" and continued to do so until 1940. The Syke's Farm continued to worship as before in joint church services. They were held in Me. K.K. Epp's house on the Smith farm, which was transformed into a primitive sanctuary until 1934. (Only some of its attenders were M.B.'s.)

The M.B.'s had begun work in the city of S.C. already a year previously when several members moved into the city and under the leadership of F. Peters, gathered girls for Bible study and prayer meetings in his own home. Occasionally they held some meetings and gave programs in a rented building on fifth east in the city. Through the ministry of Rev. G.W. Peters in 1932 a number of young people were converted in S.C. city and on the "Syke's Farm". A number of these were baptized and joined the M.B. Church still at Blumenort. By 1934 the number of M.B.'s in S.C. had increased to twenty-two and they organized into the M.B. Church of S.C.

1. S.C. in Mennl Ency.

2. Home Mission Board, Jahrbuch, 1931

3. Alliance was the popular name of the "Evangebsche Mennoniten Gemeinde" founded in 1905 in Russia in an attempt to bridge the gap between the Mennonite and Mennonite Brethern Churches. Members of the group who came to Canada after World War I organized as separate congregations and joined the M.B.'s while those who went to Brazil joined the G.C.'s. Those in Paraguay have remained an independent group.

At the 1932 Canadian Conference Elder Ewert reported that those who came to Canada from Russia since 1924 were starting to join the Canadian Conference which was organized in 1902. The Emmaus was one of three congregations to be accepted into the Canadian Conference during the Conference at Laird.¹ That year Rev. Wiens reported that three men out of the growing Emmaus had been elected to the ministry. Abraham Bergen, William W. Rempel, and Aaron Friesen have all started serving in various localities. During the same year Rev. Ewert on one of his visits baptized another nineteen souls, seven at S.C. and twelve at Wymark.

By 1933 the Emmaus had ^{five} ~~two~~ meeting places with regular services. In addition two, Pamburn and Schönfeld, were given special attention during Elder Ewert's visits. Rev. Wiens in reporting stated that all three men who had been elected during the previous year were serving though none had as yet been ordained. Though he did not specifically state what the trouble was, he mentioned that there was a struggle in the field in spite of a fruitful ministry. The Home Mission Board reported on June eighth that Rev. Wiens had been released from his duties by the Board. The main reason the report goes on to say was that the church had now become indiginous. It was supplied with elected ministers out of their own midst and could now easily do without the help of a Conference worker. Thus Rev. Wiens' official ministry as a home mission worker ended in five years. In the fall of the same year Mr. Abram Bergen was ordained to the ministry (Aug. 13, 1933) and he continued to serve in Blumenhof as a lay minister until 1946 when he moved to S.C. W.W. Rempel was never ordained.

In 1934 the Home Mission Board decided that because Emmaus had its own minister they only needed advice and a little supervision from the Conference. So Elder Buhler was given the supervision of the Emmaus while he was traveling in the interest of American Home Missions. The report of that year states that he was to look after their spiritual need and in return the Canadian Home Mission Board would pay the expences incurred at S.C. As already indicated in 1934 the M.B.'s organized into a church in S.C. The "Syke's Farm" branch of the Emmaus worshiped together with the M.B.'s in a rented building on fifth Ave. East instead of the former vacant dwelling place out in the country. Rev. Warkentine, as M.B., was the regular minister though visiting ministers from both the M.B. and General Conference served the group as often as possible and as well as they could.

In 1935 Emmaus lost the supervision and eldership of Elder Gerhard Buhler then stationed at Herbert. Because his work involved frequent visits to S.C. he had been placed entirely in charge of this field.² Through his death both S.C. and the Home Mission Board lost a great man. The 1935 Home Mission Report indicates that Rev. Wiens still living at Blumenhof was helping with the growing work there though now probably under the leadership of Rev. Abraham Bergen.³ During this year we have the first record of evangelistic work done on the level of the whole Emmaus (including the six stations that were now under this name). In summer maybe 1934 these meetings were conducted by Elder Benno Towes, Jacob Schmit, and I.P. Friesen with considerable success and the realization that further work needed to be done in this field. Accordingly

1. Fünzig Jahre Konferenze Bestrebungen 1902-1952, Volume 2, p.260

2. Jahrbuch, 1935, Home Mission Report

3. The Home Mission Report 1933 states that Rev. Wiens withdrew from Conference work July 1 of that year.

I.P. Friesen returned during the winter and worked in the district especially S.C. The 1935 Home Mission Board Report states that the Lord used Rev. Friesen to lead many souls to Him. He also had the task of helping to solve hindrances, hardships and problems. As is the case with any new or growing church problems and tensions were not lacking here.

In 1936 the vacancy created by the death of Elder Buhler was filled by Elder Nicolous Bamann from British Columbia upon the advice of the Home Mission Board. He began in January primarily for the purpose of starting a Bible School and also to supervise the work of the whole Emmaus. (One report indicates the Bamanns were assigned to S.C. by Elder David Tawes.)

BIBLE SCHOOL STARTED

In 1936 was the midst of the depression and employment was unobtainable especially during the winter months. The older segment of Society had their farms which required their constant attention but a large portion of the youth was left without anything to do. Elder Bamann wanted to capitalize on this leisure time by having the Young People study the Bible. Also he and the church itself, saw a great need for education, many of the "young" Christians for their own sake and to increase their usefulness in the Lord's service and for the work of the church. Consequently under Elder Bamann's supervision, the funeral home in S.C. was rented for the proposed Bible School. The ladies got together, cleaned it, painted and made it livable. As a result Swift Current Bible School opened Nov. 5, 1936 with about twenty-eight¹ students, two teachers (Nicolai Bamann and Abe Schulz) and one cook (Helen Wiebe--now Mrs. Henry Janzen). School started with two classes and was mainly financed by Canadian General Conference in North America.² The Bible School has probably done more to determine the shape of the Emmaus than any one person or organization in it. For years it received financial aid from the Conference and also some teachers. From the start (at least from 1937) there was a Bible School board which was composed of members of the Emmaus. The church from the very start felt that it was their school and supported it with students, food, class rooms, dormitory, and its supervision for many years. The opposite was equally true--the Bible School played an integral part in the church life. From 1937 until 1946 the Bible School was conducted right in the church. Movable partitions divided the church at S.C. into classrooms. The Church basement served as the kitchen, dining hall and girl's dormitory. These rooms were used as S.S. classrooms on Sunday. The Bible School took part in all the church's activities, Sunday morning Worship service, they supplied a good portion of S.S. teachers, they sang in the church choir, and attended the church's prayer meetings. The Bible School filled another place in the Church's program in D.V.B.S. Teachers who were not fully occupied during the summer months supervised the work, and taught a good deal themselves. Many of the students would interrupt their summer's work by two to six weeks to teach D.V.B.S.

In 1947 a building was bought and moved in from Rhineland and arranged in to the main B.S. building. The Basement was used for kitchen, dining hall and laundry room. The main floor contained the three class-rooms and the third

1. Jahrbuch 1943 -. 58, No.4, Die S.C. Bibelschule indicates that during the first year there were 40 pupils but this seems highly improbable.

2. Ibid

floor served as the girl's dormitory. The school and church maintained especially close connections as long as the principle of the B.S. was also the leading minister in the S.C. church which was the case until 1952. Since then there has been an ever widening separation. The B.S. board has since then hired teachers separately for the B.S. with little duties in the S.C. church or the Emmaus. The church has also felt that the B.S., though it made great contributions, could not be given justice in providing it with the proper facilities that a school of this nature needed, especially in view of the growth during recent years. Now after being under the jurisdiction of the Emmaus twenty three or four years it has become a General Conference provincial School. During the last year it has had an enrolment of fifty six students and four teachers. A site has been purchased at the outskirts of Swift Current and a new building is on the agenda for 1961-62.

Because the School and the church were so closely tied together the change of language of instruction kept pace with that of the church or even preceeded it. It started entirely in the German but by the early forties had already shifted to fifty percent English. By 1945 all instruction was done in the English though German has remained as one subject. The Swift Current Bible School Mission was organized in 1946[?] as a branch of the school but has served as an outlet for mission work of both school and church.

In its curriculum there has been a strong emphasis on direct Bible study. There have at no time been many peripheral interests. The purpose has always been to equip laymen and women with a practical knowlege of the Bible for use in teaching Sunday school, Christian Endeavor work, etc. In later years missions has received greater emphasis. The school has turned out no great scholars but has given its students a grasp of basic Bible themes, doctrines and practical Christian living. Students were encouraged to study their Bible and carry it into their churches. The students have entered almost all walks of life, several have become missionaries and ministers, and Sunday School superintendents.

Several criticisms could be leveled against this school the same as most Bible Schools. Often stereotyped explanations were given to difficult texts. Many problems have been over simplified, with memorized proof-texts given as the only solution. Some of the instructors have worked special "pet" interpretive points of view into almost creedal beliefs. (This is all I will say about the Bible School at this point though references will be made to it as it had a bearing on the development of the Emmaus Church.)

Returning to the work of Elder Banmenn it should be noted that his work and influence extended far beyond the confines of the school. Rev. John Loewen in an article in the Mennonite Life of 1947 wrote of Elder Banmann's work, "our people of southern Saskatchewan were spiritually revived under the ministry of Nicolai Banmann and Bible School became the nucleus of the spiritual life of our youth." Elder Banmann also organized the first Ladies' Aid in Swift Current in 1936, which has been in existance ever since.

Special mention should be made of the ladies and their work in the church. Few have held offices in the church, none during the early years and yet their

1. John Loewen, Mennonite Life, July 1947 "Elim Gospel Beach"

influence and contribution were often the major means of support the church had. For example when the Bible School was first opened in 1936 it was the ladies who cleaned and painted the rented funeral home and made it livable. It was also due to their diligence that the school could carry on. They supplied the food for all students and faculty even to the extent of baking the bread.

SECOND CHURCH BUILDING AT SWIFT CURRENT

After Elder Banmann had been in Swift Current less than a year, he realized the desperate necessity of a church building. The Bible School was operating in a rented funeral home. The church was conducting its services in another rented building on fifth avenue East since 1934. The possibility of S.C. building or buying their own church at this time was out of the question because 1937 was the very height of the depression. No one had any money even if he would have wanted to donate it to the church. Because it had not rained since the previous summer the prospects of a crop were nil. The actual need was so evident that the government gave assistance. Even those who claimed it was below their dignity, and those who had recently upon entering Canada (1923-29) promised that they would not become a liability to the country and now felt this would be doing so, accepted relief mainly in the form of food (apples and salted cod), some provision for animals (horses were shipped to the Alberta foothills where there was still some grass), and in the form of seed grain. However in spite economic difficulty there were a good number of Christians who had more faith than money. Consequently upon the recommendation of Elder Ewert the Canadian Home Mission Board¹ loaned the Emmaus (the station at S.C. was one of the entire Emmaus) two thousand dollars for the purpose of a church building at S.C.

The Old Colony Mennonites in moving to Mexico during the 20's had vacated their church building in Rhineland. This was purchased by the Emmaus and moved to Swift Current to its present location on fifth East on two lots, one facing fifth and the other sixth is just position. The church was placed on a full basement which served various functions. When the two thousand dollar loan was not enough the loan was extended to twenty-one thousand fifty dollars. With some help in the form of labor from the M.B.'s the church was ready for occupancy in the fall of 1937. During the next three years both the M.B.'s and G.C.'s worshiped in it though it belonged to the G.C.'s. One report indicates that the M.B.'s were permitted one Sunday a month in which they were entirely in charge even the offering was at their disposal.² In July 1938 F.J. Peters was ordained as the first minister of the Swift Current M.B. Church, though Rev. Warkentin was an M.B. since 1931 and had served this group since 1924 he never became the M.B.'s leading minister.

MENNONITE BRETHERN

However, the members of the M.B. church felt that if they wanted to expand and meet their financial obligations to their Canadian M.B. Conference and also the Foreign Mission Projects of the M.B. Conference it was necessary for them to erect their own Church building and become totally independent. In 1940 a small church was built on thirteenth Ave. East and after it was completed (one letter indicates that this time the G.C.'s helped somewhat in the form of labor.) severed connections with the G.C.'s in a brotherly way.

1. May be it should be the N.A. Home Mission Board
2. Another report indicates that Sundays were equally divided.

An M.B. in answering a questionnaire writes, "I can truthfully say that there have never been any strained relations between the two churches although there may at times have been misunderstandings between individual members." The M.B.'s have sold this original church building to the E.M.C.'s and since 1958 are conducting their services in a new brick sanctuary on 15th Ave. N.D. The membership at present (1961) is 140. I shall leave the M.B.'s here, mentioning them only as they have had a bearing on the development of the Emmaus.

CHURCH AT WYMARK - REV. V.E. NICKEL

The church that was built in Swift Current was dedicated on October 3rd of the following year. Just one month later, Nov. 11, 1938, a small church was also dedicated at Wymark, which had been built during that summer. Wymark had made great strides since the work was begun there in the late 20's. The growth of the church there was primarily due to the efforts of the resident school teacher, Valantine Nickel by name. Mr. Nickel was born on March 8, 1901 in Rosthern. His parents came from Russia to Kansas probably during the 80's. From there they moved to Nabraska for a short time and finally to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Here Mr. Nickel attended the regular public school. From here he moved with his parents to Renata, British Columbia and attended public school there. He received all of his high school at the German-English Academy at Rosthern and then went on to Normal School in Saskatoon.

On July 28, 1918 he was baptized at Drake by Elder Johann Gerbrant and became a member of the North Star church there. On April 5, 1926 he married Marie Gunther from Lanigan, Sask.; the same Elder officiated. Mr. Nickel taught school in Perdue Sask. for three years (1926-1928), one year at Osler (1928-1929), and since then has been a teacher in both public and high school in Wymark, Sask.

From reports made by Rev. Wiens it would appear that Mr. Nickel had ver- vices in the school on Sunday from the very beginning of his stay there. The work in Wymark has been under his guidance with little outside help. The assistance of two other high school teachers should be mentioned in the persons of Mr. Friesen and Mr. Mirau who both took an active part in the church program, especially as choir directors.

The Emmaus saw in Mr. Nickel a great potential leader and minister especially for Wymark at this time. On July 1938 while the church was being build in Wymark he was elected as minister by the Emmaus. In August of the same year he was ordained into the ministry by Elder David Towes.

Wymark early had an active Christian Endeavor in which a large number of young people took part. The young people came largely from Somerfelder church which showed little interest or concern for them. Because their parents belonged to the above mentioned church many had little interest or concern for the Emmaus or even a vital and dynamic Christianity. Consequently many of the youth who attended school under the tutorship of Mr. Nickel, Sunday School and church received no help or encouragement from at home. This resulted in slowing up the progress of the church's growth and presented serious difficulties.

Two other groups, though they constituted a smaller segment numerically

ought to be mentioned. There was at least one family of the 1923-27 Russian immigration groups. Several families came direct from Germany. There were also several English speaking families, farmers and elevator agents have attended but never joined the church.

1940

The year 1940 brought several changes to S.C. As mentioned the M.B.'s who had up until this time worshiped with the G.C.'s became entirely independent. Thus the Emmaus S.C. lost the ministry of Gerhard Warkentine who had served them as an M.B. since 1931.

S.C. with the help of the Home Mission Board hired Rev. Jacob Doerkson from Herbert. He may have been hired primarily for the Bible School but he also served in the church. Another teacher was hired for the Bible School who had been a grade school teacher in the person of Isaac Epp. Mr. Epp was born on May 14, 1912 in Waldheim. Here he received grade and high school and attended Normal School in Saskatoon. During the two years that he was a Bible School teacher in S.C. he can be credited with organizing the first Daily Vacation Bible School. Because his summer months were not fully occupied he conducted numerous D.V.B.S. and organized many more with Bible School students as teachers.

D.V.B.S. later became one of the greatest missionary arms of the church, especially in Sommerfelder and non-Mennonite communities. Many parents who were unwilling to attend anything but their own church which had no S.S. for their children at this time allowed them to attend D.V.B.S. in their local school. This became the source of pupils when S.S. were later started in some of these areas. The students who were converted later drew their parents into the Church.

William L. Rempel was another B.S. teacher who worked in the church and D.V.B.S. Born in Nov. 20, 1924 in Gruenfeld, South Russia he came to Canada with his parents in 1923. He had finished Grade School in Russia but took some High School (Grade X) in Canada. He was a graduate of Herbert Bible School, Prairie Bible Institute and had one year in Winkler Bible School. He was converted in 1933 and baptized by elder Buhler the following year. In 1941 he was ordained to the ministry by elder J.J. Nickel from Herbert. He was active the Bible School and D.V.B.S. in 1942-3.

ELDER PROBLEM

The entire Emmaus church found that they were again without regular access to an elder when Rev. Banman left. For this reason they sought the aid of elder J.J. Nickel. Rev. Nickel was a resident of Main Centre some forty miles from S.C. with his own church there. He was born on April 14, 1883 in Warwarowka Nikolaysoler Wollost, Russian. He was saved at the early age of eight in 1891 and twelve years later was baptized by Rev. Isaac Dyck. On Nov. 4, 1903 he married Maria Remple and together had the privilege of raising thirteen children. On Feb. 11, 1911 he was ordained to the ministry by Elder Unrah. During World War I he ministered to a group of CO's along with his own work. In Aug. 1925 he and his family came to Canada and settled at

Main Center. In 1935 he was ordained as elder by Elder David Towes. Being the only G.C. elder in the vicinity and because he would be more readily available than Elder Benjamin Ewert who only came around once or at most twice a year, Elder Nickel was asked to serve as elder until Emmaus would have their own. Thus the eldership system was becoming established again. This system was probably started by the early Mennonite reformers and became firmly established in Russia where in the so-called "Kirchspiel" one elder served a good many churches. Each church would have its own minister or ministers with the elder at the head. He was the one authorized to baptize and give the Lord's Supper and had the general oversight over the churches in his domain.

In the beginning there was one elder per colony but later more were added because of the magnitude of the work. His office became very powerful. He had priority in church leadership. Disciplinary power was almost entirely relegated to him. The Emmaus adopted this custom to a very large extent. The Semmerfelder adhered to it strictly only adding additional power to him.

When Rev. J.J. Nickel was elected elder of the Emmaus Church this was not the case. His only duties were to serve with the two ordinances, baptism and communion and that only upon the invitation of the Emmaus Church. He faithfully served in this capacity until 1948.

The interviewing years 1940-48 were some of the most prosperous years in numerical additions to the church. Because of the Bible School and for other reasons the centre of activity shifted from Blumenhof to Swift Current. One of the great attractions was the coming of Rev. Hans Dyck in 1943. Rev. Dyck was born on Jan. 30, 1905 in Neuhorst Ghortitza Russia. After four and one years of elementary school he and his parents had to flee. On Aug. 27, 1923 he as an orphan came to Canada. In 1927 he attended the German-English Academy in Rosthern and then Normal School in Saskatoon. He spent nine years as teacher in the Swift Current area and two years at Drake. In July 27, 1934 he married Anna Regier who died Nov. 8, 1945. On July 17, 1946 he married Bertha Schmidt. On Nov. 8, 1942 he was ordained to the ministry by his father-in-law, Elder Johann Regier.

REV. H. DYCK IN SWIFT CURRENT

Rev. Dyck was called to Swift Current to serve the local church and the principalship of the Bible School each a full time job in themselves. Not only was he minister of the Swift Current group, but he served as one of the three itinerant ministers (Rev. Bergen, Rev. Nickel, and Rev. Dyck) who rotated and together served seven preaching places. Early in the 40's Gull Lake became one of the churches on the Emmaus circuit because a good many of the Mennonites left Gull Lake for British Columbia and among them their minister. In summer his work involved organizing D.V.B.S. in the whole south of the province, serving at camps and retreats; and doing deputation work for the school often to the neglect of his pastoral duties in Swift Current. During his absence other ministers would fill in as best they could.

In a report¹ of 1943, Rev. Dyck indicated that his greatest responsibility lay in the field of Youth Work. Because the children in the Canadian public schools received no religious instruction, Sunday School had become

1. Der Platz der Jugend in der Gemeinde, Hans Dyck, Jahrbuch, 1943

imperative. He realized the Sunday School was composed of many students who did not understand the German coming from Mennonite and non-Mennonite homes where German was unknown or never spoken. He felt that it was his duty to bring these children the Gospel. Consequently the English was used with the result that Sunday School attendance jumped from 35-80. In order to keep the children in church and maintain a right relationship with the minister more English was used in the worship services as well. He went on to make a statement which I think could generalize into a principle in the Emmaus. "Though I am sorry to see the German go I am glad we could reach the children."¹

RHINELAND

About this time, 1944, or earlier Mr. Friesen began work in Rhineland. In the beginning he gathered the children of several homes into his house for weekly "Children's Hour". This developed into a Sunday School held at the village school every Sunday morning. A feature attraction was John Regier conducting the choir. Rev Friesen was ordained in Sept. 24, 1944 by J.J. Nickel.

As a result of Sunday School the vision of Rev. Friesen and the realization of the great need, a building was purchased from Jake Smith in Flowerville and moved into the village to serve as the church. In March 1954 a new addition to the church was dedicated to the Lord and his service. At the dedication Rev. Friesen said that willing service, Christian cooperation and consecrated leadership had all contributed to the growth of the Christian Church of Rhineland. Though the Sunday School began with seven pupils, ten years previously, it had now grown to fifty with five classes.

Nominally Rhineland was a station of the Emmaus but the ties were never very strong. It was started almost entirely on the indigenous basis. The only help the Emmaus gave was the service of their elder for baptism and communion, and the exchange of occasional Christian Endeavor programs and choir conductor J. Regier from Swift Current served in that capacity once a week. Those who attended church here all had Sommerfelder background but many had become dissatisfied with its conservatism. When they organized as a Church in 1959 only a few were members of the Emmaus Church. Because of their background many felt that they did not want to go back under an elder system again if they joined a new church, they felt that it would hinder their immediate organization, growth, and further witness, those who were members of the Emmaus withdrew from the Emmaus and the General Conference entirely, and together with other Christians what had up until this time been members of the Sommerfelder church organized into an independent church called the Rhineland Christian Fellowship. This church immediately proceeded to build a large modern attractive church. In 1958 and '59 there was a revival in the Sommerfelder church and those who became Christian and openly claimed and proclaimed this assurance had to withdraw. Many of these have joined the Rhineland Christian Fellowship. The church has always placed great emphasis on evangelism and missions. One of the most successful outreaches has been their radio work especially in the low-German language. They have supported missionaries from many denominations and under various mission boards. I see in this church a great potential witness for their community. However, in my opinion evangelism and mission work has been emphasized somewhat to the neglect of Christian education which will in the long run be a liability.

1. Hans Dyck, Jahrbuch, 1943, Der Platz der Jugend in der Gemeinde, p.58
2. Canadian Mennonite, March 19, 1954, Rhineland

ELIM GOSPEL BEACH

In the early part of 1945 the Emmaus church purchased what is now known as Elim Gospel Beach. Traveling south from Swift Current eighteen miles and eight miles west without warning, one drops into a valley where reside the clear waters of Lac Pelletier about one-half mile wide and three miles long. It lies spread out on the bald prairie with an occasional shrub bordering the fringe. On the north end of the lake one finds a profusion of firs, shrubs, buildings and hills dedicated to the cause of Christ.¹ Several years previous to the purchase of this site in 1945, summer activities had already been introduced like camps, retreats, and D.V.B.S. Various places were rented. I can remember "seventeen mile bridge in 1944" and "Gowen's Grove" in 1942-43. The places were good but temporary. A good deal of work was involved in obtaining appropriate grounds, renting tents, moving bunk-houses, and building kitchens each year. In order to have something more permanent a half section of land, with one-half mile of lake front was purchased from Mr. Iverson in the early part of 1945 for \$10,000 plus \$2,900 indebtedness against the buildings. It has been operated by a local board of directors who are responsible to the Sask. Youth Organization.

The greatest contribution of the Beach has been in the area of Youth Evangelism. There has always been at least one week of Children's Camp and one to two Youth Retreats. A good number of the young people in the Emmaus and other churches as well, date their conversion to some time spent here at Elim. One report indicates that in a single week fifty dedicated their lives to Christ and eight for foreign missions. With shelter from high hills, the shade of tall poplar trees and ample water for recreation, Elim has provided an ideal site for children to meet God; a quiet resting place; a place for recreation under Christian supervision and has established a spirit of goodwill among men in that many non-Mennonites and non-Christians avail themselves of the facilities provided at this resort. Rev. V.E. Nickel must be credited as the main driving force in the acquisition of this beach.

A NEW MINISTER

In 1946 Rev. Bernard Rempel from Tuegaske moved to Swift Current and became one of the regular ministers in the rotating setup. Because he spoke only in the German language his ministry was somewhat restricted. By this time Swift Current and all the other stations were using a good deal of English in the worship services and almost exclusively in the rest of the church life. Rev. Rempel would speak at those times when the worship service would be in German.

SPIRIT OF THE TIME

To understand the spirit of the time a discourse² by Rev. V.E. Nickel wrote for the 1946 Jahrbuch is invaluable because it states his own views on church life and quotes numerous Sunday School teachers. The fact that great emphasis was placed on youth in the Emmaus was evident in remarks like those of Rev. Dyck (see last paragraph on p.15). The variety of youth camps, D.V.B.S., children's hour, and the purchase of the beach had this concern in mind. Rev. Nickel began by stating that "the very life of our church"³ depended

1. *Canadian Mennonite*, June 13, 1954, *Elim Gospel Beach*

2. V.E. Nickel, *Jahrbuch*, 1946, *Our Mennonite Youth and Christ in our Church*, pp66-71

3. *Ibid.* p.66

on the theme "youth". He was to deal with Our Mennonite Youth For Christ and our Church. In analyzing the Emmaus situation he mentioned several reasons why youth were not won for Christ nor for the Church. They are significant here because they reveal the circumstances under which the church was operating. He said that schools were teaching pernicious philosophy, disrespect for settled opinions was prevalent, and all that the teacher should do was, supervise the self-expression of the student. This had resulted in self-pleasing, self-exalting and self-asserting attitudes which were carried over into the spiritual realm where all wanted to be free without shouldering responsibility. Because of this irresponsible attitude, inter, non, and anti denominational churches, societies and missions were established. They grew like mushrooms because of strong leaders unlimited constituency of appeal, wide distribution of attractive literature, went along with the spirit of the age, use of radio, and provided the youth with an outlet for their superfluous energy without really hampering their freedom in any way.

Because Mennonites were no longer living in solid rural communities, the maintenance of a distinct spiritual life had become more difficult with the great population shifts and redistributions. In the suggestions that he made he stated some of the guiding principles of the Emmaus church itself as I see them on looking back to that time. The church was to face the facts squarely with courage and vision, making adjustment and adopt new methods where necessary even if they cut clean across lines of tradition. What was equally important was his attitude and conception of the church. "I agree with great leaders that present denominationalism as a hindrance to soul winning, and the maintenance of the present attitude is unchristian and impossible if souls are to be saved. If we want to operate in water tight compartments we are bound to fail...The tragedy of division (in view of the previous sentence he means failure to take part in interdenominational efforts) is the tragedy of a sterile, barren church, too bound and fettered by its own inhibitions to make a nation or community wide work of the spirit possible".¹ In my opinion this was the policy of the church during the years 1940-50 with some tremendous results and others less favorable. Interdenominationalism was strong in the minds of the people especially among Emmaus participants. e.g. An Emmaus church attender, "A young lady always went to church and suddenly accepted baptism from an interdenominational minister. When I asked her the reason, her frank and apparently sincere answer was 'I want to be free to come and go as I please.' She still attends church as usual."² To my recollection the word Mennonite was almost never mentioned during these ten years. For example some in the Swift Current group, when making the official church stamp, left the word Mennonite off intentionally. The reason given was it hindered the church's witness. In my opinion the real reason was a reaction against a Mennonitism because of former associations with Sommerfeld and left a bitter taste in their mouth, and a great lack of education of what the Mennonite and the General Conference really is. On the other hand there was great emphasis on evangelism. Rev. Nickel quotes several answers Sunday School teachers answers to a question he asked them. "What is wrong with our church and how can we improve it?" The answers all have the same theme--The church must bring young people in touch with the living Christ; all young people should be trained in soul winning; the church needs Sunday School teachers who have a passionate concern for souls;

1. Jahrbuch 1946, Our Mennonite Youth for Christ and our Church p. 64

2. Ibid. p. 70

and the church should have a trained evangelist to hold a series of meetings at least once a year.¹

Finally Rev. Nickel's discourse reveals that a spirit of "Pentecostalism" was already prevalent. The interview that he recalls was typical of much thinking of the Emmaus church at this time.

"Recently I asked one of our most promising young ladies why she had gone to another meeting on Sunday night instead of our own church, and there take her part...the answer was 'I listened to something better once. I got a greater blessing there than I got here because that whole church seems alive; the testimonies were such a blessing. I really felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. The evangelistic message of Rev. B. was so inspiring, I certainly enjoyed it.'"² This can be taken as a commentary on many attending Emmaus Church. The result of this attitude a few years later was that some of its members and others who had been converted because of its ministry joined Pentecostal groups.

The post war period ushered in new interest in religion. For the first time students in larger numbers began going to high-school. Those of the Sommerfeld background were discouraged because it was felt that further education was not necessary and would lead to worldliness. Some of the 1923-27 group shared this opinion and others just did not have the finances to send their children to school.

ELDERSHIP

By 1948 it became very evident that the service of Elder J.J. Nickel, though excellent as far as it went was totally inadequate to meet the needs of the Emmaus Church. Consequently under the leading of Elder Ewert, Rev. V.E. Nickel was elected elder by the Emmaus on May 20, 1945 and on Oct. 31, 1948 was ordained by the same Elder. He served in this capacity until 1959. Thus the eldership system was fully established in the Emmaus Church.

WORK IN SCHÖNFELD

Work began in Schönfeld in the late 20's. When Rev. Wiens was working in Blumenhoff, he served it from there. Services were conducted in a school house until 1944 when a church was built. There were never any Sunday morning services, only Sunday School and an evening service. Average Sunday School attendance was 45. Rev. C. Kehler started preaching in 1949 and was ordained by V.E. Nickel on Oct. 12, 1952

WORK IN MCMAHON

Work was started in McMahon by the Swift Current Bible School Mission in 1949.³ with various ministers from the Emmaus and the Bible School serving. In 1950 the services of Rev. William Zacharias were secured in part by the Home Mission Board (as far as financial obligations were concerned) and the Swift Current Bible School Mission. The small group of early Christians that participated in the fellowship included Lutherans, Pentecostals, M.B.'s, Sommerfelder,

1. Jahrbuch, 1946, Our Mennonite Youth for Christ and our Church, p. 70

2. Ibid. p.70

3. One report indicates that the ministers from the Emmaus had been serving in McMahon in 1946 and it was turned over to the S.C.B.S. Mission only in 1949-50.

and General Conference. Rev. W. Zacharias was ordained July 20, 1952 by Rev. G.G. Epp, as a Home Mission Worker.

Sunday School began with fifty and was built up to 100. Mostly the English language was used. Even though it was a G.C. mission station of the fifty to sixty that attended only about twelve were G.C. members. In the spring of 1954 Jake Nickel a recent Swift Current Bible School graduate took over the work for two years. He was not a member of the Emmaus nor did he become one. When at the end of this time he wanted to return to school (this time Bethel College) Rev. Zacharias returned in 1956-58.

By this time Rev. Zacharias thought it was time that they organized into a church and rightly so. Several factors prevented this from happening. One, 1958 saw a revival in the Sommerfelder churches with the result that a new Evangelical Mennonite Church was started in this area (Chortitz). Those of the Sommerfelders who had attended the G.C. mission in McMahon joined this newly organized church. Second, the few members who were faithful thought they would rather join ~~an~~ already existing G.C. Churches. Third they were unable to find a replacement for Rev. Zacharias who wanted to discontinue unless a church be organized. As a result the project was closed when Rev. Zacharias resigned in 1958. The G.C. members in this fellowship are now worshiping in Rhineland and Wymark. Others have joined the M.B.'s and E.M.C.'s.

Realizing that one cannot really evaluate a work of this type by its immediate results, several observations can still be made. A good number of children were reached and ~~won~~ for Christ through Sunday School and D.V.B.S. This acted as leaven in the entire community. It fermented that section of the Sommerfelder lump, ripening the crop for an EMBharvest. From the standpoint of the G.C. it was hardly a success because even some members which formerly were G.C. now attend other churches. However it is fortunate that the Lord does not restrict his work to the G.C.'s.

DAVID QUIRING

David Quiring has done much work in the Swift Current Church, primarily in the area of German messages. Also during the absence of full time ministers he has stepped in and filled this role admirably. Rev. Quiring was ordained in Sept. 24, 1944 by Rev. J.J. Nickel.

WERNER ZACHARIAS

Rev Zacharias was ordained in Aug. 7, 1949 by V.E. Nickel, after election earlier in the same year (June 8). He worked in Blumenhof until the summer of 1955. Since then he has been the principal of the Bible School in Swift Current. This is becoming a more difficult task all the time. Now that the school is operated on a provincial basis the enrolment has greatly increased.

TENSION IN THE 50's

Tension characterized parts of the Emmaus Church during the 50's. There was by this time a strong desire for autonomy especially in S.C. primarily among the members though Rev. Dyck was in sympathy with it. By this time the church had become so large that the elder was unable to give it the required

leadership primarily for two reasons. One, because of the full time teaching position of the elder, the time he could devote to the church was limited. Secondly, because under the eldership type of church government the duties of the elder and that of the various pastors was inadequately defined. Neither was sure exactly what was his part of the work nor which geographical area he was responsible for. As a result much work was left undone. In Swift Current and Rhineland the spirit of autonomy was especially strong. Rhineland solved the problem by withdrawing from the Emmaus and the General Conference altogether. This S.C. was not willing to do but was divided in its attitude toward both the Emmaus and the G.C. Those who had a major share in the early stages of the church life saw great strength in all being united under the Emmaus; thus presenting a unified witness in the community. It was felt that several of the smaller outstations e.g. Schönfeld and McMahon, Pella needed the support of the larger church for existence. The few privileges that local autonomy in Swift Current might bring would not compensate for this need of unified strength. On the other hand some saw the Emmaus as a hindrance to the witness of the local, Swift Current church because it was hampered in its activity. All major decisions had to be made by the entire group (Emmaus) even though they concerned only Swift Current, or any other single group for that matter.

It was during this growing tension that Rev. Dyck resigned from S.C. because of ill health caused by over work. The intervening years at Swift Current greatly lacked strong leadership. The work was carried on by several Bible School teachers whose primary interest was the Bible School with the church secondary. Rev. Quiring and Rev. Bernard Rempel did all they could but neither ^{was} officially hired by the church and could serve only upon its invitation. They were both limited in their ministry because they used only the German language.

A CHURCH SPLIT

Finally in Jan. 1955 a group of 25-50, including some of the best and most active leaders e.g. Sunday School superintendent, choir conductor, and S.S. teachers withdrew and started the Christian and Alliance Church in Swift Current. However, this did not solve the basic problem of the eldership system in the Emmaus.

After a three year absence Rev. Hans Dyck returned to Swift Current as its minister with no longer any duties in the Bible School. This enabled him to devote his entire attention to the Swift Current congregation.

The same problem (desire for autonomy) arose again. By this time the church in Gull Lake had been closed and its more active members were attending church in Swift Current. Most of these were in favor of keeping a unified Emmaus church because they had greatly benefited from it as such.

Numerous attempts were made in S.C. to draw up their own constitution in an effort to become autonomous with repeated failure. This failure was due to two reasons; one, the S.C. congregation was not united on this issue; and secondly, the elder opposed it. The elder did so for several reasons. First of all he had to do so because constitutionally this was not allowed. The whole Emmaus never literally followed the constitution still in existence which Elder Ewert drew up in 1929, but this point was stressed. Several amendments had been made to the constitution but somehow it seemed impossible to change it granting autonomy to individual congregations. Secondly he was

opposed to it for personal reasons, as I see it.

REV. ABE NEUFELD IN SWIFT CURRENT

In 1958 Rev. Hans Dyck again had to resign because the various pressures were more than he could take. In the early part of 1959 Rev. Abe Neufeld began his ministry in Swift Current. He was invited to reorganize the church and this is what he proceeded to do. With the help of local ministers an acceptable constitution was drawn up. A new name was given to the S.C. congregation "Zion Mennonite Church". Its own membership records were established. Thus connections were formally severed with the Emmaus though not without another bitter controversy over the same problem. The new constitution in S.C. gives it the right to call its own minister, ordain him as elder if he is not already one and thereby he has the right to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. The result has been very beneficial for Swift Current. Its membership now stands at 120, with twice that many attending every Sunday morning. Sunday School has some 200 pupils. A well rounded church program including a German and English message on Sunday morning, Sunday evening services, two prayer meetings—one in German and one in English, a junior and senior choir, boys club, several Ladies Aid Societies ^{have been established}. Because of the greater unity the church has finally embarked on a long over due building program. During the coming summer a new sanctuary is to be built on the same church block. Several Sunday School outposts were started by Swift Current while it was still in the Emmaus. One was started in Beverly in 1954 and has continued ever since. More recently Sunday School work has been carried on in Waldeck as well.

WORSHIP HISTORY

Because I am most familiar with S.C., I would like to use it to describe the worship history. There have been regular uninterrupted services since 1924. In the beginning only the German language was used because it was then composed only of 1923-29 immigrants. During 1940's there was a gradual shift. First the Christian Endeavor was in English, then the Sunday School and finally part of the morning worship service. Almost no liturgy has ever been used though there might be a tendency toward that direction of late. Prayers were always spontaneous, the usual posture was standing. Sermons were never read. The music was always a very strong attraction. In the beginning only the "Evangeliums Lieder" book was used. As English came into use the "Christian Service Songs" books were purchased and used. In the better 40's this was replaced by "Church Service Hymns". There was a strong choir during the 40's under the direction of Rev. Dyck which assisted in almost all the services. The earliest instrument was a pump organ given by Mr. Unger soon after the building of the church in 1937. As far as I can remember there have always been weekday prayer meetings, at least since the arrival of Rev. Dyck in 1943. In recent years there have been two prayer meetings a week, one in English and one in German.

Until Swift Current withdrew from the Emmaus finances are difficult to describe. The church did not have a unified budget. The missions offerings and M.C.C. were sent to the Emmaus treasury from where it was dispersed. Local financial obligations were met by regular offerings and taken care of by the local church secretary.

At the same annual church meeting that Swift Current withdrew from Emmaus

Elder Nickel resigned his eldership. The reason given was ill health.

Also Rev. Kehler left "Schönfeld" and discontinued as minister there. This left the group there without a minister. They have continued with their S.S. but no organized church program. Many of the people are now attending church elsewhere especially Rhineland. The later has done most to meet this group's need in holding services there.

The station at Pella had been neglected for a long time and was abanded in 1958 with the suggestion that the two or three families there should go to Wymark or elsewhere.

The only church that has remained under the name Emmaus is the Wymark congregation. It has been looking for a minister since the formal resignation of Elder Nickel as their minister. Rev. Nickel and Rev. Kehler do the preaching when called upon to do so but neither is willing to take the responsibility of leadership.

SUCCESS OF THE EMMAUS

Thus formally ended the Emmaus Church as a larger unit. In evaluating its successes and failures several observations can be made. In some aspects the church was successful. One was its evangelistic program. From the very beginning this emphasis brought results. The earliest organized evangelistic campaign was conducted by I.P. Friesen from Rosthern in 1935. Similar efforts have been made during almost every following year either on the one congregation level; or the Emmaus level, or the entire S.C. area level with all evangelical denominations participating e.g. the "Brunk Revivals" in 1955 and 1956. Vigorous camp and D.V.B.S. activities stressed the conversion of children. Radio broadcasts by the Bible School and later one of the churches stressed evangelism.

The Emmaus has never had a radio broadcast of its own. The Bible School broadcast was shared by the Swift Current Church. Now the Bible School participates in "Wings of Peace" a Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth project. Rev. Friesen along with this church "Rhineland Christian Fellowship" has developed several radio broadcasts which serve especially the S.C. area.

Outpost Sunday School started largely through the efforts of a local full time worker (Ann Quiring) resulted in numerous conversions.

Another reason why the evangelistic program was so successful was because the environment was ripe for it. Ninety percent of new converts came from the Sommerfelder church. Because of its strict conservatism and lack of salvatory preaching, many were dissatisfied and were hunting for a more **satisfactory** religion. The result was that many came to the Emmaus of their own efforts.

Because of this constant stream of converts the first Christian zeal for conversion was kept alive by these new converts often more so than by the old stayed members. The Bible School was a constant source of workers for Sunday School, D.V.B.S., tract distribution, house visitation, camp workers and deputation work did much to further the cause of Christ in the S.C. and surrounding area. Rev. Nickel's statement of 1946 "Above all else we need to win souls; it must be the concern of every minister, S.S. teacher, Christian Endeavor, ushers, boards, committees and members".¹ was to a large extent fulfilled.

1. V.E. Nickel, Jahrbuch, 1946, p.71

FAILURES

On the other hand the church did not fulfill its task in the community. Many remained unreached. Many did not find in the Emmaus the spiritual home they felt they needed and so moved on. That the Emmaus did not complete its task was evidenced by the fact that other churches had to be started to accommodate all the converts. The church's divisions and troubles were a great hindrance to its effective witness. Many came to the Emmaus to be baptized and later married but the church failed in some cases to bring them in contact with the living Christ and His church. In other cases the church reached the children in Sunday School and camps but because of lack of interest in parents the church failed to follow through and lost the children later. Also the church failed to a large extent in its responsibilities to the General Conference as such because a large portion of converts won by the church drifted into other denominations. People converted in and through the efforts (humanly speaking) of the Emmaus are found in the Open Bible, M.B., Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of God, Apostolic, Klein Gemeinde and the Rhineland Christian Fellowship. The Klein Gemeinde came in to a large extent because the Emmaus failed at that point. There was no Klein Gemeinde Church in the area. There was a revival among the Sommerfelder. Those revived had to leave, the Emmaus did not give them a home so Klein Gemeinde came in and they did.

When the group who later joined the Alliance brought up their problems they were ignored too long by leaders in the Church. The policy that we must "face our problems squarely" was not followed here.

There were several reasons why, in my opinion, the Emmaus was ineffective. First Elder B. Ewert along with the Home Mission Board established the eldership system which had worked satisfactorily in other environments never really became fully adopted. Though it served a great need in the beginning it was a hindrance later on but was invested with the inability to adapt itself to the new situation. The eldership government presupposed a frontier situation with lay ministry not dependent on hired pastors. It presupposed a closely integrated group of church which never was the case with the Emmaus because of geographic dispersion and even religio-culture background. The eldership government presupposed strong dynamic leadership which was often lacking in elder of Emmaus. During 1928-49 the duties of the elder were performed by visiting men who administered ordinances. However, they were unable to give the needed leadership by their annual visits. From 1940-48 the services of Elder J.J. Nickel again consisted primarily in administering the ordinances, with leadership more or less in the hands of each congregation. By the time Rev. V.E. Nickel was ordained as elder as an Emmaus man it was almost time for a change in the government. The churches who had been operating largely on their own were unwilling to submit to eldership rule. Rev. V.E. Nickel's services were always hampered by his full time teaching duties and the Wymark congregation.

In some congregations like Swift Current the work was greatly hampered at times because of the lack of a permanent minister (1952-55; July 1958-Jan. 1959), because of his full time duties in the Bible School, teaching and deputation work. Because of the circuit system the rotation of ministers in the various preaching stations did not add to the progress of the entire church.

The General Conference Mennonite cause was neglected primarily because leadership emphasis was in this direction. Of the ministers in the Emmaus four later joined the M.B. because they were dissatisfied with the General Conference. Rev. Gerhard Warkentine a G.C. from Russia changed to the M.B.'s in 1831 but served as minister in S.C. until 1940 as an M.B. Naturally the situation was such that he could not stress the G.C. cause. Rev. Abe Bergen in Blumenhof had that station and withdrew from the Emmaus and G.C. after he left. He himself became an M.B. by practise though nominally he may be a G.C. Rev. Jacob Derkson when they left Swift Current and moved to British Columbia joined the M.B.'s. Rev. W. Rempel became an independent. Though they may all have been loyal G.C.'s while they were in the Emmaus their attitude left a marked impression. The strongest leader Rev. Nickel saw denominationalism as a hindrance. "I agree with great leaders that present denominationalism is a hindrance to soul winning, and the maintenance of the present attitude is unchristian and impossible if souls are to be saved".¹

Rev. Friesen gave evidence of his attitude when he led his church out of the G.C. in order to escape the Emmaus eldership system. When the congregation later voted concerning the rejoining of the G.C. as a separate congregation the majority were disinclined.

Because so many of the leaders were inclined toward interdenominationalism this was stressed and taught much more than the G.C. Church. This teaching, lacking Mennonite emphasis, was especially effective in the Emmaus because many of the members came from the Sommerfelder Church. For them the word Mennonite had only a negative connotation; they wanted to leave all that the work stood for in their minds. Lack of education failed to correct this attitude.

But it would be unfair to put all the blame for Emmaus ineffectiveness with the leadership. The leadership was to a large extent determined by the membership especially in later years. Several congregations like Swift Current, Wymark and McMahon had their own church organization which chose many of their own workers. The Bible School brought in teachers some which were interdenominationally minded and others anti-denominational. Ante-Mennonite as well as evangelism varied with members of the different congregations. Some churches allowed every kind of speaker and missionary to speak and solicit for funds. The result was that in some congregations as much as two-thirds of the total budget went for mission but the support of G.C. missionaries was neglected. Many coming from a more conservative background saw the Emmaus still too conservative just because it was Mennonite they wanted a more complete break with Mennonite and joined more radical groups of Pentecostals. Many members fell prey to "faith healing sects" while the Emmaus stood back with no particular answer to give to their specific problems. Students attended the provincial high school or interdenominational High Schools like Prairie Bible Institute, or Briercrest Bible Institute, but few attended the G.C. Church schools e.g. Rosthern Junior College. Even with an Emmaus School as it was until a few years ago many attended other interdenominational Bible Schools.

In summary one must say that the Emmaus has done a great work in Swift Current and area. It started as a mission field of the G.C. Mission Board. It had its roots in a frontier situation where material and spiritual life were

not what might be desired but they did the very best they could under these circumstances. God blest their efforts and "added to the church those who were saved." The Emmaus from the beginning did not follow a great master plan as though it had inherited one, but it was characterized by its experimentation continually seeking God's guidance. Its growth in numbers was phenomenal. In a little over 20 years its membership starting from zero rose to almost 400.

Its spiritual growth is not as easily calculated. The number won for Christ through the Emmaus humanly speaking far exceeds the estimated membership. It is still much too early to evaluate many of these results. Only eternity will reveal what God has been able to accomplish through the people of the Emmaus.

STATISTICS OF THE REIMAU'S MENNONITE CHURCH

YEAR	ENTIRE CHURCH BODY	MEMBERSHIP	NO OF FAMILIES	NO OF ELDER'S	MEET/ING PLACES	CHURCHES	S.S.	X th N END.	LADIES AIDS	TOTAL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS	MINISTERS
1927											
1928											
1929											
1930	270	120	48	0	5	1	50p.				2
1931											
1932											
1933											
1934	280	144	46	0	6	3	2	2	1	75	2
1935	264	132	44	0	6	1	5	1	1	50	2
1936	112	45	17	0	2	0	1	1	1	58	1
1937	350	170	60	0	6	3	4	2	3		3
1938	260	161	52	0	6	1	1	0	0	161	3
1939	340	182	68	0	6	3	4	3	3	435	3
1940	398	210	72	0	7	3	5	3	3	731	2
1941	398	210	72	0	7	3	5	3	3	731	2
1942	433	234	73	0	7	3	5	3	2	371	3
1943	478	269	79	0	9	3	5	3	3		3
1944	500	275	85	0	8	4	5	3	3	379	3
1945	527	314	84	0	8		7	6	4	12,584	6
1946	536	323	84	0	7	7	7	6	4	11,321	5
1947	556	339	85	0	6	6	6	4	3	13,596	5
1948											6
1949	541	341	82	1	8	6	7	6	4	5,106	5
1950											
1951	563	362	83	1	7	7	6	5	2	10,778	5
1952	—	354								3,979	
1953	384	371	68	1	7	7	5	5	3	14,182	6
1954	398	218	63	1	7	7	7	5	1		6
1955	368	196	81	1	5	5	26cl.	5	2	13,862	7
1956	427	236	82	1	5	5	310p.	5	1		7
1957	454	255	64	1		6	32cl.				7
1958	464	266	65	1							7
1959		196									5
1960	454	255									
1961											

MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED THE REIMAU'S CHURCH IN VARIOUS WAYS

GERHARD WARKENTIN (1928-	CORNELIUS KEHLER
ABRAHAM BERGEN (1933-	ISSAC EPP
JACOB DOEFKAMER (1941-	ISSAC EPP
VALENTINE NICKEL (1941-	J.P. BOHR
BERNARD REMPFL (1949-56)	JOHN LOWEN
DAVID QUIRING (1946-	A.B. KOOP
HANS DYCK (1945-58)	PETER LETKESMAN
WERNER ZACHARIAS (1951-	ANNE QUIRING
WILLIAM ZACHARIAS	
J.J.M. FRIESEN	
WILLIAM L. REMPFL	

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