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PRINT, TEXT, COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF COMMUNICATION
IN THE *ZIONSBOOTE*, A MENNONITE WEEKLY,
BETWEEN 1884 and 1906.

by

Dora Dueck

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of History
Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg
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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
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Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the *Zionsbote*, a weekly religious periodical serving Mennonite Brethren in America and Russia, as communication. The parts of the communication transaction (producer, receiver, medium, content, and effects) are delineated and given context, and their convergence is observed. The central question is: what was happening as this little paper was being written and read week after week?

Zionsbote communication engaged with matters of time and space through the pervasive discourse of journey. The Mennonite Brethren in this period were deeply marked by the experience of migration. This reality shaped the discourse. At the same time, the transportable, paper, print medium of the *Zionsbote* constructed a new "imagined" community. Travel writing negotiated the new experiences of time and space. A narrative of spiritual pilgrimage continuously drew attention to the time and place when all would be together in one "home".

Second, *Zionsbote* communication revealed an overlap of Mennonite Brethren practices of orality and literacy. The Mennonite Brethren had a culture of participatory congregational life as well as an emphasis on a personal appropriation, or hearing, of biblical text. In *Zionsbote* communication, print often seemed in the thrall of oral experience. Contributors wrote as if they were speaking. The newspaper exhibited a carelessness to the visual aspects of print communication, a reliance on earlier social assumptions, a close connection with the Church's itinerant activity, and frequent recourse to biblical text in the expectation that readers could move from reading to listening via these references.

Third, *Zionsbote* communication contributed to the formation of the group's identity through the reading and writing of stories. The Mennonite Brethren were a relatively new group with an emphasis on family-like intimacy; they felt separate and distinct from other Mennonites and the larger world. The process of identity-formation is seen in the process of writing and reading personal experiences that created shared meaning, strengthened bonds inside the group, and established boundaries that defined and excluded outsiders.

The study of this periodical illuminates just a few of the complex themes that may emerge in the investigation of communication. It shows that communication is multi-layered, dynamic, and historically situated.

Introduction

The daily duties of the hired man at the John F. Harms farm near Medford, Oklahoma did not necessarily end with field work and chores. Harms was an editor as well as a farmer and there was a weekly paper to get out. A small lean-to erected against the side of the two-storey frame house served as a printing plant. Here, two or three evenings a week, the young hired hand lifted and lowered the inked platen press onto hand-fed paper sheets, more than 1400 times, until two pages of that week's issue were printed. Then, since Harms owned only enough type for two pages, the type of those pages was dismantled. The following day several girls set the next two pages and that evening the hired man repeated the printing procedure. The paper was then folded, addressed, and delivered to the postal station. In due course it reached its readers; they lived in America and in Russia.

The small paper produced every week on Harms' farm was the *Zionsbote*, a church paper of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America. Begun in 1884, it was the group's first periodical, and one of several German-language papers launched for Russian Mennonites who migrated to North America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It served the immigrant Mennonite Brethren, but also their co-religionists in Russia. It carried religious articles, congregational news, accounts of itinerant preaching missions, travel reports, and personal news of moves, mishaps, marriages, illnesses, deaths. Its appearance was modest, its writing homespun, its focus limited. In its beginning decades

it often struggled for its very existence.

Yet the paper survived, year after year, and inspired great affection from its scattered readers. They wished it could be bigger, or come twice a week.² They addressed it as a "good friend" or a guest on a "dear visit."³ The *Zionsbote* helped them stay connected as members of geographically separated Mennonite Brethren congregations. It gave them a sense of who they were as a larger group. Since the word "bote" in the name *Zionsbote* means "messenger," they could imagine the little paper as alive, as someone carrying the words they wanted to say to, and hear from, one another.

This interaction, within the text of a weekly paper, is the subject of this study. The *Zionsbote* was an immigrant institution, and also a religious institution, but it will be analyzed here primarily as an organism of communication in dynamic relationship with a particular community during a particular period in both their histories.

The *Zionsbote* was only one print venture, of course, and a rather small one at that, in a much larger publishing phenomenon in American history. The entire American press enterprise was surging by the mid-nineteenth century. By 1830 the United States with less than 13 million people already had more newspapers than Europe with its population of 185 million.⁴ There was "a feverish setting up of new papers" on the western frontier; the newspaper was a common experience of every community that formed there.⁵ The foreign language press also played a significant role in press growth. As the population of America swelled through immigration,

foreign language newspapers proliferated. Between 1880 to 1920, the peak years of this journalistic activity, more than 3440 newspapers came into existence to serve over 30 different nationalities.⁶ These papers ranged widely in size, purpose, and constituency, from large urban dailies to small "organ" papers such as the *Zionsbote*.⁷

Robert E. Park, in his study *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, estimated that, contrary to stereotypes of immigrants as stolid, illiterate peasants, proportionately more newspapers were produced and read by the foreign born population of the United States than by the native born population of the migrants' home countries.⁸ For some this keen readership was linked to the relative freedom and opportunity of the press endeavor in America, but for all groups immigration itself created new audiences for printed materials.⁹

Newspapers have been used by historians in various ways. They are, of course, a rich and invaluable source of factual and cultural information. They have also been the subject of study as media institutions. Their importance to frontier studies has been acknowledged, although William Lyon complained in 1980 that there were no "generally accepted theories" for the function of this "primary institution on the frontier" such as exist about "railroads, mining and stockraising."¹⁰ Scholarship on the immigrant press has been more extensive, however, beginning with Robert Park's 1920 survey and continuing with overviews of the press endeavors of the major language groups in America, as well as monographs on individual periodicals.

These studies often followed the themes that have engaged immigration historians, that is, questions of assimilation or ethnic persistence. The general assessment was that foreign language papers were of great value in providing a strategic sense of belonging and in "smoothing the difficult transition to conditions in America" while subtly and gradually acting as agents of assimilation into the host society.¹¹ John Kulas, in a close analysis of one German immigrant religious paper, *Der Wanderer of St. Paul*, for example, discovered an "interactive relationship between the desire of cultural preservation and the demands of integration."¹²

Media studies that placed personalities or institutions in their wider social context fit into what communications scholar Willard Rowland called the first important shift in the historiography of communication, namely a broadening of the "horizontal frame of reference."¹³ This approach wove political, economic or sociocultural factors through the histories of journalism and media.¹⁴ A second significant shift in communication historiography that Rowland identified, and indeed proposed, extended the frame of reference of media studies in a vertical dimension, that is, against "a much deeper chronological backdrop" which looked at "the role of communication in the development of the human species and its forms of civilization." Scholars such as Walter Ong, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Harold Adam Innis pioneered interest in this "deep civilization context" of communication. The approach of the second shift, as Rowland outlined it, rests on several principles: media technologies are extensions of the basic

and innate capacity of humans to communicate; social relations and even individual cognition are intimately tied to the forms of communication predominant in given areas or times; and thus, the story of communication is more central to human history than has been previously recognized.¹⁵

The *Zionsbote* has mainly served as a resource for denominational scholars. It appeared regularly for 80 years, from 1885 to 1964, and was later microfilmed and indexed. Missions scholar G.W. Peters used the paper to discover Mennonite Brethren involvement in missions, saying "The researcher will be overwhelmed by the amount of mission material in the pages of this periodical..."¹⁶ John B. Toews analyzed the periodical's conversion stories to discuss early Mennonite Brethren piety and theology of conversion.¹⁷

Although these studies confirmed the *Zionsbote's* significance in Mennonite Brethren history, they focused on the information and evidence the paper yields about the past rather than on the medium itself or the communication it enacted. Nor was the *Zionsbote's* meaning particularly probed in the general denominational histories; there the *Zionsbote* story was told within an institutional framework, simply as one of a variety of publishing programs undertaken over the years.¹⁸

To consider the *Zionsbote* as communication may take us, at least according to Rowland's bold suggestion, close to the heart of a more encompassing theme within a particular historical setting. Perhaps David Harms was prescient about the paper's role when he described the effects of his cousin John's move to the

farm in Medford, Oklahoma after more than a decade in Kansas. The congregation of Mennonite Brethren in Medford was small, he said, and they were very glad to have the John Harms family among them. The family added to the numbers, it contained good singers, and John would become their preacher and church leader. Since he was editor and producer of the *Zionsbote*, moreover, they were now "so to speak, the center of our [Mennonite Brethren] Conference."¹⁹ To communicate, he implied, was at the core of this people's existence as a group.

The concept of communication is multi-faceted; it includes the medium (or technology), as well as the producer, receiver, content, and effects. To name these components of the *Zionsbote* communication process may seem obvious enough. But, the various elements of any communication interact with one another; they form what communication theorists David Kaufer and Kathleen Carley have called a "single ecology."²⁰ The word "ecology", borrowed from the functioning of the physical environment, reminds us that the individual parts of communication are vitally interdependent; a change in any one part changes the whole. Furthermore, the convergence of parts in any communication act demonstrates at the same time both the uniqueness and diversity of communication itself.

This study looks at the *Zionsbote* as communication by describing its parts and then analyzing their interaction. Put simply, the question it seeks to answer is, "what was happening as this little organ was being written and read week after week?" The period 1884 to 1906 was chosen for the project because these are

the beginning years of the periodical, and they cover the tenure of the first editor, John F. Harms. This 22-year span also roughly corresponds to the first generation of Mennonite Brethren immigrants to America, as well as to the period in which the Mennonite Brethren in Russia were without their own paper.²¹

I have sought to enter and reconstruct the *Zionsbote's* world. Since extant copies of the paper are available only from 1890, the story of the first six years has been gleaned from other materials such as the editor's autobiography and minutes of annual denominational meetings in which the *Zionsbote* was discussed. I have attempted to be mindful of both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of communication. In order to understand the Mennonite Brethren people and their beliefs, and the environments they inhabited in both America and Russia, I have consulted sources such as memoirs, community histories, and church histories. While the assimilation debate is not explicitly pursued, the experience of immigration, as well as of pioneering and religion, is considered integral to the investigation. The study follows the views of such scholars as Timothy L. Smith and Kathleen Neils Conzen, who contend that immigrant communities must be seen as both dynamic and particular.²²

As a communication study, however, the "host" society against which the material is viewed is not defined in terms of nation or ethnicity but rather in terms of technological development. Individuals or groups, whether immigrant or not, communicate by different forms and in different ways, and can be seen to be assimilating or resisting--in various combinations--the media of

the larger and dominant society. The *Zionsbote* was the Mennonite Brethren's first periodical; its discourse was particular to the group and its historical circumstances. The use of a print medium, however, belonged to a wider transition (which it demonstrated and in which it participated), namely the rise of literacy and the rise of the newspaper in Victorian-era society, all of which occurred in the context of rapid economic, technological and social change. Founding a paper was easier in the American context to be sure, but it did not represent integration into American society as much as accommodation to the flow of industrialization and new technology throughout the entire western world.

An awareness that humankind has been profoundly involved with print during the past several centuries has led recently to a new area of scholarship called "print culture studies". This scholarship embraces a number of disciplines and includes literary studies, reader-response theory, ethnographies of reading, and the social history of books or other printed materials. The usefulness of this field in general for this project lies in its emphasis on the reader and the act of reading, as well its attention to the shift in humanities research "from culture as text to culture as agency and practice."²³ The *Zionsbote* represented communication within a context--a particular community, setting, medium--and it carried a text or discourse reflecting that context. But it also shaped it. This study relies heavily on the text as evidence for what was both reflected and effected; the circularity of this approach and its limitations must be acknowledged from the outset.

The first chapter is narrative in style and sets out briefly

the context of *Zionsbote* communication. It describes the Mennonite Brethren, for whom the paper existed, and their migration and settlement in America. It provides an overview of the paper's origin and development in its early decades, and a biographical sketch of the first editor, John F. Harms.

The next three chapters (Two through Four) analyze three aspects of the new medium's interaction with its constituency: first, engagement with time and space; second, practice of orality and literacy; and third, identity-formation through reading and writing. These are linked respectively with prominent themes of the discourse: journey, text, and story. Each chapter contains one or more examples of *Zionsbote* writing, such as travel accounts, correspondence, and personal experiences.

Chapter Two shows that the *Zionsbote*, as a paper medium, transcended time and space to form a new imagined community. The Mennonite Brethren were no longer defined by physical proximity but had been separated and scattered through migration. Through the technology of print and nineteenth century developments in transportation and postal service, Mennonite Brethren had a regular connection to others with whom they shared ethnicity and religious worldview. Their regular gathering within the pages of the paper was remarkably intimate. Travel writing of all kinds constructed the geography of the new and larger Mennonite Brethren world and bridged old and new experiences of time and space. The religious motif of pilgrimage, furthermore, provided a theological narrative that united people on both sides of the migration decision.

Chapter Three discusses how the practice of literacy in *Zionsbote* communication intersected with the practice of orality. As Anabaptists, the Mennonites recognized the Bible as authoritative but also as a text to be interpreted in the community. Rates of literacy, therefore, were relatively high, even though the range of reading materials was limited. A widening array of print materials played an important role in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church, as well as in the migration of some 18,000 Mennonites to North America in the 1870s.

The Mennonite Brethren embraced print communication as a powerful tool for mission and theological unity. The early decades of the *Zionsbote*, however, reveal that the new practice of literacy was closely linked with, and reflected, oral church practices based on sermons, group discussions of the Bible, and extemporaneous prayer. Much writing concerned words that had already been spoken; it supported the MB practice of itinerant preaching missions. Here too there was a religious motif--the biblical text--woven throughout the written reports.

Chapter Four shows that while the *Zionsbote* transcended space and time to make a new kind of community possible, it also created boundaries and established identity. Print made possible an "imagined" church community. Within the "print church", conventions were established, certain ways of speaking ritualized, and understandings reiterated about the inside and the outside, all of which formed the self-identity of the group. The conversation was deliberately intimate; it became fixed and familiar; it was exclusive and separatist. This process of

identity formation happened in all parts of the paper, but will be analyzed in the genre of personal stories. It was the readers of the paper who were writing their stories. The act of writing drew from what had been read, and in its turn established meaning which others read. These understandings were set into print text and, as it were, solidified; they both bonded and bounded those who considered themselves part of the community within the periodical's pages.

A few explanations about language and usage. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. The use of Conference with a capital "c" refers to the association of Mennonite Brethren churches in North America or Russia. The representatives of these congregations met annually in what was also called "conference"; this gathering will be indicated by lowercase "c" or translated "convention." Mennonite Brethren may be designated by the acronym MB.

Another word often used in the *Zionsbote* was *Geschwister*, which means brothers and sisters or siblings. The Mennonite Brethren used the word in a very specific way, a kind of code for those who belonged to them. They might say of someone, "we hear they are also now *Geschwister*." I have retained the German word in this usage rather than translate it each time as "brothers and sisters". Siblings is used when the meaning clearly indicates blood relations.

Several MB congregations were founded in Canada during the period of this study (Manitoba 1888 and northern Saskatchewan

1892) but I use the term "America" throughout for both countries, unless differentiation is clearly required. This was the term used in the *Zionsbote* to designate the New World; Mennonite Brethren in both Canada and the United States referred to themselves as living in America. Eventually, of course, especially beyond the period of this study, the national designations were used more frequently.

The name for the paper was first a hyphenated word, *Zions-Bote*. I retain this spelling in quoted material. Otherwise I use the one word designation, as it was spelled after 1904.

Chapter ONE

Background: The People, the Paper, the Editor

The Mennonite Brethren

Among the approximately 18,000 Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to America in the 1870s there was a small number, some 200 families perhaps, of Mennonite Brethren.¹ The Mennonite Brethren were a relatively new group of Mennonites. They originated in the Mennonite colonies of southern Russia within the swirling milieu of new ideas and forces that marked the emerging modernization of that country.² Pietistic revival and an intellectual awakening in the colonies had stirred up the established church life of the Mennonites and given birth to the concept of "brotherhood" or intimate Christian fellowship. Many conversions had taken place under the dynamic preaching of a German Lutheran pastor, Eduard Wuest, at his church near Berdjansk.

The so-called Brethren began to meet regularly in private homes for Bible study and prayer. This fostered a sense of common understanding among them but also a growing alienation from the larger Mennonite church to which they belonged. Many in the established church viewed the brotherhood movement with reluctance or even alarm. Tensions increased until the secession of 18 "charter members" on January 6, 1860, which marked the formal beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church.³

The MB church was characterized, as many religious renewal movements are, by great intensity in spiritual matters. It emphasized a decisive conversion experience, the active practice

of Bible study and prayer, and the repudiation of activities deemed worldly such as playing cards, smoking, and drinking. The Mennonite Brethren instituted river baptism (*Flusstaufe*) or immersion, which became a powerful and provocative symbol of a separate identity.⁴ Many of the first generation of Mennonite Brethren already belonged to the established Mennonite Church and were re-baptized. This was more than a spiritual act; it was the sign of leaving one group identity for another.

Internal separatism was reinforced for Mennonite Brethren in the early years by the sense that they were being persecuted by other Mennonites.⁵ They were derisively called "*die frommen*" (the pious ones). One recalled, "Anyone who joined the Brethren became the object of community contempt."⁶ John F. Harms, later the editor of the *Zionsbote*, noted in his memoirs that as a child he was not allowed to associate with the children of Mennonite Brethren families outside of school.⁷ The established religious and civil officials vigorously attempted for some time to repress the new group, while the latter in turn appealed to the Russian government for legal recognition. The Mennonite Brethren movement blighted its reputation with emotional extremism in the early years, but the central issue for their opponents, said historian Abe Dueck, was separation. "To some degree, ideological dissent might be tolerated, but the creation of new ecclesiastical structures was intolerable."⁸

In spite of their rejection of the predominant religious culture of Mennonitism and their adoption of a narrower, exclusive practice, Mennonite Brethren cannot be considered conservatives.

Historian James Urry characterized them as "essentially liberal-minded individuals, progressive in attitude not only with respect to religion but in all areas of life."⁹ They tried to resist worldliness but this was defined, often somewhat legalistically, in terms of certain practices and association, not in terms of modernization as such; they were open to technology, education, and outside religious influences.

It is surprising, perhaps, that members of the relatively young Mennonite Brethren group, still developing their internal cohesion and still feeling beleaguered in the face of criticism from the larger Mennonite community, would risk further change by emigrating. Nevertheless, Mennonite Brethren participated in the great emigration of the Russian Mennonites in the 1870s.¹⁰ The first of them came to North America in small groups and settled in the United States--in Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota. By the turn of the century, they had also moved on to Oklahoma, Oregon, California, and Manitoba and Saskatchewan in Canada. Their numbers were augmented by a trickle of ongoing migration from Russia as well as religious "re-grouping"¹¹ among Mennonites and other Germans in America: by 1905 there were 3487 Mennonite Brethren in 59 congregations.¹² In Russia, there was steady growth of the Mennonite Brethren in terms of numbers, organization, and development of new settlements during this period as well.¹³

Mennonite Brethren came to America, said historian Theron Schlabach, with a distinct "group feeling and unhealed wounds from their origins;" they "scarcely joined hands at all with any American Mennonites." They arrived as a movement, Schlabach wrote,

and became a denomination.¹⁴ The first immigrants were scattered and leaderless until the arrival in Kansas of Abraham Schellenberg, former elder of one of the Russian MB churches, in 1879. With his help, the fledgling congregations were organized into an association called a Conference (*Bund*). Two strategies (also used in Russia) of consolidating the disparate parts of this religious constituency were annual meetings of congregational representatives and the practice of sending certain ministers on itinerant preaching missions to the various congregations. The potential of publishing as a connecting mechanism was soon recognized as well. The *Zionsbote* was launched in 1885.

The latter was not, however, a first encounter with a Mennonite newspaper. Some may have read the *Mennonitische Blaetter*, the oldest periodical of German Mennonites, founded in 1854 (published through 1941) by Jakob Mannhardt of Danzig. Mennonites in Russia also read other papers, like the German language *Odessaer Zeitung* and the *St. Petersburger Zeitung*.¹⁵ The Mennonites in America, of Swiss-German background from an earlier migration, also had papers, such as *Das Christlicher Volksblatt* (1856-66) and *Der Mennonitische Friedensbote* (1867-81).

Perhaps of most significance, however, was the founding in 1864, by American Mennonite publishing entrepreneur John F. Funk, of the *Herald of Truth* and its German counterpart, *Herold der Wahrheit*. Funk became interested in the possible migration of Russian Mennonites to America and began a concerted effort to reach readers in Russia as well as the U.S. He printed 20,000 extra copies of the February 1873 German issue and sent them to

Russia. This issue was dedicated to the Mennonites of Russia and their "plight" after the government's policy change on military conscription; it included possible settlement locations in America and estimates of actions necessary to accomplish immigration. Funk played an active role in the migration and subsequent settlement in America.¹⁶

Soon after the migration began, a newspaper was started especially for the immigrants. It was called *Zur Heimath*, put together by David Goerz, and distributed to immigrants by the Mennonite Board of Guardians, the American-side organization assisting in the settlement of the Russian Mennonites, of which Goerz was secretary. The paper provided information of practical assistance to the immigrants as well as news from Russia. In 1878, Funk's Mennonite Publishing House began the similar and competing *Der Nebraska Ansiedler*. Both these papers were financed by steam and railway companies.¹⁷ The former increasingly became a periodical of the Mennonites of the General Conference Church and in 1882 merged with the *Mennonitische Friedensbote* to form the *Christlicher Bundesbote*, the first official newspaper of that church group.¹⁸ The *Ansiedler* was replaced by the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1880. It was intended to serve the Russian Mennonite community regardless of church affiliation; it emphasized in fact that confessional differences were not up for discussion in its pages.¹⁹

The Zionsbote

When John F. Harms, the *Zionsbote's* first editor (to 1906)

and later assistant editor (1922-1934), wrote a history of the Mennonite Brethren church to commemorate the fiftieth-year jubilee of their existence in America in 1923, he gave considerable attention, not surprisingly, to what he called the conference's "publication business".²⁰ Harms began the story of that business with the desire of the MB church in Russia in the 1880s for a "little paper" of their own to circulate the reports of the itinerant preachers. The itinerant ministry had been launched in Russia at the first annual meeting of the Mennonite Brethren in 1872; five ministers were chosen. Each one was to keep a diary and send in quarterly reports which were then sewn together in a copy book and sent on a fixed journey from village to village where Mennonite Brethren lived, each village receipting the book when received, read, and sent on. As early as 1874 the Russian Conference made plans to print the reports of the itinerant ministry, but apparently they continued to circulate for another decade in their handwritten form, in hand-sewn copybooks with homemade covers. The first steps taken to print them were their publication in the *Zionsbote* of 1886-87.²¹

Although the *Zionsbote* provided an outlet for the Russian reports, the paper was not founded for that reason. The *Zionsbote* was a project of the American Mennonite Brethren to communicate news about its own itinerant missions. Nevertheless, the link with Russia that Harms established is significant because it expressed a common understanding by MBs on both sides of the Atlantic that it was important to disseminate information within the group. Print was a desirable technological step forward from a copybook

but the notion of circularity was the same; both assumed and demanded that the community share a practice of writing and reading in order to meet common goals.

In November 1883, at the annual convention in Nebraska, it was agreed that the itinerant preachers of the American MB Conference would make their work known to the congregations by sending their reports to Bernard Pauls of Coffey Co., Kansas who would check them over and see if they could be reproduced in a small paper or perhaps sent on to an existing paper, the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Nothing was forwarded to him, however, so nothing appeared.²²

The annual meeting of October 1884, held in Kansas, struck a committee to pursue publishing matters, including the need for a "written history" of the Mennonite Brethren Church and the publication of Conference resolutions. Also, the minutes recorded, "it is the wish of the Conference to publish the travel reports and news from our fields of work".²³

The three-member committee included Elder Abraham Schellenberg, Dietrich Classen and John F. Harms. Harms had recently joined the Mennonite Brethren by re-baptism and had been secretary of that year's conference. He was also the editor of the *Rundschau*, while managing a lumber business in the village of Canada, Kansas. The committee now went "courageously" to work, first getting the conference recommendations printed and then developing the plan for a Conference periodical. They met often, Harms recalled, going through reports that had been sent in. They discussed possible names for the new paper they had conceived, and

finally chose, from various "fine" names, the name *Zionsbote*, meaning "messenger of Zion".²⁴ Schellenberg selected a text from the Old Testament, and Classen one from the New, to stand on the left and right sides respectively of the title in the masthead.²⁵ Twenty-nine year-old Harms would be editor.

The *Zionsbote* was launched in 1885 as a 4-page quarterly at an annual subscription price of 25 cents. It was sent to churches in bundles and then distributed. During the first two years, the paper was printed at John F. Funk's Mennonite Publishing Company in Elkhart, Indiana, which also produced the *Rundschau*. It seems that the *Zionsbote* appeared twice monthly during the years 1887 and 1888. Harms and his family had moved to McPherson, Kansas in 1887, where he opened a printing plant. From this time until the Conference bought a printing press in 1904, Harms printed the paper in his own establishment.

The 1888 convention, held in Kansas in October, agreed that "every brother should subscribe to the paper" and also now took "a large step forward": the paper would become a weekly.²⁶ The paper remained at four pages (with two-page inserts at various times for the American subscribers) until 1904, when it expanded to eight pages.²⁷ The subscription price was raised to 75 cents in 1889, and increased to \$ 1 in 1893, the price was not raised again until 1920, when it increased to \$ 1.50 per year.

Circulation in 1889 was 800 copies; in 1892, 1100 copies were being printed. By 1897 the number had risen to 1435. By 1919, circulation was 3500.²⁸

"It is interesting," wrote Harms later, "what a lively

interest was shown this unpretentious little paper in Russia from the beginning."²⁹ He credited what he saw as the relatively rapid progress of the paper to this participation. In 1892, 625 copies were mailed within America, and 400 to Russia. Roughly the same proportions apply to figures from 1897 and 1898--of some 1435 copies printed, 632 were going to Russia. It seems that Russian subscriptions increased significantly for some years, reaching between 900 to 1000, for in 1904 Harms wrote that Russian circulation had dropped by one third, to 633.³⁰ Besides reading the *Zionsbote*, many Russian MBS contributed reports and letters to it.

Since no copies before 1890 are extant, it cannot be known how these issues looked or what they contained. The appearance of the *Zionsbote* in the first extant issues reveal it was indeed an "unpretentious little paper." It looks plain and, by our standards, somewhat amateurish. The unsophisticated appearance of the *Zionsbote* underscored the sense that it was an in-family organ produced by new and still-poor settlers, and humbly understood and accepted for what it was. When one subscriber somewhat uncharacteristically complained in the 3 January 1894 issue about how shabby "in print and paper" the *Zionsbote* was compared to a paper like *Herold der Wahrheit*, the editor replied that the criticism pained him. Of course there was much to be desired, he said, but the state of the treasury required that the cheapest paper be used, and as for the print, nothing better was possible on a hand press; the *Herold*, he said, was printed on a cylinder press costing ten times as much as his.³¹

Although the paper gradually improved in appearance, perhaps

as Harms could afford more variety in typefaces, the paper reflected the limitations of what was by 1902 "an old, used, completely inadequate printing press." Harms' insistence that he could not carry on under these conditions finally galvanized the Conference to act on something they had been contemplating for some time, that is, investment in their own printing press.³² The machines were purchased in 1903 and set up in a building in Medford, Oklahoma, where Harms was living at the time. (After Harms' resignation, the plant moved to McPherson, Kansas, and then in 1913 to Hillsboro, Kansas.)

As for content, the *Zionsbote*, befitting a church organ, contained articles of a devotional or theological nature, news from congregations, reports of conference meetings, Sunday school conventions and song festivals, accounts of itinerant preaching missions, reports and announcements. The front page often opened with a poem and an article of a theological or inspirational nature. It sometimes carried a continuing series, such as a study of the Lord's prayer or other biblical topics, and the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. Depending on what had come in, the rest of the paper contained writing from church "correspondents", letters, personal accounts of conversion or other experiences, and travel reports. The headings for member-submitted material were generic, such as "My Conversion" or "A Travel Report" or were simply designated by place of origin, such as "Out of Russia." The *Zionsbote* used newspaper forms such as columns and headings, but retained epistolary conventions in many of its reports, printing the writer's salutation, opening apologies or explanations, and

personal closing.

Although it was obvious from what people wrote that the *Zionsbote* was deeply appreciated, and that, furthermore, the Conference was committed to a paper of its own, the early decades were a struggle. More than once, discussion at the annual conference urged that every "brother" subscribe. The endeavor struggled financially for most of Harms' tenure. It frequently barely broke even or faced the year-end in a deficit position. Harms charged for costs, but considered his own work a voluntary service. When funds permitted, he was given an honorarium; it ranged from \$ 25 to \$ 50. If people paid their subscriptions, the paper generally carried itself, but every year many subscribers were in arrears.

In the 1 January 1896 issue, noting a deficit from the past year of \$ 142.23, editor Harms commented that payment could hardly be expected from some very poor readers in new settlements, and that the Conference had a "brotherly obligation" to be of help to these. But, he added more sharply, "I cannot understand how readers who are not so poor and still don't pay live with their conscience." He kept the printing prices as low as possible, he said, and there was nothing left for the editorial work; he felt "[m]any members of our community do not treasure the fact enough, that we have our own paper."

The *Zionsbote* also struggled for material. Reading the paper was easier, more pleasant, came the frequent apology, than writing it. Readers complained when there was too much "Ausgewaehltes" or re-printed material from other papers; they wanted "original"

material, that is, material written by fellow-members. The editor made frequent pleas for participation, at the annual conventions and in print. Eventually a system of designated correspondents was established in many congregations and participation seemed to stabilize. At the end of the eleventh year of production, 18 December 1895, the editor reflected that he felt like parents who on the birthday of their weak 11-year-child were moved to "praise and thanks that the Lord had helped thus far and saved the child from death, but at the same time looked sadly at their precious gift from God and sighed in prayer for the child's full health."

In spite of the struggle, there was discernible development in the paper. Harms' request (sometime before 1890) that people write about their conversions started a genre that resulted in the publication of hundreds of such accounts between 1890 and 1906, producing at times a backlog of material. Travel reports increased. There was still material taken from elsewhere (the Baptist minister Spurgeon was a favorite, for example) but generally much of the paper was written within the group, as people preferred.

Innovations appeared from time to time. Conversion stories have already been mentioned, which may have unintentionally shifted the burden of the paper somewhat from the "mission" effort of preachers to the experiences of ordinary members. At various stretches, the *Zionsbote* carried short news excerpts from the national and world stage. (This feature might have depended on the editor's availability to read and summarize the items.) A "Question and Answer" feature ran for some time. At several

periods the *Zionsbote* included a "Beilage" or insert which was sent only to the subscribers on the American continent. The first attempt at this supplement series covered the political situation in Russia, particularly in reference to the persecuted Stundists (Russian Christians who had left the Orthodox faith). A later regular insert or supplement, also for American readers, had a somewhat more national flavor, even including some advertisements, in addition to the commentary about Russia that could not be included in a paper going to that country.

The purchase by the Conference of a new press in 1904 marked a milestone in the paper's development. The number of regular pages doubled, the print was easier to read, and Harms was hired as salaried editor and manager. The paper was given a new masthead--a drawing of a walled city of Middle Eastern appearance --and a new organization of material, under categories such as "Mission", "Correspondence", "Current World News", "Experiences", "Sunday School" and so on. Many people wrote to congratulate the paper on its "new dress" as well as expressing a sense of great confidence about its future.

John F. Harms, editor

John F. Harms was a key figure in the founding and progress of the *Zionsbote*. He was born in Kleefeld, Molotschna, South Russia on April 29, 1855, the only child of a well-to-do *Vollwirt* (full landowner), Jacob and Anna (Foth Isaak) Harms.³³ He was a precocious child, learning to read and write and add figures to 100 before beginning school. In *Eine Lebensreise*, Harms' account

of his first 23 years in Russia, he described his enormous appetite for books and learning. He built up a small personal library of children's and youth books through purchases from a Christian bookseller. At eight, he recalled, his father gave him Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in German, which affected him deeply. John also read his father's books, including Hofackers' sermons, Baxter's *Ewige Ruhe*, the *Kleines Maertyrerbuch* and *Wandelnde Seele*.³⁴ His father was a "zealous reader" of the *Sueddeutsche Warte*, a paper put out by Christoph Hoffman, founder of the Templar Movement, and so the son read this paper too.³⁵

Jacob permitted John to attend school beyond the elementary level, mainly to master the Russian language for the purposes of farm business, but he did not support John's aspirations for still further education. After a spiritual crisis during a near-death encounter with typhus, John acquiesced to his father's wishes, if not to farm at least to teach locally. But, he admitted, it had "cost a great effort to step down from the dream of university professor to village teacher."³⁶

This was not John's only area of difference with his father. As a child John was attracted to the fledging Mennonite Brethren movement and their Sunday school because his closest school friends were from these families. The families associated with the Brethren were from the landless of John's village and held their meetings in homes; their activities were a constant irritation to John's parents and he was forbidden to have anything to do with the children outside of school.³⁷ Later, in the colony crisis over land, John's sympathies were with the landless in opposition to

his father, who as leading member of the full landowners was, the son felt, "too much under the influence" of the land baron Peter Schmidt. John was not able to convince his father of the injustice of the landowners' position, even though he had developed his arguments by purchasing and secretly reading several times the pamphlet written by Abraham Thiessen, representative of the landless in legal proceedings in St. Petersburg, about the cause of the landless.³⁸

In spite of John's diminished dreams, he later wrote that his five years teaching in the village school of Lichtfelde were, except for 1876, very happy ones. In the unhappy year of 1876, his first wife, whom he had married in 1873, and their two children all died within the space of two months. At the end of 1876, John married Margaretha Isaac; they had six children and the marriage lasted 45 years until her death in 1921.

In 1878, John and Margaretha, along with his parents, emigrated to America. Five of John's uncles as well as two of Margaretha's brothers had gone earlier, which undoubtedly influenced their decision. John later expressed his reason for leaving, however, as an uncomfortable awareness, through his travels and his wider reading in newspapers and books, that the Russians living around the colonies "hated us Germans; we were too well-off and aroused their envy." There was, he noticed, active "propaganda" of this sentiment.³⁹ He was also aware of and disturbed about the persecution of the Stundists.

It is not surprising, given his personal inclination to print materials, that John Harms became interested in publishing work in

the New World. Jacob Harms bought John and himself a farm in Mountain Lake, Minnesota but John soon realized again that he was not a farmer, though he would return to this vocation at various times throughout his life. He and Margaretha moved into town, where he conducted a small parochial school and developed a plan together with a Mennonite merchant to start a German newspaper. John would write and edit, the other man would supply the funds, and printing would be done in St. Paul. This did not materialize, but when the opportunity came to assist John F. Funk in his printing establishment John seized it and moved his family to Elkhart, Indiana. Funk was beginning the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, an outgrowth of the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. His young assistant edited this paper for six years, two years while also studying at Evangelical College in Naperville, Illinois and over a year while living and working in the village of Canada, Kansas.

In the 10 February 1886 *Rundschau*, Harms announced that it was his "duty" to withdraw from the job, a move he had not sought, nor found easy. Publisher Funk wanted the editorial and production functions closer together and Harms could not agree to returning to Elkhart. He said he felt like a father abandoning his child to the care of others, apologized for any offence he may have caused in his work, wished the paper well and urged readers' continuing support. Funk followed with some additional explanations for the change, saying it had not happened with "a light heart." He offered no praise for the editor's work over the past years, however, which suggests there may have been more reasons than efficiency for the change.

John and Margaretha had had a religious conversion experience in Elkhart and joined the (Old) Mennonite Church there, but now their loyalties had shifted to the Mennonite Brethren. John F.'s cousin John Harms had been part of a revival in the Hillsboro, Kansas area that resulted in the formation of a new Mennonite Brethren congregation. When John and Margaretha moved to Kansas they began to worship with the Mennonite Brethren; they joined by immersion baptism on June 29, 1884.

Harms now gave his considerable energies to the Mennonite Brethren Church. Besides publishing, he was involved in nearly every aspect of the Conference life, including itinerant preaching. He sat on the Board of Foreign Missions, was general secretary of the Conference, and promoted various education projects. In 1906-8 he worked among Russian immigrants in Saskatchewan and later founded the Herbert Bible School. He also had a prominent role in relief efforts, at first to causes such as the Stundists and the Armenians, and then to needy Mennonites in Russia.

These activities were not his means of livelihood, however. For this he fell back on teaching occasionally, and also tried farming at various places, including Oklahoma and Saskatchewan. In 1887, however, he bought a press of his own and during the next 10 years did printing jobs and published a regional German paper, the *Anzeiger* (variously called the *Marion County Anzeiger* or the *Hillsboro Anzeiger*, as well as another paper, the *McPherson Anzeiger*). Between 1885 and 1887, the Kansas Mennonites founded five German-language newspapers; only Harms' *Anzeiger* lasted more

than five years. In these papers, Harms played an active and influential role in political life. Historian James Juhnke wrote in *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites*:

Those who knew Harms in his later years did not remember him as a man of strong political interests. In the decade from 1887 to 1897, however, his controversial newspaper editorship was the most visible--and possibly the most significant--politicizing force among the Kansas Mennonites... in the national campaign of 1888...Harms was an outspoken protectionist who grounded his argument in an openly nationalistic point of view...[he] advised his readers to vote a straight Republican ticket in the 1888 election...⁴⁰

Although Harms had taken the side of the landless in Russia, he did not support the Farmer's Alliance movement or the Populist party. He saw the alliance reforms as a kind of socialism quite unlike Christian socialism, and thought populism was dangerous because it would lead to "a state welfare-institution for all people"; to him the Republican party represented "morality, order, and justice."⁴¹

Harms later regretted that he had become as politically active as he had been, even blaming himself that he had introduced participation in political life through his papers; "I see it differently now," he remarked in the last decade of his life.⁴² Interestingly, the editor's "other world" very rarely, though with a few exceptions, intruded into the pages of the *Zionsbote*. The *Anzeiger* was a commercial venture, carrying secular and local news for the wider German-speaking community, as well as political opinion. Harms encouraged people to be informed and involved in other spheres, but these different identities--national, regional,

ethnic, church--had, he seemed to suggest by example, a discourse of their own. Organs of communication carried the conversations of particular communities.

Like many Mennonite immigrants, the Harms family moved several times. They lived in a few places in Kansas, also Oklahoma, then after resigning from the *Zionsbote* business in 1906, moved to Edmonton, then to Flowing Well, south of Herbert, Saskatchewan. Here Harms farmed, while conducting Bible classes at the Herbert Bible School in the winters. They moved to Seattle, Washington in 1918 and after one year to Reedley, Calif. After Margaretha's death he married Adelgunda Jost Prieb and returned to Hillsboro, and also to the work of assistant editor of the *Zionsbote* until 1934.

Harms influenced the paper between 1884 and 1906 in several important ways. On the one hand, he had a long tenure, produced the paper from his own home, and carried authority as an ordained minister and active churchman. He was strongly identified with the paper. On the other hand, since he was producing the paper in addition to many other involvements, his direction may have been somewhat haphazard; the result was an unsophisticated but rather genuine conversation within the group. Harms was a competent, interesting writer himself, as his contributions demonstrated, but he did not write weekly "editorials". How much actual "editing" he did is hard to gauge; undoubtedly he made grammatical corrections if necessary, but he seems to have given his typesetters the material more or less as it came in, however meandering or badly written it might be.

He did provide some instruction in the paper about how things should be done, however. For example, Harms frequently reiterated that readers must identify themselves, even if they wished to remain anonymous in print. "We must know who we are dealing with," he would remind, adding, "All papers do this." He instructed that travel reports needed something "for the heart" and that conversion experiences ought to include a clear biblical foundation. He said that "original" poetry was very gladly received when the poet had, besides talent, some understanding of language and grammar; "hobbling doggerel", he said, should not be sent to any newspaper. And he had harsh words for those who copied other's poetry and sent it in under their own name; this was "s-t-e-a-l-i-n-g!" In these ways Harms directed the content and discourse of this particular public conversation.

Communication, we noted earlier, involves a number of components, each of which has a distinct character and history. The interaction of these parts, then, is also specific and historical. This chapter has begun to draw a picture of the particularity of the *Zionsbote* as communication by outlining, in brief, the origins and development of the paper as well as its producing and receiving body, the Mennonite Brethren. We have seen that the use of a print medium for regular communication was new to this group, and that the group itself was relatively new. It had differentiated itself from the larger Mennonite community in some important ways. Furthermore, Mennonite Brethren were caught up in the massive changes brought about by migration to America,

as well as the establishing of new settlements there and in Russia. Although the founding of a paper seemed a good, even obvious, solution for the communication needs of scattered congregations, the *Zionsbote's* development over the period under consideration revealed that it was truly a new form of conversation, involving effort, struggle, and learning. The first editor, John F. Harms, was in many ways representative of the constituency and its concerns but also influential in the process of learning to converse by print. All of these factors must be kept in mind, and will be elucidated further, as we turn now to an analysis of how the new medium interacted with its constituency.

Kommt, laffet uns auf den Berg des Herrn gehen, zum Hause des Gottes Jakobs, daß er uns lehre seine Wege, und wir wandeln auf seinen Steigen. Jes. 2, 3.

Zionsbote

Beiler, liebe Brüder, was wahrhaftig ist, was ehrbar, was gerecht, was leusch, was lieblich, was wohl lautet, ist etwa eine Tugend, ist etwa ein Lob, dem denket nach. Ps. 4. 8.

Organ der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde von Nordamerika.

Entered as second-class matter at Hillsboro, Kansas.

Jahrgang 43.

Hillsboro, Kansas, Mittwoch, den 30. November 1927.

Nummer 48.

Der große Abfall.

(Von H. H. Siebert.)

Zu den Zeichen der letzten Zeiten gehört auch der große Abfall, wie wir dieses so klar aus folgenden Worten sehen: „Lasset euch niemand verführen in keinerlei Weise, denn er kommt nicht, es sei denn, daß zuvor der Abfall komme und offenbart werde

lich sein. Vom Glauben der Wahrheit zur Anbetung Satans — ein schrecklicher Abfall!

Drittens wird dieser Abfall groß sein in seiner geschichtlichen Bedeutung und Stellung. Also der Abfall kommt vor dem Ta-

Sonntagschule

Jesaja belehrt die Regenten.
Jes. 37. 5—11 und 14—20.
Sonntag, den 11. Dezember 1927.

The masthead above was adopted in April 1904.



John F. Harms.

Left, John F. Harms, editor of the Zionsbote from its founding in 1884, until 1906.

Chapter TWO
Journey: Engagement with Time and Space

In 1950 Harold Innis inspired an intriguing line of inquiry in communications history by proposing that societies have either a time or a space bias, that is, a particular cultural orientation, derived in part from their dominant mediums. Stone in ancient Egypt, he said, was a "heavy" time-biased medium, favouring a centralized religious culture of ritual and tradition. Papyrus introduced a "light" space-biased medium, which allowed for much wider administration and control over space. Profound changes in Egyptian civilization, he showed, had coincided with shifts in the way communication interacted with time and space.¹

In the 1960s, media scholar and guru Marshall McLuhan declared "the medium is the message", and that message, he said, was the change of scale or pace or pattern produced by the medium.² Since then, scholars have undertaken a variety of explorations of this theme. James Carey, for example, considered time, space, and the telegraph; Carolyn Marvin looked at the impact of electricity.³ Stephen Kern, in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (1983), revealed how a plethora of changes in technology and culture between 1880 and 1918 had created new modes of thinking about time and space. Although he did not offer a single thesis that embraced all the shifts in orientation, Kern suggested that the affirmation of private time was the most important development for "time" and the levelling of traditional spatial hierarchies as the most important development for "space".⁴ Carolyn Marvin's 1988 study of electrical communication

in the late nineteenth century took a somewhat different approach, documenting the drama that occurs in society as "new media" are introduced and as their use is publicly contested. Significantly, she found that the contestation over electrical communication occurred in terms of earlier, already familiar, communication divisions, "between oral-gestural and written modes...between body and mind."⁵

These studies, though varied in their approach and conclusions, alert us to the fact that communication engages with real time and physical space in a particular way. The form, furthermore, shapes perceptions of these realities. As a consequence of its particular features as a medium (paper, print, periodical), then, the *Zionsbote* exhibited a specific interaction with time and space that affected its communication.

The other components of *Zionsbote* communication were also interacting with time and space in complex ways. The readers and writers of the paper were profoundly marked by the experience of migration and separation. This reality, both physical and psychological, shaped the content of the *Zionsbote*. A discourse of journey (*Reise*) dominated the paper in its early history. If we were to think of these decades of *Zionsbote* communication as a story, "journey" could, in fact, be described as its plot, as that which underlies, unifies, and moves everything else.

Time and space are large and somewhat slippery concepts. This chapter can explore only some of their dimensions in the *Zionsbote*, as they adhered to the medium, the community, and the content. This exploration shows that the engagement with time and

space was multi-layered, but will also suggest what the new medium made possible for the scattered Mennonite Brethren and what the discourse of journey meant in their lives.

The Mennonite colonies of Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century were an agrarian or peasant-like community, relatively rooted and concentrated in space, oriented to the seasons and biblical calendar, oral communication, and religious ritual. By the latter half of the century this society was undergoing tremendous changes that affected their experience of time and space. Problems of landlessness and innovations in their technological world awakened a desire for, need of, and the opportunity to occupy "other" space. A rail line from Kharkov to Sevastopol brought rail access to the Mennonite colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna in 1875; in the 1890s branch lines extended this service into the colonies.⁶ Increased contact with the outside world through greater mobility and print media challenged the previously isolated and relatively narrow intellectual and religious "space" of Mennonite life.

Perhaps the most decisive factor in the changing orientation to time and space, however, and one that is foundational to understanding the communication of the *Zionsbote* in its first decades, was migration. As already noted, about one third of Russia's Mennonites left for America in the 1870s. This move separated Mennonites geographically, putting a huge distance and also another element--water--between them.

The migration also represented a psychological separation. The "contrast in temperament" between those for whom the "moral

choice" is to stay and those for whom it is to leave is central to the study of emigration, said immigration historian Frank Thistlethwaite.⁷ While Mennonites in Russia responded very differently to changes in their historic rights and privileges, both sides couched their decisions in religious or moral terms. The Mennonites who emigrated in groups, led by congregational officials and generally conservative in respect to change, considered their departure a matter of conscience; they refused military participation of all kinds. Elder Gerhard Wiebe, leader of the Bergthal Mennonites who settled in Manitoba, compared his people's migration to Israel's escape from Egypt.⁸ Historian P.M. Friesen, who stayed, also claimed God for his side. He spoke of those who left as "the most extreme element, incapable of a God-willed and God-permitted closer association with Russian society, using the pretense of the inviolability of the religious conscience..."⁹

Those who stayed accused emigrants of greed and false hopes about the promises of America; those who left considered Russian Mennonites complacent. John F. Harms said he left because he sensed the growing hatred among Russians directed at the German Mennonites. Many could not see the "menacing danger" around them, he said. On a return visit to Russia in 1898 he had noticed, he wrote later, that the Mennonites "held fast to their comfortable lives and would not let themselves be warned."¹⁰

Whatever the motivation, migration opened a rift in the original community; it was, as historian Harry Loewen put it, "a house divided."¹¹ There had been long-term tensions among Russian

Mennonites over land, education, agricultural reforms, and religious practice; migration grew out of these tensions and irretrievably widened them.

The psychological impact of the separation has been vividly illustrated in a work of fiction based on actual events and people, Peter G. Epp's 1932 *Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story*. The elderly narrator recalled the great migration to America: the restlessness, the fears, the meetings and "endless discussions", the "quarrelling and bickering" associated with it. "Those were difficult times," she said. Auction sales, normally held when someone had died, were held now by those leaving. Harsh and bitter words were spoken; each side predicted the other would regret their choice.

The old woman recalled the day her sister and family departed. "The sobbing and the weeping were heartbreaking... Slowly the train began to move and gradually it disappeared from sight. And then they were gone, never to be seen again in this life." The emigrants headed into the unknown to make new lives for themselves, and those who remained had to continue with theirs. For the first year, she said, "the topic of conversation was the news from the New World. It took almost a year before we could resume life...with all our former confidence and faith."¹²

The "moral" and psychological aspects of migration posed particular challenges to the Mennonite Brethren, which the *Zionsbote* communication, as will be seen later in this chapter, tried to overcome. The group had formed relatively recently, and the circumstances of their origin and development had left them

feeling somewhat beleaguered in the larger Mennonite society, and also justified in their cause. They considered each other "brothers and sisters" in a new Mennonite family. One's siblings who were not MB would be referred to as "natural brothers and sisters"; other Mennonites might be called "brothers in the flesh." The period of the migration was one in which the Mennonite Brethren were trying to establish themselves as a viable and stable alternative in Russian Mennonite society. It was understandably urgent to maintain unity.

Extensive migration also occurred within each continent. Although the decision to re-locate to a new settlement seemed to carry less moral opprobrium than the one to stay in or leave Russia, these moves further separated people geographically, often by great distances; they too produced loss and pain. As early as the 1860s Mennonite Brethren had moved to the Kuban area of the Caucasus, where the government had granted them land for a settlement because of the tensions the Mennonite Brethren schism had caused in the mother colonies. A group of Mennonites, captured by chiliastic ideas, embarked in 1880 on a trek eastward to Central Asia to find a place to wait for Jesus' Second Coming. Mennonites seeking better economic opportunities moved to new settlements in the Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, the Caucasus, the Volga region, and after 1900 to various places in Siberia.¹³

The Mennonites who migrated to America in the 1870s immediately dispersed to a variety of locations in the prairie region. For Mennonite Brethren, the period after 1890 was marked by their rapid expansion into the continuously advancing frontier:

northward into North Dakota, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan; southward to Oklahoma and Texas; and westward to Colorado, Oregon, and, after 1900, California. Although many immigrant families stayed where they first settled, many others moved, even several times. One account of the movement of Mennonite Brethren connected with the congregation at Kirk, Colorado may illustrate the experience of many on both continents.¹⁴

At the end of the 1880s, several Mennonite Brethren families moved to Kirk from Nebraska. Some families from Kansas joined them in 1890 and in 1892 the migration from Kansas began in earnest. The motive was

to possess one's own sod; those who previously just rented in Kansas often never knew if they would have their farm the next year and who one would have the next year for neighbor or as church member. In Colorado there was still much cheap government land available.¹⁵

The group organized as a Mennonite Brethren congregation. Difficult years followed, with drought and crop failure. Some returned to places they had left. Many fathers and grown sons were forced to go south to the Arkansas River to find work at the freight yards. The year 1896 yielded good crops but 1897 was very dry. That year ten families emigrated in 14 covered wagons to Texas.

This group settled in Westfield, some 15 miles north of Houston, where several other Mennonite families had located. It was a beautiful region, though the land was not particularly productive without fertilization. The younger farmers were willing to adapt to local methods, but the unfriendliness of the area's residents, an outbreak of malaria, and the 1899 tidal flood

discouraged them; families began to leave in groups and by December 1899 all were in Enid or Corn, Oklahoma, among the Mennonite Brethren there, starting over once again.

Although the migrating Mennonites usually sought locations where they could live as agriculturalists and which would replicate familiar terrain and plant cultures, their moves inevitably brought them through, or into, very different terrain with different climatic conditions. Space for the Mennonites was becoming a much larger, more diverse, sometimes contested, and divided entity.

Migration also brought its participants into new experiences of time, such as travelling much longer and often much faster than they had before. This travel involved a great deal of waiting and enforced idleness; the Mennonite travellers had "time on their hands". The migrants had to be "on time" or would miss their ship or train. Pioneering meant starting again "from the beginning." In terms of personal time, migrants shared a past with those they left, but were deliberately choosing another future. Migration meant that they would, with the introduction of standard time at the end of the nineteenth century, soon live in many different time zones. (In 1884, the Prime Meridian Conference in Washington established Greenwich as "zero" meridian.) Mennonites in Russia and America, furthermore, literally lived in different times of the calendar year: Russia followed the Julian calendar and did not adopt the Gregorian calendar used in America until the Russian Revolution of 1917.¹⁶

Every reader of the *Zionsbote* knew something of the

experience of migration personally. Nearly every reader in America was an immigrant, or the child of immigrants. In both America and Russia, everyone had family or friends or acquaintances on the other continent, everyone had said goodbye, either to those leaving the community or because they themselves had moved on. Everyone knew what was meant by the designations of "old home" (*alten Heimat*) and "new home" (*neuen Heimat*). As a religious community, they also understood the expression, "home above" (*oberen Heimat*). It is not surprising then that the *Zionsbote* of 1884 to 1906 reveals an intense engagement with time and space, seeking to overcome the losses of separation, to manage the new experiences that moving required, and to maintain--if possible--the values, closeness, and comfort their earlier history had allowed.

The *Zionsbote* offered a solution to the problems of distance. Its genius as a light, paper, print medium was that it could transcend geography. Via a plethora of new transportation networks, it reached to all the places the Mennonite Brethren had scattered. In its abilities of representation and reproduction in print it could set these places side by side, as it were, into one new place where people could meet. It created in effect a new "imagined" Mennonite Brethren community.¹⁷ Through it Maria Wiebe of Bingham Lake, Minnesota, for example, had now "seen and heard" the very ill Mrs. Enns of Sparrau, Russia; she commiserated deeply and sent a letter to the *Zionsbote* saying so.¹⁸ She had, she said, also prayed for Mrs. Enns, an act even less time and space bound than reading and writing.

The weekly four pages had some of the same emotional and tactile quality of the former handwritten and handsewn itinerant ministers' reports, but with a significant difference. The "news" was centrally organized, mediated, and uniformly printed. Print meant that the text was no longer "hostage to the material fate of a single physical surface."¹⁹ This news circulated to everyone at the same time; print could foster a sense that the participation in the communication was simultaneous.

The act of reading the paper would have been an experience of participating in a common text across time and space, but was probably also a private experience. Although the paper might be shared within the family or with neighbors, it did not have to be signed off on a circuit to others. Print, communications theorist Walter Ong said, serves individualism; it creates "a new sense of the private ownership of words."²⁰

The paper was published weekly, every Wednesday, establishing a regular and predictable rhythm in communication.²¹ This was not the large urban newspaper with its rapid, seemingly breathless rhythm of daily information and advertising, with space and time even more diminished by the impact of the telegraph on news-gathering. The *Zionsbote* stood between that and the intimate, less regular medium of the personal letter. Throughout the period the reports and stories by readers were published with epistolary features intact: the date of the writing, the salutation (usually to "Dear *Zionsbote*," sometimes to the editor), opening greeting or "apology", and closing benedictions and personal identification. It reflected the time lag of mail communication (larger for the

overseas audience), but still, the paper was a regular thing; it came out "new" 50 times a year, the only breaks being the weeks of Christmas and the annual autumn Mennonite Brethren conference in America.

The *Zionsbote* also interacted with time and space through the theme of *Reise* or journey. This theme inhabited many layers of the paper's discourse, and emerges as the predominant motif of the *Zionsbote* during the period under study.

The paper's own name implies travel. "Bote" means messenger. *Zionsbote* correspondents sometimes referred to their contribution as "giving something along on the trip" or "circuit" of the paper. "Zion" was a figurative place of spiritual belonging but also the heavenly destination one travelled toward on life's pilgrimage.

The concept of life as pilgrimage is also an old and familiar one in Christianity. Versed in biblical stories of journey, Mennonites readily understood and embraced the symbol of pilgrimage.²² In his memoirs, which he called his *Lebensreise* or "life's journey", editor John F. Harms wrote that reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a child had a powerful impact on his life.²³ Many Mennonites were also familiar with Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling's *Heimweh*, a novel of longing for a spiritual homeland, and *Der Wandelnde Seele* (The Wandering Soul).

Zionsbote correspondents often signed off as a *Mitpilger* or "fellow pilgrim". Funeral reports reminded readers one's life was only a journey. Death was described as having *ausgepilgert*, literally "pilgrimed out" of the world. The many conversion stories printed in the *Zionsbote* also fit the classic journey

narrative, "with the narrator poised between sin and damnation, or belief and salvation," moving at last from danger to safety.²⁴

Besides the language of journey (*reisen*) and pilgrimage (*pilgern*) woven into the discourse are the many travel accounts that the paper carried. This writing grew out of the lived reality of the community and was strategic, part of the reason the paper existed.²⁵ Based on the Index of the *Zionsbote*, there were at least 320 travel accounts over the period. The Index is very inadequately compiled, however, and the amount of writing that relates to journey of some kind was even greater than this figure indicates.²⁶

The *Zionsbote* contained accounts of four kinds of travel: itinerant ministry trips, visits to other places, investigative trips, and migration journeys. The most numerous were the reports of itinerant ministers. At their annual conferences in Russia and America, the congregational representatives assigned ministers to travel to other areas, perhaps for several weeks or months (often in winter when it was possible to leave the farm), to conduct meetings and do house visits. (This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3). These reports often described the journey to the assigned location, the work done or experiences that took place at the site, and briefly, the return home. The trip, and its report, had a circular structure.

Another kind of travel writing arose from visits to other communities. Some of the key leaders in the church of Russia or America undertook lengthy visits to the other country, either by invitation or on their own initiative. These visits were recounted

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in the *Zionsbote*. Other people also made visits "back home" or "to America", or to new settlements in their own country, usually to visit relatives. They too might write an account of their experiences for the church paper. These trips sometimes included tourist-type stops along the way. Trips to the annual conference were also frequently described, as well as various side visits such travel might offer.

Land searches or investigations of opportunities in other areas, either individually or commissioned by groups, were another category of travel described in the *Zionsbote*. Even before the Mennonite Brethren developed their own missions program, but particularly after it, there were mission journeys, either to or from the "foreign field" or forays within the program country.

A fourth and important kind of travel writing concerned the migration journey, representing chain migration from Russia throughout the period, or accounts of people moving elsewhere within the continent.²⁷ These had a linear structure, usually beginning with the sorrow of the farewell, moving through the "stations" and difficulties of the journey, and ending gratefully with the arrival at the destination.

Two sample travel accounts follow that will set the context of the discussion of what happened when print met journey and how this related to time and space. One is the report of an itinerant mission, the other is a migration account.

David Dyck (1846-1933) was a minister who emigrated with his family from Russia to Marion County, Kansas in 1876. He then moved to Colorado, and on to Manitoba in 1895. (He later moved to

Waldheim, Saskatchewan.) This account, in the 27 July 1898 *Zionsbote*, tells of his trip to the Rosthern, Saskatchewan area to minister to Mennonite Brethren settlers there. He was then 52 years old.

It was on June 20, at 12 o'clock noon, that I bade farewell to my dear ones and also several *Geschwister* at the train station in Rosenfeld, Manitoba, in order to set out on my trip to Rosthern. After several hours the train brought me to Winnipeg where I had to wait for a while. At 7:10 in the evening the train left Manitoba's main station. I now had the opportunity to look at the region much more than in winter, because here in the north the day is very long in this season. West of Winnipeg lies a stretch of much low land, which on that account is not very populated. But a little further one finds settlements in full bloom, especially at Portage la Prairie and also at other places[.] During the night we had rain and strong wind. In Wolseley, where we arrived at 6 in the morning, two freight cars had been thrown off the railroad, as well as several light buildings blown over, by the night's storm. Evidence that this occurs less often in the north than the south. In Regina, the Mounted Police from the East side were standing at the train station, waiting for an important person, who did not, however, arrive. Oh people of God, are you finely dressed too, waiting for your King? From here one travels almost straight north some 200 miles to Rosthern in a mixed train. The German settlement, most of it occupied only this spring, begins just a little north of Osler, some 24 miles south of Rosthern. Children from many houses came and peered eagerly through the train windows, to see if there was a familiar face. I had seated myself on the steps and thought: how the human heart longs for reunion with those one grieved to leave. Oh you old world with your woes of separation and much else! When will we be done with you? At 8 o'clock the train stopped in Rosthern and I had reached my destination. I spotted several familiar faces as soon as I disembarked, ones I had grown to love, among them also Br. Fischer, who then took me to his home, where after a very pleasant night's rest we met the

next day, edified [erbauten, lit. "built up"] one another and made the schedule for my work here. Then, accompanied by Gesch. Karl Fischers, we visited various families in Waldheim. Also made plans about holding a meeting. But because an engagement was to be celebrated in the house where services are usually held, we deferred this. Towards evening I had the opportunity to go along with Br. Anton Hoepfner to his home. That night and the next day we had a lot of rain. But it cleared up enough so the dear brother could bring me to Gesch. Eichendorfs towards evening. Saturday we made some house visits. Visited Gesch. Tobias Schmidts, who just settled here, their brother H. Schmidt and Peters. Sunday, we had a relatively well-attended service. I went along with Gesch. Franz Siemens for night; presently most of the Geschwister live in their area. That is also where daily meetings were to be held the following week. Monday we visited the G. Andres where I had greetings to deliver. In the afternoon from 5 to 6 we had a service at Gesch. Hins. There was a fresh grave mound by the garden gate covering the bones of the old Br. Hins; he has finished his course, and we?--

Tuesday the 28th of July we visited the family [?] Elder Peter Regier where we met the bridal couple and other people we knew. In the afternoon we again had a service. After that we went for the night to the North Saskatchewan River to observe the fishing and, if possible, help along. But the weather was not suitable and after pulling in several fish we had to seek refuge from the rain at Gesch. Peter Hoepfners, 4 miles from the river. Enjoyed ourselves in the dry indoors with fried sturgeon just as much as in the rain near those separated from us by deep water. The next morning two of them, one of 33 and one of 17 pounds, took the bite; the first would make the trip to Manitoba with me. On Wednesday there was another meeting at Gesch. Eichendorfs, 12 miles southwest. Thursday there was another meeting at Gesch. Hins and Friday at Gesch. Fischers. Saturday several families were visited, orders delivered in Rosthern, and so on. The immigration of Russians from Galicia is strongly underway[;] in Rosthern too there were 3 freight cars on a side rail occupied by these people. The Russian way of doing things was very obvious. Sunday, July 3, we had meetings before and after noon. We

concluded with the meal of the Lord [communion] and then it was time to say goodbye. May the Lord give also the *Geschwister* in the Northwest the grace to fulfill the apostle's words: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. *Gesch.* Peter Penners had to bury their little son Peter recently, which caused a wound in the family that still hurt. Where are you, oh land, where there is no longer any grave mound?

Otherwise there is nothing particular to report from the *Geschwister*. I saw them all in their houses.

Monday, at 3:30, I said farewell to the last brother at the Rosthern train station and headed towards home. There were seven travelling to Regina who often sang Russian songs and aroused in me a remembrance of the old homeland. I arrived home safely on Tuesday, July 5. Found my dear ones well, and we were grateful; also various *Geschwister* immediately delighted us with pleasant visits.

To all the *Geschwister* and friends, I say Thankyou very much and may God repay your love and helpfulness with heavenly blessing.

The harvest prospects there [Rosthern area] look good again, and many have nicely recovered [presumably from re-settlement] and are well off. Because there is no debt for land [this was homestead country], the income goes farther. It would be very desirable to have a teacher [minister?] from our brethren move there. Should he not be able to make his living there, where so many others do? Oh Lord, send workers into your vineyard. Warm greetings to all bound together with me, David Dyck.

Jakob and Maria Kroeker and their children emigrated from the Molotschna colony in Russia in 1902. Maria described their journey for the *Zionsbote*, where it was published 20 August 1902. Unlike most accounts of this nature she did not describe the farewell, but began directly with their departure.

We left Russia April 6, that is, from Margenau. We had no travel companions, but we thought, people would not be able to protect us anyway if the Lord did not do it. At 2 o'clock we reached Prischip, bought tickets to Odessa; they cost 16 rubles, 40 kopeck. With God's help we arrived in Odessa

on Monday. We looked at various sights, which meant a lot to us; we were there an entire day. My husband went to the [travel] agent and I stayed in the guest house with my children. I watched the bustle of the people and thought: how blind the people are; they run hither and yon and do not know what they are running towards. We paid for the trip to New York and in the evening were brought to the train and, with God's help, departed. I thought, oh if only there was such a rush to the gate of the narrow way, then it would be as it is written, namely that some 3000 were added in one day [Acts 2:41]. Well, may the Lord grant that many still enter that door. From there we left in the evening and went to Alexandrowo, that is, to the Russian border. The next morning we travelled from there to the first German border city, Ottlotschie. There we got the tickets to Antwerp; we also got some bad information there, but there was nothing we could do about it. We expected to arrive April 13 in the morning, but we only arrived at 3 in the afternoon and by then the ship was gone. So we had to stay there until the following Saturday. It was the Easter week and the time seemed very long to us. But we got through it, though it was also quite expensive, 24 rubles. We boarded the ship at 9 in the morning and soon left, and everything went well. We soon ate lunch, went up and down, but suddenly I felt so sick, I lay down in bed, but had to throw up. Oh, I thought, if this is how it will be the whole time, I don't know how I'll do it. But that is exactly how it was. We went further and further into the ocean, the water was so restless, and that is how it was with the sickness. Sometimes it was also quite stormy, and the waves pounded over the ship. We could not get around the ship without holding on. When we lay on our beds it seemed as if we might suddenly fall out, the ship rocked so much. It was as if we were lying in a cradle. There was nobody of our people on the ship and we were always alone. Otherwise there were many people, about a thousand persons. But it went good and also bad on the ship. The people were all so sick, we simply could not stay below, we all had to go on the deck into the air. My husband was sick only three days. The children were not affected at all, for which I was glad. As I lay ill on my bed I thought: O God, have mercy on us, if you do not bring us over, we will perish. But the Lord had mercy on us

and took us safely over.

On the 6th and 7th days of travel people were already looking if there was anything to see [of land]. The first thing we saw was a ship, but my, what a cry: "There, there, a ship!" And when we first saw land, they screamed, "Land! Land!" Now [we knew] the Lord had brought us safely across. On the 9th day, at 9 o'clock in the morning we were released from the ship, God be thanked. In New York we were treated like cattle: they held us back with cords and put us behind iron bars. But that was fortunate, we did not know where to go, so we were imprisoned. Then, we came once again to the railroad. The first day I thought, this is even worse than the ship. The train swung back and forth so much we occasionally thought it would tip over. Suddenly it was completely dark in the train. Oh, I thought, this is the end. It was so dark I could not see my children. But soon it was light again. After we had travelled some 3 days we again drove through a mountain [tunnel], but it stayed light enough that I could see the window. Our goal was Harvey, North Dakota. We arrived there the evening of May 16. Now we were delivered from travelling. Towards the end I could hardly walk, my feet were swollen and I had such a headache I did not know what to do with myself.

So we arrived May 17 at the brother's. We plan to stay here until autumn, then we are planning, the Lord willing, to move to Saskatchewan.

I want to give notice in this way that we are in America, because we have parents and siblings, friends and acquaintances, in Russia. [Maria closes with a paragraph of reflection on the parable of the Ten Virgins, which she says has been meaningful to her]. Also greetings to all readers of the Zions-Bote from your sister pilgrim to the heavenly Canaan. Jakob and Maria Kroeker.

From these accounts, and the many others like it in the *Zionsbote*, we can consider the following ways in which the discourse around journey relates to time and space.

First, the communication of journey in the *Zionsbote* relentlessly plotted the points of, and described the spaces of,

the new Mennonite Brethren world. When Jacob Giesbrecht travelled from Russia to America, his report in the *Zionsbote* 26 August 1891 stated, "I travelled from home [Wohldemfurst] over Ekatarinodar, Noworosfisk, Odessa, Warsaw, Berlin, Bremen, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Kansas City, to Hillsboro." The Mennonite Brethren of Wohldemfurst were linked, as in a chain, with the Mennonite Brethren of Hillsboro, Kansas.

Most writers filled out the details of the journey rather than simply listing them as Giesbrecht did, but the way space was structured in most accounts was the same. A thread had to be pulled through the geography that separated people of this common community, to bring them together on a new and expanded mental map. Maria Kroeker had tied Margenau of South Russia and Harvey of South Dakota together; David Dyck threaded in the new settlement of MBs of Rosthern.

In most *Zionsbote* travel writing, the burden of description rested on the unfamiliar. Inexperienced travellers like Maria Kroeker focussed on the shocks to self and family, and relayed to others that they had made it over the vast length of the migration gap. Through the *Zionsbote*, everyone else could now, with sympathetic gratitude and less effort, place Jakob and Maria Kroeker, once of Margenau, in their new location in Dakota, at least as it was represented on paper. (It must be remembered that many people in the early Mennonite Brethren community knew one another or had enough mutual connections to identify quickly even those not personally known to them.)

More seasoned travellers like David Dyck, while they spoke

of their own experiences, seemed aware that they also had a role to play by interpreting and informing readers about new places. Through repeated reports of trips to various areas by different writers, and through regular correspondence from within congregations, readers became acquainted with these places; they could "see" them. Once the traveller reached a familiar place, or a place where Mennonite Brethren had settled, the reports attended mainly to the names of "brothers and sisters" and anything of note from their lives. Much else could be assumed, or simply alluded to. While details of terrain or weather or situation might provide context, the important thing in the new MB geography and its places was the people who lived there. Towns like Hillsboro, Kansas, or Mountain Lake, Minnesota, or Winkler, Manitoba, where friends and relatives and leading ministers resided, took on importance out of all proportion to their size or actual role in real geography.

A world center like New York, by contrast, was much less significant: it might provoke awe, or humiliation as for the Kroekers, or impatient waiting, as for Johann J. Friesen and his family who spent nearly three weeks in quarantine there in 1892 because of the cholera epidemic in Europe.²⁸ Places like New York belonged to the Mennonite Brethren world, but peripherally, and generally negatively, as places to pass through and survive; travel reports "tamed" them a little by sharing experiences and providing tips, such as recommending the German *Emigrantenhaus* near the harbor in New York for lodgings. But it was the places where kin, especially spiritual kin, resided that were large in

the map of the mind.

Second, the *Zionsbote* discourse of journey inculcated new perceptions of time. It has already been noted that migration journeys and other kinds of travel took people out of their regular day-to-day routines, which were based on the seasons and, in rural communities before electrification, patterned around sunlight and moonlight.²⁹ Accounts of these journeys gave details about time that seem both unnecessary and boring to a reader today. "[W]e boarded the train in Lehigh at 12 noon," wrote P. Wall, 18 November 1891, describing a trip to an MB conference, "[and arrived] at 6 o'clock in the evening and arrived in Sioux City the following day at 12 noon, where we had to wait until 9:30 the next morning."

Once the destination--a Mennonite community in most of these reports--was reached, the time spent there was reported with a much looser, more fluid chronology. There was generally a perceptible sense of slowing down, from riding as Jacob Loewen of Russia did in 1895, on the "express train, where we travelled up to 50 wersts an hour, as if we were flying away" to the slow journey after he disembarked, riding on a wooden wagon for 60 wersts along "very bumpy roads".³⁰ The actual pace of travel had slowed, but undoubtedly the reader's emotions and perceptions as he journeyed along by reading did too. The new and exciting things Loewen had described shifted to mention of meetings, "brothers and sisters", meals like "Vesper". Time now referred to time spent with people. Similarly, David Dyck's report of his time with the "brothers and sisters" moved forward by the use of people's names

and broader conceptions of time like "afternoon" or "the next evening" or "Saturday" or "for the night." Only once did he mention the hour, a meeting "from 5 to 6"; this was unusual for such reports. Within the community, the visiting minister travelled by conveyances powered by animals, usually horses (instead of by train, which was sometimes called a "steam steed"), perhaps accompanied by a local church leader, and time and space had their familiar proportions and tempo.

People writing about a visit to relatives also detailed transitions in time along the way, building to the climax of the emotional reunion with their loved ones. Then the report of the rest of the visit might be collapsed with a satisfied "in this way the days passed one after the other, until Saturday" or "the days ran by quickly." Time also passed quickly in these circumstances but it was because one was much less aware of it. It had receded to the background. This same sense of unawareness was expressed by Heinrich Friesen about a gathering of the church family, 17 April 1895. "All too quickly the hours of our [spiritual] refreshment disappeared."

Since these conventions of time--precision outside the community and fluid categories inside--were used in *Zionsbote* travel reports throughout the period, they must have served some ongoing purpose for the writers and readers. What was the meaning of these different engagements with time?

One answer may be that calculations of time provided the most meaningful conception of distance, and tied into the continuing attempt to grasp new geographical realities. Another

may be that the experience was simply constructed in print the way it had been experienced in life. Where precise times mattered for the success of a prospective venture, the re-telling of them communicated that the results had indeed been favorable; all the stages had been accomplished. These ways of communicating time also probably expressed the adjustment this community was undergoing, not only as an immigrant community in America, but on both continents to the challenge of a new and significantly different context. Unawares perhaps, unease was being revealed, a sense of not being fully at home in the faster, more disparate, disjointed world represented by other places and other modes of movement through time.

There was strength in numbers, however. Jakob and Maria Kroeker's time on the ship seemed endless, not only because of sea sickness but because, in spite of a thousand fellow passengers, they were pathetically alone without their "own people". Note, in contrast, the relative confidence exhibited by a group of Mennonite Brethren men travelling by train to a conference, as recounted in the 29 October 1890 *Zionsbote*.

Every journey [Reise] has its attractions [Reize], and what our trip to Nebraska offered in this regard was first, that 40 of us, of one People, could book a train car of our own, and second, that dear brother David Schellenberg from Russia would be part of our company... [W]ith the good wishes of many at the Hillsboro station, we set out Thursday at noon. We had to change trains in Florence, but we were allowed to stay together in our car and so the wait was no problem... Arriving in Superior at 11 at night, the Santa Fe Railway gave us special permission to use our coach as night lodging, though there was not much thought of sleeping, for there was a cheerful atmosphere and much warm intimate

conversation...Unfortunately [when we changed trains] we could no longer be together in one coach; instead the men had to sit in the smoking car. In response to our friendly requests the smokers did not bother us too much; hopefully the song we sang in English, "We wait upon the Lord, "showed these strangers the stuff of which we are made..."³¹

Memoirist Marcel Proust said of train travel that it "made the difference between departure and arrival as intense as possible"³² and Norman Cantor in *The American Century* wrote of the impact of the railway on modernism, in particular the creation of the literary and artistic expatriate figure, setting out on journeys from cathedral-like train stations, the departure "a celebratory, public, ego-boosting act."³³ While the stations from which *Zionsbote* writers departed were generally not as awesome as the terminals of large cities, that sense of "event" for the ego can definitely be seen in many of the travellers' reports. If the farewell was likely to be final, or involved that of an important figure like a minister visiting from the other continent, a large number might gather at the place of departure. Sometimes people accompanied the traveller until the next station.

Modern travel offered the opportunity to be an observer, not just of that which was known, but of that which was new; in its new scale and experience of time lay the opportunity to become increasingly sophisticated, detached, a mediator of liminal or "in-between" places. Note how David Duerksen, a minister who did much itinerant work in Russia and also visited America by invitation of the churches there in 1896, opened the 24 April 1901 account of his trip from the Crimea to Memrik.

On February 5, at 4:12, passenger train No. 8 arrived from the south at the Station Kurman-Kemeltschi. By the time one has gotten comfortable in the coach, the train has nearly hurried to the next station. Here it stops some 25 minutes. As it sets into motion again the traveller is reminded of the minutes he spent in the circle of his loved ones during his 18-year teaching career... Oh, this hour of dusk, if only it would finally be over! Yes, and what comes then? Then the last weeks, days, hours with their experiences and adventures, with their joys and sorrows, gather and are reviewed before the spirit's eye, and in the process shame and repentance mix with praise and gratitude... Meanwhile, 10 o'clock has come. So, one entrusts himself to God and goes to sleep. It is a rest that is often interrupted but still relatively good, because the traveller knows nothing of the journey between Station Alexejewka and Station Alexandrowsk except that he must have slept well. A cup of tea is drunk in Alexanderowka. The sun rises while the train is standing at the Station Sophiejewka. Between 8 and 9, the train reaches Station Sinjelnikowa. Here it is necessary to disembark and wait 5 or 6 hours. This period of waiting is occupied with reading, writing, thinking and walking... Now is the time to sit some 7 hours in the coach. Next to the Lord Jesus, a good book is the best travel companion. Then the hours are only half so long as one expects...

What is interesting here is the voice Duerksen assumed for this part of his report; he positioned himself as "the traveller" at a remove from the reader and involved in reverie. When Duerksen reached his final destination and was picked up by Brother Cornelius Voth with his "spirited horses" and carriage, his account dropped the literary mask of "the traveller" and he became simply himself, using first person pronouns and the names of the "brothers and sisters."

Editor Harms enjoyed travel, he indicated more than once. He also recognized its allure and its temptations. The desire to travel, he believed, had been awakened by his experience of

migration. Opening a series of articles about a trip to Texas, and wishing to explain his reasons for taking it, he wrote 15 Sept 1897,

For one who, after mature consideration, has crossed the ocean with his family to find his sphere of work and advancement in America, the danger lies very close, that the once-awakened wanderlust will produce more shoots and then the ground for more than one false journey is at hand. He who knows the boundary between well-motivated travel and useless spending of time and money could be considered a wise man.

The temptation, Harms suggested, could only be thwarted by keeping parameters on the "meaning" of travel. Once earlier he had suggested that meaning. In the 24 January 1894 *Zionsbote* he stated, "Travel reports are only wanted for the *Zionsbote* when they contain something for the heart. When, for example, in describing a trip to America and back to Russia, there is nothing that concerns meeting 'brothers and sisters' or is edifying, we say simply, these travel reports are not worth the paper they are written on." Something for the "heart" meant linking it to the religious community--its people and beliefs.

This takes us to the last point to be made about the interaction of "print" and "journey" in the *Zionsbote*. The communication of journey offered an alternative vision of time and space, a spiritual narrative, in which the diverse experiences of moving about in life could be placed.

This spiritual narrative, as already suggested, wove in and out of the discourse. The paper was, of course, a church paper and such language could be expected. But it was set, sentence next to sentence, against life experiences, not merely contained in

separate articles. The spiritual life was also seen as a journey, often fraught with dangers and difficulties and eventually the ultimate farewell of death, but there was a better land coming and a reunion with all the "brothers and sisters". Farewells and reunions were regular occasions to sigh about the sorrow of life, characterized by one loss and separation after another, and the joyful hope of final reunions some day, of which reunions now were just a foretaste. "We are just passing through," said the unnamed author of a 13 May 1896 article called "Thoughts on Moving." Harms concluded his 4-part series on his Texas trip, filled with much interesting and closely observed detail about the land and cities, with "In closing I want to point to a far better land than Texas, a land where all who have accepted Jesus in faith find room." This was followed with an 8-line poem on heaven.

Train travel was often used as an analogy of the Christian life and its demands; parallels included the need to be "on time" and not miss the opportunity for salvation, the need to set out in the right direction for the right destination, and ³⁴ Conversion stories, a very popular genre, followed a journey narrative structure, but sometimes integrated journey directly. "When I was 11," wrote Helena Froese in "My Experience", 23 January 1895,

my parents wanted to move to America and I was very afraid that the ship would go under while we crossed the ocean, and I dreamt that this had happened and I died in the water. When I woke, this made a deep impression on me and I related it to my niece whose parents also wanted to move to America, and also did. She said it would be that way. We knelt and prayed that God would not let us be lost but would forgive us all we had done wrong.

The climax of I. Martens' conversion account, published 5 June 1901, was "a wonderful dream which is still very clear to me today." He dreamed he wanted to board a ship at the Berdiansk bridge. The ship was high above the water but the ship's master showed him a plank. It was narrow and broken but he climbed aboard. The master "asked me if I would become afraid if storms arose as we crossed the sea. I said, 'I trust in the ship's master.'"

This interweaving of the two spheres, earthly and heavenly, in reference to the travel experience was not unique to Mennonite Brethren but, as Jon Gjerde notes in *The Minds of the West*, was found in the writings of other immigrants. The linking of departure and death, and reunion and afterlife, connected "Christian consolation to anxieties of loss stemming from migration."³⁵

The spiritual journey narrative not only provided comfort, but it bridged the "moral choice" about migration mentioned earlier. There was undoubtedly a sense of competition between Mennonites in Russia and America, as well as regions within the two countries, but strong sentiments of this nature are hard to find in the *Zionsbote*³⁶. The differences were muted, subsumed by a persistent reiteration that the place one lived on earth was less important than the "home above". Harms in his visit to Texas commented that he was "struck by all the places one could make home". Jacob Thiessen, "your fellow pilgrim" ended his 16 August 1893 report of their migration from Hierschau, Russia to York, Nebraska with a poem that sums up the sentiment so often expressed

in the paper (translated freely):

So move consoled, whether near or far,
 For we are all one in the Lord,
 You pilgrim there, we pilgrim here,
 But we are all led under one banner.

Whether dwelling here or dwelling there,
 The same Word of God nourishes us all,
 Wherever we move upon the earth,
 We are united in moving to Jesus.

And if we do not see each other again,
 We are given a light for the way,
 And at last we will all move on
 Into a great heavenly home.

It did not really matter, in other words, where one lived on the earth, but one's spiritual "place" was crucial. This view, which the discourse of the paper promoted, certainly downplayed (publicly at least) the sense of "moral choices" involved in the migration decision, and mitigated the difficulties of separating from others.

In conclusion, we see that *Zionsbote* communication reflected but also shaped the spatial and temporal experiences of the community it served. The Mennonite Brethren used a print medium to stay connected because this medium could transcend geographical separation. A weekly paper established a regular rhythm of communicating within their "new world". It created an imagined community that took in a larger physical world than Mennonite Brethren had known before yet was made comprehensible and intimate within four regularly recurring pages of communication. A multi-level discourse of journey, including a vision of another time and space occupied by the "soul" on its pilgrimage to heaven, constantly bridged divides that were both physical and

psychological. The *Zionsbote* repeatedly, vicariously, brought its readers safely home.

Chapter THREE

Text: Between Face-to-face and Print

The geographical dispersion of Mennonite Brethren required deliberate strategies of communication if connection as a group was to be maintained. That such a connection *should* be maintained was not questioned. Their common roots as a Mennonite people, their recent origins and difficult development as a movement, their minority status and use of a "foreign" language, their experience as immigrants, their new spiritual orientation as "brothers and sisters", all drove the desire--a desire perceived as necessity--for communication.¹

One strategy of connection was the *Zionsbote*. A newspaper made it possible to communicate at any number of scattered and separated sites, at regular intervals and more or less simultaneously. It fashioned new perceptions of time and space within which an imagined rather than visible community could be formed and fostered. Mennonite Brethren were pleased with this symbol of belonging to a growing, expanding, united body.

At the same time, Mennonite Brethren in both Russia and America continued the practice of annual meetings of the Conference and an aggressive program of itinerant ministry, initiated in Russia in 1872. While the *Zionsbote* struggled for many years before its existence could be assumed, the strategy of bringing congregational representatives together in one site for face-to-face contact, or of taking leaders to scattered local sites for personal contact with people there, was never

questioned. This on-site work by trusted and gifted leaders was considered essential to achieving the group's spiritual aims. Much of the annual conference agenda on both continents was taken up with hearing reports of last year's work, making assignments for the following year, and insuring that all the stations were visited.²

In addition, the important content of Mennonite Brethren experience, that which people in the group wanted to know, was still very much rooted in matters that partook of face-to-face society. These matters were daily concerns such as weather, crops, and health; significant passages, perhaps of births and marriages, but especially death; and the happenings of religious life. Religious life happened in listening to sermons, studying the Bible, and praying together, and in the acts of baptism, communion, and footwashing. These too were essentially face-to-face activities in a communal setting.

But the *Zionsbote*, all attempts at anthropomorphizing it to the contrary, was not a person. It was a written text. How did the text distinguish itself then from face-to-face communication? How did it relate to people accustomed to oral interaction? The short answer is, sometimes effectively, but often awkwardly. What can be observed in the early decades of the *Zionsbote*, in fact, is a new literate discourse still in the thrall of an older and more prevalent oral discourse.

Walter Ong theorized extensively about the differences between orality and literacy. The spoken word occurs as sound, he emphasized; it is "heard". He described the characteristics of

orally-based thought and expression as: additive rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant or "copious", conservative or traditionalist, close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned ("within a context of struggle"), empathetic and participatory, homeostatic, and situational.³ Writing, however, commits word to space; it is "seen". Print, further, "locks words into position in this space."⁴ The shift, Ong said, restructures thought. Literacy brings one into a more "rational" consciousness. The effects include a quantification of knowledge, a sense of personal privacy and ownership of words, "a sense of closure,...that what is found in a text...has reached a state of completion."⁵ Orality promotes more communal and externalized structures, Ong said; literacy fosters the individual and isolated thinker.

Ong's work was explored further in specific historical settings by many scholars; Elizabeth Eisenstein's work on the printing revolution in early modern Europe is among the best known.⁶ Although Ong's notions of cognitive change and a somewhat deterministic approach to communication technologies were subsequently challenged and nuanced, there seems to be consensus among scholars that modes of communication play an important role in how individuals or society develop and organize, and that societies can be differentiated on the basis of these uses.⁷ Ong himself acknowledged that the differences in the worlds of orality and literacy are not absolute and immediate; oral expression does not "vanish as soon as one used to them takes pen in hand."⁸ He called cultures that know some writing but remain basically oral

or word-oriented "verbomotor cultures", whose "courses of action and attitudes toward issues depend significantly more on effective uses of words, and thus on human interaction, and significantly less on non-verbal, often largely visual input from the 'objective' world of thing."⁹

Ruth Finnegan suggested that "orality" and "literacy" be abandoned as "*generalized* comparative concepts" since recent work across a variety of disciplines emphasized that they "are not self-standing but are always and everywhere dependent on social context for their meaning and use."¹⁰ It is in the process of following Finnegan's advice, and examining that social context of communication, however, that the ideas of orality and literacy remain very helpful, even as generalized comparative concepts. Arnold Synder, for example, in "Orality, Literacy and Anabaptists" alerted scholars of sixteenth century Anabaptism to the need to look beyond texts and ideas, upon which attention is usually focussed, to the dynamics of communication by which they circulated. It is likely, he said, that in the sixteenth century "even the printed word was most often mediated by the spoken word."¹¹

Something of the opposite effect--oral experience being mediated by printed word--can be glimpsed in the *Zionsbote* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The intention here is not to plot the Mennonite Brethren on an orality-literacy continuum--our subject, after all, is a periodical, itself a literate form--but to notice how the texts of new media interact with older communication forms. The point is, even when

communication modes change within society, they overlap. Individuals and subcultures, furthermore, may engage with communication media differently than the larger society. How is literacy used for particular print materials?¹² How did orality and literacy (or put another way, face-to-face communication and print media) co-exist in this setting? Some of the *Zionsbote* discourse that seems dull, unnecessary, even exasperating, to a contemporary reader can perhaps be explained from this perspective.

Before turning to the *Zionsbote*, however, the larger orality-literacy context of the Mennonite Brethren must be examined, including both their literate world and their oral world. Even apart from the *Zionsbote*, these were in flux in the MB religious experience. Within the periodical, some kinds of texts, such as doctrinal discussion and story-telling adapted well to print. It was in the genre of congregational correspondence that the interaction between orality and literacy can be especially seen; here the writers tried to bring readers to the site of oral experience via print text. Lastly, it will be seen that like the spiritual pilgrimage narrative woven in and out of the reality of travel, there was ubiquitous referral to another place of hearing and speaking, namely the biblical text that was assumed to have been "heard" by all.

Considerable scholarly work, which can only be summarized here, has been done on Mennonite society in Russia in the areas of education and culture.¹³ Mennonites in Russia were generally literate, at a rudimentary level at least, because of their belief

as Anabaptists that every church member ought to be able to read the Bible. They operated their own schools, with a basic curriculum of reading, writing, arithmetic and Bible stories. A primer introduced the alphabet and phonics. The catechism was the text of the next level, with an emphasis on memorization. Reading then progressed to the New Testament, and then to the entire Bible.¹⁴ The uses of this literacy were primarily in the area in which it had been learned, that is, for religious use (reading the Bible, catechism, hymnbooks, devotional materials) and in some practical applications such as accounts and transactions.

In his study of Russian Mennonite society between 1789 and 1889, "The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia", James Urry said:

This was a world in which all had the ability to read, but in which the practice of reading was not conceived of as a means of accumulating knowledge of the world beyond learning and reinforcing the necessary prerequisites of their faith...in which all could write, but in which dictation was considered merely as a means of recording or copying out what was known, not for the development of a literary tradition...ordinary people preferred to visit unannounced...rather than to waste time and energy constructing a letter.¹⁵

Urry's study also documented, however, significant change in the Mennonite society over the century he examined. Educational reform was pushed from within, especially under the leadership of Johann Cornies, followed later by pressure from the Russian government. Some secondary schools were introduced, and the status and training of the village teacher gradually improved. An enlarged and more open educational system, shifts to High German and the infusion of pietistic language all suggested that

Mennonites sought "a new and different order of discourse and practice."¹⁶ Mennonites, Urry said, moved out of a closed order in which "all meanings were held within the boundaries of the system and external principles were excluded" into a much more open order in which innovations and new ideas were accepted and acted upon.¹⁷ This included a greater interest in reading, and a growing amount of print material within the society.

Urry gave a long account of the formation of the Brethren because, he said, it "marks a fundamental break in the Mennonite order of life between the old and the new...the first conscious expression and full working out of the recognition of the necessity of change and progress in the area of ideology."¹⁸ The break had its roots in the earlier "religious renaissance" occurring in Europe, much of it introduced to Mennonite society through religious literature. Mennonites had become aware of the wider Christian world, and encountered its new symbols and language.¹⁹

Although the Mennonites' range of reading remained narrow (mostly religious and practical), the amount of reading was increasing in the period we are considering.²⁰ The role of newspapers in migration has been noted earlier. Cornelius Jansen, influential in promoting the migration, used publishing as a tool to spread these ideas. In 1872, for example, he printed 300 copies of selected letters from America for distribution among Mennonites.²¹ The founding of a variety of newspapers by and for immigrants also attested to an increase in reading. Newspaper reading, Robert E. Park said in his study of the immigrant press,

acted as a catalyst for interest in other kinds of reading materials.²²

The *Zionsbote* reflected this embrace of print. "A brother" noted on 20 September 1899 that there was "a feverish drive to read" and encouraged people to remember that the Bible must not be neglected. JCD from Mountain Lake wished, in a letter published 4 February 1900, that the *Zionsbote* was bigger, "for nowadays one wants to read." (He too warned of the Bible being pushed aside for "much newspaper reading.") The paper also carried a variety of articles on reading, several of them written by A. Kroeker, who called himself a "passionate reader".²³ These articles assumed the importance of reading; their emphasis was not on reading more but rather on reading properly. The diffusion of print materials, they suggested, made it necessary that Mennonite Brethren discern between good and bad print materials. The editor often recommended books, or other journals, to *Zionsbote* readers. The 1904 capital investment in a printing press by the Mennonite Brethren conference also included a bookstore that sold Bibles and other Christian literature.

In the *Zionsbote*, the "press" was set beside the "pulpit" as a powerful and parallel means of communication. Editor John F. Harms, in one of his occasional pleas for more active participation in the writing of the *Zionsbote*, wrote on 24 September 1890,

Starting with the view that written work is just as important as verbal, I believe I can assert that our fellowship still has much to learn from the apostle Paul in this area. He not only preached the gospel verbally and founded congregations, but he also wrote, and if the craft of the printing

press had been known then he would have had pamphlets and leaflets printed and distributed, as Menno Simons, so genuinely Pauline-minded in this way, did. The *'Zions Bote'* is a small beginning of activity in this area...

In the 27 September 1899 *Zionsbote*, in an article "Oration [Vortrag] and Press", an unnamed writer again set the two kinds of communication side by side, saying enthusiastically, "The oration and the press are for the intellectual world what steam and electrical apparatus are for the commercial world." Similarly, "our pulpit and our press assert a powerful influence upon the inner and outer shape of our church body." The writer praised the "pulpit" and the progress it had made in understanding how to "feed" its listeners and then the usefulness of the *Zionsbote* in its role as "messenger", "binding agent" and "means of education".

The *Zionsbote*, then, was regarded as an instrument of oration, and if different from the spoken word, only different in the positive sense that it could broaden the outreach of the speaking church. The picture drawn was an optimistic and ideal one of two powerful partners, equally well established, and busy accomplishing the same effects. While its impact cannot be measured, what the *Zionsbote* as print seemed suited to communicate effectively was that which, using Ong's descriptions, was quantitative, linear, and logical in character. It carried the Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith, for example, which in a long series of installments laid out the MB theological understanding. Doctrinal or teaching articles--often in a series, frequently borrowed from other published sources, and authored by those more skilled at written communication--also fit

this category. Over the period under study, serialized stories of a Christian or moral nature were increasingly used, probably in an effort to attract younger readers with the charm of fiction while teaching a message. Such writing took the key feature of the literate experience, the separation of writer and reader,²⁴ to its farthest point, for not only was the author probably outside the community but in the fictional form had disappeared behind the story altogether.

The understanding that press equated to pulpit could be confusing, however. Did the authority of this medium rest in the place of speaking (pulpit, periodical), the content, or was it in fact linked to the person? Although there was no discussion of the issue in these terms, the question can be observed in the fact that women participated quite significantly in writing the *Zionsbote*, though they were not permitted to speak or hold leadership positions in the church.²⁵ Editor Harms more than once encouraged women to write, but it seems their gender could also cause uneasiness, especially if their work produced a spiritual effect. Peter Toews of Russia wrote on 1 February 1899 that he had often been edified through the *Zionsbote*, "also when I read the experiences of ordinary women." This reminded him, he said, as if uncomfortably surprised by this, about decisions made regarding women wearing a head covering, expressing simplicity, and so on. The dilemma seemed less the women's words, which were probably perfectly suitable for sharing if heard in a home setting, than the public role print had given them. Women writers sometimes directly addressed "the sisters", for their own comfort perhaps or

to mitigate criticism, or their opening remarks might convey a conversation with their husbands implying permission to write.²⁶

Or was this "press" not in fact "pulpit" but a kind of family conversation? This understanding was suggested in other parts of the *Zionsbote* discourse and brings us to a consideration of the oral world of the Mennonite Brethren. It is difficult to get an accurate picture, in spite of the foregoing, of how widely Mennonite Brethren were engaged in reading and writing. The documentation of the contents of libraries is often only an indication of what the elites in a group read. There were surely many, especially on the continuing frontier, who fit what Noble L. Prentis in an 1875 article "The Mennonites at Home" described in the house of Abraham Reimer in Kansas: "no books save a black-covered German Bible...and several Mennonite hymn-books." In another article in 1878 Prentis observed in the Richert house a bookcase set into the wall, filled with books, "sober-colored volumes, commentaries on the Scriptures, and works on horse-doctoring" but such a sight, he said, was "not very common in Mennonite houses."²⁷

The conversion accounts of the *Zionsbote*, although they admittedly selected memories for a very specific purpose, offer glimpses of influences upon the mind-set of ordinary people. Some of these stories referred to the reading of a book, but the majority cited other experiences such as natural occurrences (storms, a red sky, fire), listening to the telling of Bible stories by schoolteachers, dreams, conversations, and illnesses or encounters with death. These were "readings" associated with a

residually oral culture. David Thiessen, for example, recounting his conversion in the 8 May 1901 *Zionsbote*, described the significant encounters of his spiritual journey as his illness, his wife's illness, witnessing a baptism, a conversation in which another man read the Bible with him and related his conversion, and a relative's sudden death. The climax was: "While I was thinking these [fearful thoughts], a voice came to me: drive to the brothers and sisters and pray with them and you will find peace." Other than the biblical text read with the other believer, his long conversion process consisted of heard and lived experience.

At some point in the conversion journey, however, there was usually an encounter with written Scriptures, perhaps in the "Testament", the Bible, or sometimes in the hymnbook. The approach to the biblical text was frequently born of desperation and probably also unfamiliarity, in which the person determined to "open the Bible and believe" whatever text was found. Such random forays often yielded positive results, but could also prove disappointing. Sometimes the "*Spruchkasten*", a box containing texts and sayings, was used instead.²⁸ The written biblical text was revered but given a magical quality; it was viewed as a way by which God could intervene specifically and personally, could "choose" to speak through the person's hopeful but random act.

The renewal of interest in personal salvation associated with the formation of the Brethren group seems to have substantially increased biblical literacy among Brethren members. In his recollections of MB origins Jacob Bekker cited a report on

the group by an outside minister published in the *Mennonitische Blaetter*: "Many a common laborer, barely able to read...has in a few years become well schooled in the Scriptures...because he not only read but searched."²⁹ The writing of the *Zionsbote* bears this out; the writing often quoted Scripture or gave a reference, but was also heavily allusive, with the Bible as the main point of allusion. Biblical language and expressions, and references to Bible stories, all revealed considerable familiarity with that book.

As we look more closely at the Mennonite Brethren practice of congregational life, however, some additional and interesting communication shifts can be observed. Although bringing adherents into a more active engagement with the printed biblical text and other written materials, the religious activities that led to the formation of the Mennonite Brethren in southern Russia seemed, in other ways, a deliberate movement away from "text" and the silences and rigidity it had imposed into more oral experience. Sermons were no longer read or adapted from books or copied sources. They were presented informally and might be interrupted by a listener with additional insights.³⁰ Entry into the church was not gained now through reading and memorizing the catechism, but through an experiential conversion which needed to be explained verbally to the community. Prayer was audible instead of silent.

One of the greatest influences in the religious changes among Russian Mennonites of the mid-nineteenth century was the oratory of Eduard Wuest, a Lutheran minister of the Wuerttemberg

Pietist congregation at Neu-Hoffnung. Mennonite historian Peter M. Friesen said Mennonite Brethren must consider him their "second reformer", next to Menno Simons; just as Friesen had placed Menno Simon's document, "Withdrawal from the Catholic Church", at the head of his story of the Mennonites, he said, he had placed Wuest's 1845 inaugural sermon (preached at the pastor's installation at Neu-Hoffnung) at the head of the section on the MB Church.³² Friesen saw Wuest's theological emphasis, on "the joyous doctrine of justification", as his most important contribution to Mennonitism, but there is no doubt that style and form of communication were influential as well. Wuest was "an outstanding preacher...with a powerful, melodious voice, and well trained in the art of communication."³² One witness said "the power of his speech was both charming and convincing."³³ Wuest had himself declared he wished "that the Gospel might move souls to be free and spontaneous."³⁴

The influential Mennonite Church of Gnadenfeld had also popularized mission festivals and other large meetings; in addition, groups of "brethren" began to meet, studying the Bible by discussion format. There was, in short, a great deal of open "talk" about spiritual matters that, though derived from Scripture, abandoned earlier prescribed ways of oratory and written sermons.

Although the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century stressed the primacy of the written Word ("the word-in-space" that was closely connected with the invention of print), a stance the Anabaptists also took (against the Catholic sense of the word

embodied in the sacrament), this was complemented by an emphasis on preaching and on the power of the spoken word, whether in sermons, prayer, or the imagination of the believer reading Scriptures. Ong said the apparent contradiction in the complementary prominence of print in Protestant understanding and the rise in power accorded the spoken word could be explained in part by the fact that the physical accessibility of the text drew attention to words rather than nonverbal symbolism and opened the way for a feeling for words. "This was the Protestant way of coping with the tendency of print, subconsciously sensed, to weaken the feeling that words themselves possess power..."³⁵

Very early, the "more spontaneous and exuberant" worship of the Brethren degenerated into what was later called the *Froehliche Richtung* (Exuberant movement). Liberation from the old "texts" or rituals worked itself out in increasingly radical expression, despotism by several leaders, and moral lapses.³⁶ In the "June Reforms" of 1865 the energy that had gone first into a flurry of letters and documents causing and debating the secession was now directed to preparing a document addressing and attempting to reverse the excesses. Two ministers were appointed, as well, to write a "Confession" of identity for the government. (The same two were also commissioned to visit the Molotschna churches to explain in person "the present mind of the church.")³⁷

"The worship services of the Mennonite Brethren underwent a marked change during this period," church historian John A. Toews said. "The earlier pietistic emphasis on informal sharing and devotional talks gave way to an emphasis on more systematic

teaching and preaching." The language in public services was changed from the Low German dialect to High German (though smaller meetings continued to use the preferred dialect.)³⁸ Through Baptist influence the Mennonite Brethren adopted minute-taking and more formal procedures into church business meetings, formed a "conference" and instituted the itinerant ministry, which produced a group structure with centralized and careful control.

During the next decades the Mennonite Brethren worked hard and deliberately at setting their beliefs into writing, returning to text as it were. "[I]t was precisely its dynamic non-creedal character at the beginning that got it into trouble."³⁹ A Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith was published in 1902. Strenuous arguments were mounted in periodicals, included the *Zionsbote*, about who the Mennonite Brethren were, frequently to counter the charge that they had become, in fact, Baptists. Much of this process of theological identity formation took place in print.

On a practical level, however, the pietistic impulses were not stifled; the emphasis on oral utterances, the freely given sermon oration, the discussions and public spoken prayer remained.⁴⁰ The need to prove that they were saved required not just biblical knowledge but an intense desire to "hear" the biblical text personally. It was in hearing and grasping the Word inwardly that assurance of salvation was achieved. The motivation was not private interpretation of Scripture but the desire to appropriate it. The heard text became an event, an experience of sound in time. One "cannot have voice without presence," said Ong,

"at least suggested presence."⁴¹ The fact that the biblical text was considered sacred lent it particularly well to "the interiorizing force" of an oral utterance.⁴²

Both relations, individually to a "heard" speaking and corporately to the sermon, were much in evidence in the *Zionsbote*.⁴³ Congregational correspondents and other writers reported on the texts heard in messages, especially those of visiting speakers. Others told of texts they had heard by reading. "K. Sch." wrote 5 February 1890 of the final stage in her conversion struggle, of opening the Bible to John 14. "As I read," she said, "I was able to believe that what the Lord said there he had also said to me." Sometimes the hearing of a Scripture might come not by reading but by recollection, perhaps while praying; then the expression "as if a voice" was often used. Maria Bartel wrote in her account, 16 December 1896, "It was as if I heard the verse...then came the voice..." Another expression "*es hiess in mir*" often introduced a text from Scripture which had come to mind; it could be translated "it occurred to me" or "I thought" but carries the literal meaning and aural connotation of "it was named in me".

Personal listening, though subjective, could be transmitted in print as a kind of autobiography. But how did the print text communicate those communal experiences of daily and congregational life whose value was their face-to-face quality? The *Zionsbote* genre that tried to bring the reader into the site of oral, face-to-face experience was the correspondent's report. It took some time, but eventually the habit of filing semi-regular reports from

the various settlements took hold. Sometimes a number of people might write from a location, in other cases it became one person's particular responsibility. For example, Jakob J. Kroeker, a "very quiet and retiring" individual published his first report from Shelly, Oklahoma in 2 September 1894, telling of typhus in the area, the death of one girl and the recovery of another and the funeral "held with many in attendance and under very earnest consideration of God's Word and the admonition to be ready for eternity." Separating this by only a semi-colon, he told of hot weather, little rain, a harvest not finished and 15 to 30 bushels of corn to the acre. Kroeker "corresponded" to the *Zionsbote* from the area for 26 years.⁴⁴

Correspondents presented different styles in this work of communicating. Some were extremely terse, giving only, for whatever reasons of personality or fear of the published word, the barest details. Others wrote long rambling reports that were actually less a report than their collected (and often admonitory) thoughts about life at that point. Others presented news of happenings, but offered it with comment and interpretation. The selection of what was newsworthy also varied, again probably reflecting ambiguity about what belonged in a church periodical that spanned two continents, but also, surely unconsciously at least, reflecting the difficulty of conveying face-to-face experiences within a print forum.

To get a sense of this writing in the *Zionsbote*, here follow four correspondent's reports that appeared, in this order, on one page of the 27 August 1902 paper. They provide a context for some

further comments and conclusions on text that sits somewhere between an oral and literate society.

Russia, Friedensruh, 19 July. Sunday, the 7th, *Geschw.* Pankratz, on their way to India, were in Rueckenau. Wednesday Br. Franz Martens brought the dear guests to Friedensruh to *Geschw.* Joh. Harms. Br. Pankratz had high fever one night. Let us intercede in prayer for these dear ones. Sunday the 14th they were in Halbstadt; Br. Joh. Harms drove with them. From there they wanted to go on to Sagradovka and in 2 weeks return to Molotschna.

On the 16th Jacob Janzen, Neukirch, a grandfather aged 79, was thrown off the wagon while crossing a bridge and received dangerous wounds. We had a thorough rain yesterday, which caused a pause in the threshing. The harvest is very good. Winter wheat is yielding to 18 Tschw. per Dest. and more, except little was sown in our village because of the drought in fall. But the summer grains are good. I have not heard of any particular illnesses. Joh. Duerksen.

Kansas, Buhler, 21 Aug. After a lengthy period of drought, the heavenly Father has given us a thorough rain. God's springs are full of water, that he opens for our spiritual and bodily needs. It does not happen according to our merit and worthiness, but because of his mercy. We are shown God's greatness in so many ways. Yesterday, the 20th of August, widow Peter Schroeder's son David was buried at Klassen's church. Sick with typhus 10 days; age 21 years, 11 months and several days. At Peter Boese's the only son, one year old, died the previous week, likely from quinsy [tonsillar abscess]. Buried at our meetinghouse. Franz Wiens' from Nebraska are here visiting their children J. Bullers, who have moved here from Colorado with their mother-in-law widow Friesen and have rented a farm. Br. Heinrich Adrian has gone to Dakota to get his family. And of whom will we hear next, that he has been taken home there where there is no more separation? Franz Dueck.

Oklahoma, Isabella, 23 Aug. Dear Zions-Bote! Since we had a visit recently, I want to send a short report. It was the 16th of this month that Br. Abr. Schellenberg and Br. J.F.Duerksen arrived in Isabella. This writer picked them up at the train station. Sunday morning the two brothers preached in the meetinghouse: Br. Schellenberg on the text I Thess.5:11-20. Especially emphasized verses 16

and 17: "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing." Br. Duerksen's text was John 9:35, about the man born blind. In the afternoon we went with Br. Schellenberg to visit the old Br. Jacob Becker, who is too weak to attend the services, and since Br. Becker had already requested it earlier, we conducted the holy communion with him, in the company of a number of other brothers and sisters. The Lord blessed us there together, especially also *Geschw. Beckers*, who often feel lonely because of the brother's weakness. May the Lord bless them in their old age. May they especially take Rom. 12:12 to heart. Sunday evening the brothers preached in the meetinghouse again and Monday and Tuesday evening in the northern meetinghouse. Tuesday morning a sad funeral was held there, when Sister Wichert, wife of the dear Br. Karl Wichert was buried. She leaves behind a deeply grieving spouse and six children.--My wife, who was very sick some 5 weeks, is recovering, to God the glory. Greetings to all readers, M. M. Just.

N. Dakota, Moscow, 10 August. Peace to you! Dear Zions-Bote. Wanted to send you a short report. Our congregation had set July 8 for baptism, and since it was announced, many guests also came to observe and examine [the candidate]. It was a wonderful, beautiful day, the earth dressed in brilliant green, which put us all in happy spirits, it was one precious soul who was buried in the water's grave. O how wonderful it is here already, how will it then be above? Tuesday, the 29 July, Br. N.N. Hiebert came here on his mission trip and held meetings that same evening and Wednesday. Thursday southwesterly at the Minnes. Church, Friday in the meetinghouse. Sunday he gave a missions message, in which he clearly and meaningfully laid out the necessity of doing mission; spoke of the heathen in India, and what we can all do and should do. A collection was taken afterwards, of \$ 62. In the afternoon we had communion and footwashing. In the evening there was another service and then in blessing he left us, and after we had given a handshake and kiss and called "May God keep you", everyone hurried home, where we can reflect in joy on what the dear brother scattered. May the Lord bless it to all our hearts, it is our wish and desire that the efforts of the dear brother will be rewarded. Today Br. H. Voth arrived here completely unexpected, on his way home. Gave a message in the morning on Jeremiah 8:22, tonight will be a meeting. We expected much blessing. A brotherly greeting to all God's children, Heinrich P. Janzen.

From these reports and other correspondents' writing, as

well as other *Zionsbote* writing, the ways in which print communication intertwined with oral communication, often in a way that privileged the latter, can be summarized.

The first point stems from the appearance and general organization of the paper. Although communication in the *Zionsbote* was captured in print, typeset, objectified as it were, it was done so with a carelessness to that object, to its visual characteristic. The primitive nature of the press or the busy-ness of the editor probably accounted for this, but headings were generic and forms arbitrary. Some letters were given headings, others put under correspondence with only the place name for identification. The epistolary features of the periodical further suggested an auditory rather than visual orientation to this communication.

Second, in this "first generation" of the paper, the reporting could rely on an earlier social context, that had involved physical presence or proximity, for meaning. As long as people still knew each other, as long as they had memories of other places and experiences, writers could easily bring readers--in their minds--to the site of the communication. News about people and daily life could be communicated fairly easily, without a great deal of elaboration or explanation. Many assumptions could be made. People might remember the wounded Jacob Janzen, they could visualize a *durchdringenden* (thoroughly soaking) rain in Friedensruh, and as agriculturalists could share, furthermore, a common understanding of such a rain.

Such writing, focussing on people and the small details of

their lives, has always been enjoyed by readers of many newspapers, of course, and is a style used by gossip columnists, but it cannot be sustained unless the subjects are "known" to the readers in some way that interests them. This was print talk that could still rely on both personal knowledge and interest; it supplied fodder for further "real" talk, over Sunday coffee in the home of a *Zionsbote* reader perhaps.

It must also be noted that there was no illusion of objectivity in the writing here, such as newspapers that aspired to "higher" forms of journalism were honing as a distinguishing characteristic and public expectation in this period. That information ideal was associated with "fairness, objectivity, scrupulous dispassion."⁴⁵ The *Zionsbote* correspondent would likely be as adamant about the veracity of his account as an urban reporter, but would never have thought of himself in the professional role of reporter. He stayed very much in the account, offering his name and, as M.M. Just did, might include personal news as well as community happenings. He was, after all, part of the group as much as any other. He often offered comment. He was simply talking, with the pen, and in his own voice.

Neither, on the other hand, did the correspondents consciously attend to the story dimensions of the report, which the so-called "yellow" papers of the larger journalism, a genre often accused of sensationalism, employed as commercial strategy.⁴⁶ *Zionsbote* correspondents produced communications that reflected their worldview as part of a minority and as participants in the face-to-face discussion practices of their

group, using print technology with enthusiasm as part of what modernity offered the church, but not consciously engaging in modern, mainstream journalistic techniques.⁴⁷

A third interaction of literate and oral practice lies in the writers' attempts to address their readers as if the latter were a group assembled in congregation. In David Dyck's travel report in the previous chapter, he turned from describing the non-arrival of the important person at the train station and spoke as if he were preaching, "Oh people of God, are you finely dressed too, waiting for your King?" An expression like Joh. Duerksen's "Let us intercede in prayer..." implied a group setting or a community with common purpose. The correspondent Jacob Kroeker of Shelly/Corn, Oklahoma, almost reflexively, it seemed, tagged a blessing on to his news (as in "the fields are plowed and ready for sowing, wheat is standing well...May God bless the growth") which sounded pastoral, or benedictory.

Fourth, much of the writing of the *Zionsbote* concerned the visits of the itinerant ministers or the particulars of services. Their arrivals and departures and often their messages would be reported. Sometimes it was just the fact that they preached, but frequently, as in M.M. Just's report above, the text was given. Many other examples could be cited. N.C. Hiebert wrote on 24 January 1900 of the Sunday morning's blessings by reporting that Br. Hein. Voth spoke on Revelation 6:12-17; he had emphasized four points, said Hiebert. He went on to give them in their order. The 17 October 1894 report of the dedication of the Krimmer Church in Kansas included the texts of 15 speakers, six in the morning and

nine in the afternoon! Sometimes, as in a 22 July 1891 report on meetings by Abraham Hamm, the author used a variety of words to try to convey what the speaker did with his sermon: he "admonished", "emphasized", "comforted", "enlarged", "explained" , "encouraged", "drew attention to" "showed" and "lifted up".

It is difficult to imagine such reports becoming the stuff of conversation, or even being read with great curiosity. The editor himself must have realized the inadequacy of print to carry experiences that depended so much on personal presence, voice, and a group of listeners. "Reports about happenings are exactly what we want," he said 25 October 1901. "We have nearly enough detailed reports about Sunday services, but there is currently a lack of reports about events inside and outside the congregation." Harms did not say, however, what qualified as an event. Meetings, as good as they might be, seemed not to be the stuff of interesting print communication. Nevertheless, reports of services continued to appear. The sermon was a significant event of congregational life, so reports from the congregations would continue to use the *Zionsbote* as a way of alerting readers to such blessings, and even, albeit inadequately, of bringing them vicariously to the site of that experience. The prevalence of this kind of writing also shows how key the visits of preachers were.

A curious kind of interdependency developed. The ministers were to report on their work. They could be warmly affirming in print about the places they visited and the people who showed them hospitality. As for their own accomplishments, they were naturally constrained by the need to be humble. Historian P.M. Friesen said,

We have to emphasize that, almost without exception, the itinerant ministers in their written reports underestimate their personal effectiveness, their penetrating eloquence in their sermons and their general activity. They were not men of the pen, and the Mennonite fears every exaggeration and every diffuseness of the written word.⁴³

If the ministers were modest about their effect, reports from the receiving congregation could, however, fill in that side of the encounter a little. A visit from ministers was always reason enough to send a report; these were often highlights for the community, especially for congregations without the population mass of the larger centers where more meetings happened and the better-known ministers often lived. The reports reflected this enthusiasm for visits and visitors. The reports created a "celebrity" status for the cadre of ministers who did itinerant work, though not celebrity in its contemporary meaning of gaining intimate knowledge of a stranger.⁴⁹ The *Zionsbote* made them better known and more widely connected than even their own travels could. As time and growth would make it increasingly difficult to know personally most of the members of the larger Mennonite Brethren community, these ministers could still maintain knowledge of the wider Conference circle in their visits and in the annual conference meetings; by learning to know these ministers when they came to visit, the individual members felt they too were connected to the larger body. Itinerant minister Herman Neufeld said, "The brothers do not visit the congregations, but the congregations visit each other through the brothers." (Neufeld reported at the annual Russian convention in 1914 that in the previous 25 years he had spent 3245 days in travel ministry, preached 3259 times, made

3763 home visits, and travelled 200,000 kilometers by trains, 15,000 on steamships and 25,000 kilometers by sleigh or carriage.⁵⁰)

Last, the ubiquitous use of biblical texts, with their connotations of both reading (as written down in the Bible) and hearing (as the authoritative Word of God), offered a site of listening where the entire community could gather in spite of real geographical separation. These texts were transmitted in the *Zionsbote* by print, but were expected to convey, via the imagination, something more closely linked to sound. The sound was that which was heard in the congregational context of sermon, but also as spiritual "utterance" for the heart. Biblical texts in the *Zionsbote* bridged the tension of the oral versus literate practice of the community in much the same way as the spiritual narrative of journey bridged the realities of migration; both implied unity and common understanding rather than separation and difference.

Editor Harms, writing about conversion stories in "A Word in Love", 8 June 1892, made some interesting observations on our theme:

Whoever is putting his conversion story to paper should not forget to show good grounding in God's Word. In the verbal telling of the conversion that is necessary too, but there is a big difference between listeners and readers. The listener knows the teller personally and when the account is insufficient, he understands anyway...The reader of the conversion story does not have the assistance [of personal attendance], he has to evaluate the writer simply by the words of the account: if there is little scriptural ground and demonstration of the Spirit in it, one gets the impression that the dear writer has built only upon dreams, feelings and opinions, not on God's Word... Whoever is not able to do this in writing [give

grounds] should be contented with telling his story verbally.

The biblical text, in short, was to fill the cavity created by the absence of personal presence. Frequently it had to do duty as a kind of code as well. When Elisabeth Janz, a midwife from Sagradowka, Russia, wrote 8 March 1893 that a recent storm reminded her of Matthew 8:24 she meant to say, it must be presumed, that the storm was bad, as the storm on the Sea of Galilee had been, and that she, like the disciples, had been afraid. She went on to tell of being called to a birth in the midst of such a storm. Without much time to think, she said, she took comfort from Psalm 32:7-8 for such trips. Readers would have to know the verses or look them up in the Bible to ascertain what her comfort was.

In 11 April 1894 "A Reader" reported that several in their town had left the Mennonite Church to join the Mennonite Brethren; "what is written in Matthew 10:34-36 came to pass in several families." The Matthew text warns that Jesus' call to discipleship will divide families. Its use here, as a coded reference, suggested that there was a great deal of tension over religious matters in some of the homes in the writer's village. In 26 May 1897 Susanna M. described the farewell service in the Rueckenau church of Russia for those migrating to America with elder Abraham Schellenberg. After his last cry of "And now brothers and sisters, until we meet again!", said the writer, Schellenberg "hurried out, for it was like Joseph with his brothers for him." The reader familiar with the biblical Joseph story would know that the elder

rushed away because he had been overcome with emotion.

This heavily allusive style does not in itself suggest orality, of course, but it complements the frequent reporting of particular texts and sermons, where the written mention of text functioned to draw attention to an alternative site of listening. The biblical text woven into the writing could be said to enlarge the potential of the account; all the palpable drama of the story of Joseph's reunion with his brothers, for example, now adhered to Schellenberg. At the same time, precision was sacrificed. What kind of winter storm in Russia, for example, corresponded to the crashing of waves over a small boat on the sea? Did Elizabeth Janz mean she was as terrified as the disciples in the boat, or was the meaning simply about the storm and not her emotion? While sending readers to biblical texts for the meaning of a communication may have seemed an inspired solution for conversation within a church community, it also diffused the meaning and, furthermore, put the onus on the reader to uncover it.

The reporting of homiletic texts was hardly adequate to convey the full content or meaning of a sermon. But the hope, if not the assumption, seemed to be that communicating the text *would* be enough to convey that oral experience. Such writing undoubtedly wished to communicate the event of listening by recording the text, or at the most a sentence or two about what had been said, but such efforts had the effect, in fact, not of reiterating that hearing of it but of freeing it from its originating occasion. It took readers to the experience of a common "heard" understanding, unbound by time and context; it could be, optimistically, heard

again in the hearts of readers.

On the other hand, planted in print and linked to a certain originating occasion, the text might also rise free of its biblical context. The account of the farewell of a group of migrating Mennonite Brethren from the Rueckenau congregation and Abraham Schellenberg's text on that occasion was repeated various times in different contexts in the *Zionsbote* (and continues to show up in various histories, including this one!) The elder's text had been a portion of John 14:19, "because I live, you shall live also." This statement was a claim Jesus made in reference to his resurrection. It was not recorded how Schellenberg expounded the text; its meaning belonged to its use at the separation of the Mennonite Brethren of Russia and America. It seemed to remain in people's memories, and was repeated in print, as a brilliantly appropriate blessing for the group migrating and the devastated group left behind.

Many other instances of this use of biblical texts could be given. Although a preacher created many words about, and in response to, a biblical text, the selection of that text seemed his most important task. The text, at any rate, was usually the only legacy given his sermon in print. Recording the preaching event in this way suggested to *Zionsbote* readers that they could read the cited biblical text to hear it and, furthermore, to know and understand what had been said about it.

The print communication of the *Zionsbote* reflected a community caught between experiences of orality and literacy. The paper tried to deal with the differences between face-to-face and

print communication in various ways. Sometimes it conveyed the confident impression that speaking by mouth or by paper were equally powerful. Sometimes it seemed to be suggesting that only certain kinds of writing lent themselves to print. In genres like the congregational correspondence, the communication, though it occurred in print and thus belonged to a literate practice, seemed poised between orality and literacy. It might have the assumptions of face-to-face conversation, or employ a style of shorthand and allusion that trusted the reader could access the meaning easily enough. The ultimate resort in the *Zionsbote's* awkward effort to reconcile the practice of orality and literacy was a relentless summons to a unique and common site--the Bible text--where all could gather, if they wanted, and hear what was said, individually and by implication, together.

Chapter FOUR

Story: Forming Identity through Reading and Writing

As a print medium the *Zionsbote* accommodated the migration and growth of the Mennonite Brethren, and in this way widened their experience and enlarged their world. As print, furthermore, the paper overlapped and interacted with oral communication to multiply the number and potential impact of communicative transactions within that world. The strong missionary impulse of the Mennonite Brethren (which I have not explored but which the *Zionsbote* vigorously promoted), partaking as it did of the optimism and imperialism of the late 19th and early 20th century, was outward-looking and expansive. At the same time, however, the paper also represented a turning inward. It actively shaped the identity of the constituency, an identity that was separatist and exclusive. It established and strengthened bonds within the group, and it established and fortified boundaries around it. The process of identity formation, through a fledgling church periodical, is the theme of this chapter.

Sociologist Charles Tilly developed a conception of public identity as it related to citizenship which has particular application to the contemporary world but his work also suggests a way of thinking about public identities of the past. He defined public identity as "an actor's [actor=person or group] experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a

narrative." Identity, Tilly elaborated, is relational, cultural, historical and contingent; that is, it rests in the connections among people, in their shared understandings and values, and in a growing recognition of their group's particular history. The notion of contingency implies that identity may fail; public identity is, at any rate, dynamic and liable to change.²

Being Mennonite Brethren, one category of belonging, was probably a very significant identity for most of those individuals and families who joined the group in the period we are considering. For one thing, religion as affiliation in general had higher status than it does now. Also, Mennonite Brethren adherence was known within Mennonite communities; it was not an identity that was kept secret or casual. Once people were inside the group, ecclesiastical belonging often overlapped with kinship ties and the fact of a common ethnic background. Identity as Mennonite Brethren included relationships that were formed locally in congregations and in other settings, a common history as a group that had broken away from the Mennonite "Old Church", certain theological understandings, and particular congregational and religious rituals that can be named MB "culture".

The MB identity was challenged on all sides: through migration and separation, the forces of the frontier, small numbers, and the relative instability of many congregations. But common ties continued to be supported and shaped in a variety of ways. The *Zionsbote* was one of these ways.

To take a measure of Mennonite Brethren identity in the *Zionsbote*, however, is not to suggest that the church organ

exactly described individuals' experience of their churchly belonging, or the group's identity in its fullest sense, as if the paper were simply a mirror of its supporting society. It provided an important place, it is true, for "public representation of that experience...[for] a shared story," to use Tilly's definition, but the *Zionsbote* was itself actively producing the understandings that composed that experience.³ It did this through its language, its selection and structuring of stories, and its use of particular conventions of discourse. Each week it participated in establishing, in print, the meaning of being Mennonite Brethren.

The *Zionsbote* offers a unique opportunity to observe this process of identity formation at work. Two aspects of the communication process were involved, namely writing/writers and reading/readers. Writing involved producing meaning through a written text; reading involved receiving and interpreting that meaning. Literary critics often treat these as separate and quite distinct acts. Since much of the writing of the *Zionsbote*, however, especially those parts that readers frequently indicated they found most compelling, was done by those within the paper's relatively small group of subscribers, the two parts can be, in this instance, held close together and some conclusions can be drawn about the identity shared and generated in the two activities.

If one had photographs, such as Andre Kertesz assembled in *On Reading*, of people perusing the *Zionsbote* it would be obvious that the individuals and settings varied. Their expressions and postures would undoubtedly vary also, ranging perhaps from intense

to casual, but all would be engaged "in some form of the engrossing behavior through which print is transformed into a world."⁴ Simply watching these readers, of course, even knowing the content of what they were reading, would not itself be enough to determine exactly what kind of world was formed in the act of engaging with the text, why they had chosen this material to read, or what effect it had on them. It is "extraordinarily difficult," said Carl Kaestle, to fashion theoretical contexts for studying readers and texts of the past.⁵ Immigration historian Rudolph Vecoli, in his survey of the Italian immigrant press, said newspapers can be read for their various ideologies, that is as "forces actively constructing social reality and identity" but he reminded in a concluding caveat that this proved nothing about the efficacy of those messages. He suggested, in fact, that the influences of the press were limited, since people filtered media messages through their own experiences.⁶

Janice Radway was fortunate to have a group of living readers to probe in her study of one category of reading, *Reading the Romance*. The romance readers she studied belonged to an "interpretive community", she said, for "they all select, use, and operate on printed texts in certain socially specific ways." She proposed that different interpretive communities might actually each show "a different form of literacy altogether, founded on its own conception of the word and what can be done with it."⁷ An interesting discovery Radway made was that the "escape" of romance reading was not only into the world described in the novel, but into the activity of reading. Literacy was used by the readers she

studied to gain personal space away from the obligations and relationships of daily life. The meaning of reading was thus constituted in both the event of reading the book and the meaning of its text.

Carl Kaestle and his researchers sought "testimony" about the uses of reading in the past by studying the autobiographies of 30 women who grew up between 1870 and 1920. They discovered five purposes of reading: pleasure or escape (entertainment); gaining of day-to-day information; economic or spiritual self-improvement; promotion of dominant or minority cultures; and critical understanding and dissent. They suggested that the last two purposes were the most "consequential" because they deal with values, critical thinking, and cultural capital.⁵

A detailed profile of the readers of the *Zionsbote* in order to determine effect or to rank the periodical within their total experience of reading is outside the scope of this project and would require many more sources. Using what writers indicate about their uses of the *Zionsbote* against Kaestle's list, however, we see that the purposes most strongly fulfilled in reading the *Zionsbote* were spiritual self-improvement, promotion of a minority ecclesiastical culture, and pleasure. Readers mentioned appreciatively the role of the *Zionsbote* in strengthening their faith, bringing news, describing various experiences. They spoke of it as "instructive", "interesting", "encouraging" and "healing".⁹ It was read "in quietness", said Johann Harms of Hillsboro, Kansas, 26 November 1890, and read "gladly." As for pleasure, the *Zionsbote* was not, of course, a journal with

entertainment as its aim, but there are plenty of indications that to enter its world, with its possibility of hearing from known persons or old places, or of discovering something new and interesting in a familiar milieu, was an enjoyable activity for many readers. "When you arrive [dear *Bote*], we take you in with joy, for you are such a very loving guest and bring us various delightful instructions from far and near," wrote Susanna Adrian of Halstead, Kansas, 19 February 1890. The things readers tended to look for first, if these were mentioned, were correspondence from places they knew or for personal accounts (*Erzaehlungen*, lit. relatings).

Given the nature of Mennonite Brethren in this period, and the nature of the *Zionsbote* as an in-group and subscription-based venture, it can be argued that its readers formed a common interpretive community. It was understood that the paper was a journal for the ordinary people of the congregation, not for theological specialists. The readers' background and experiences, as well as their language and allusive framework, were probably similar enough to ensure that they understood texts in fairly similar ways. We do not have the empirical evidence Radway developed in her study--our measures are more intuitive--but there is nevertheless the evidence offered by the fact that, as already mentioned, much of the content was written by its readers. An imaginary photo gallery must include views of some of those earlier seen reading now sitting at tables or desks or in a train car with pen and paper, writing. Their manner might reveal fluency or hesitancy but nevertheless all are engaged in "deliberate

semantics...deliberate structuring of the web of meaning"¹⁰.

Not only editor Harms but readers too often stated that they wanted "original" material. By this they meant that which was generated within the community, as opposed to *ausgewaehltes*, or material borrowed from other publications. One correspondent said, "if we all keep quiet, the Zions-Bote will soon be no longer a precious friend, but like every other paper, merely an unfamiliar companion."¹¹ Herman Fast said he would rather see the *Zionsbote* fold than be filled with material from other sources. "Let's draw from our own spring," he wrote 19 November 1890, "out of the fountain flowing for us since we quenched our thirst in Jesus, and where we continue to drink. This spring exists in each brother, each sister." As people "learned" to write for the paper as well as read it, participation increased.

The writing was not expected to be original, however, in the sense that communication scholars use the word, that is, as containing "yet unheard of or unknown meanings...information that is nonredundant with any other piece of information in the culture."¹² Rather, *Zionsbote* writing could be considered as "ritualized" texts, where "meanings are well assimilated, familiar, repeated, and relatively self-contained." Assimilated knowledge is information already widely known in the culture. This is not to say there was nothing new in the paper; it existed after all to transmit congregational and personal news as well as providing spiritual nourishment. But these new happenings were placed into familiar cosmological understandings and referenced to biblical texts, giving them therefore "allusive" rather than

"original" authority.¹³

The *Zionsbote* contained hundreds of personal stories, or "experiences" (*Erfahrungen*) over our time period. The majority of these were conversion stories. This became such a popular genre that the editor finally asked, on 4 February 1903, that readers not send any more in; there were still 22 waiting to be published. When the supply was empty, he said, he would say so. Personal accounts were also written about health issues, deaths, births, hardships of various kinds, or answers to prayer. These stories resonated with readers.

One such personal account will be analyzed in the pages that follow. If one wished to use literature to reconstruct cultures, Janice Radway said, it would be "necessary to connect particular texts with the communities that produced and consumed them and to make some effort to specify how the individuals involved actually constructed those texts as meaningful semiotic structures."¹⁴ This is what will be attempted with this piece, in order to observe identity formation via the *Zionsbote*. The quoted text will be interrupted for comment, comparison, and analysis.

One day in the spring or summer of 1898, Sara Balzer, 45, of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, sat down and wrote a long account, of her conversion and her husband's recent death, for the *Zionsbote*. It was published 28 September 1898 under the title "A Sister's Experience." She began:

Dear Zions-Bote! A long time ago already
 God's Spirit reminded me to also give you
 something about our experience along on
 your circuit; I always felt though that I
 would rather leave it to others who could do
 it better than I could. When the *Bote* arrives

in our house, I always first check if it contains the experiences of *Geschwister* and then it occurred to me [*hiess es in mir*]: "Serve others with what you have, even as you want others to serve you." So I will tell, to the glory of God, the great things the Lord has done for us.

This opening was typical for such accounts. It was apologetic about the author's ability to write and it established motivation and "credentials". The latter lay in God's instruction and a personally heard biblical text. Apologetic beginnings no doubt reflected, in many cases, genuine anxiety about setting one's thoughts into the public medium and seemed to occur especially in accounts like conversions where the writer was likely writing for public consumption only once. Gestures of humility may have signalled relatively low status or authority in the community. They eventually seemed to become a convention in these personal accounts. More experienced writers, such as regular correspondents and the "working brothers", as itinerant ministers were called, did not generally open this way. Nevertheless, the use of such humble justifications put the writer on a footing with others. It should be noted that humility statements seemed to become somewhat less frequent over time. The editor often gave encouraging and appreciative remarks about the effort of writing, and as we have seen in other places, offered some gentle instruction for writers.

Writing, at any rate, was more difficult than reading. "I am never too indolent to read," said P.H. Neufeld of North Dakota, 11 April 1900, "even if the *Zionsbote* came twice a week." But he had put off writing, he said, "for the thought is always with me that

my writing is so very unaccomplished and other *Geschwister* could do it so much better than I...[B]ut that is not upright and simply a suggestion from Satan, in order to keep quiet about our blessings." Since the editor and others frequently reminded *Zionsbote* readers that it was a Christian service to write, even a duty, those who did so, like Sara Balzer and P.H. Neufeld, often explained their motivation in those terms.

But reading spurred writing. D. Fast from Russia wrote on 27 January 1897, "After a long silence I felt one evening, as I was sitting alone and reading our paper and finding myself inspired by various articles, the pressure within, to also give a sign of life from me." Such writing, he said, was a service to the widely scattered members of "our fellowship", to have "empathy" [*Fuehlung*] with one another.

One occasional practice of writing for the *Zionsbote* was to fulfill a vow. The person promised that if a certain prayer was heard, praise for the answer would be given publicly through the *Zionsbote*. One such fortunate occasion was recorded by Kath. George of Tiege, Russia, who told readers her baby son was still alive at 6 months. He was her tenth and only living child, nine previous children having died. But even here she had felt herself almost "too weak to write it down."¹⁵

After her opening statement, Sara Balzer continued:

Already from my youth God's Spirit has worked in my heart, though I did not know what it was. My dear mother had taught me to pray and also often told us children that we should not fall asleep without praying, an instruction I tried to follow faithfully, but it did not satisfy me. When I was 15, I got *Nervenfieber* [lit. nerves fever]¹⁶ and was sick eight weeks. When I was

well again, I determined to lead a completely different life, but unfortunately I could not do it, for I tried in my own strength and soon realized that I was doing worse and became aware I was on the broad way.¹⁷ Besides this I also had a great fear of being [eternally] lost, and often sought out solitary places where I cried a lot and prayed, but my frivolous nature did not show any of this to others. When I was 19, I went to [baptismal] classes too and it was my heart's earnest desire then to attain salvation;] at that time too I cried and prayed much. I memorized # 476 from the hymnbook and then often prayed its words. When the song, "O dearest youth, how can it be, etc." was sung the Sunday before Pentecost¹⁸, oh, how my heart was stirred; I longed to have rest and peace in my heart, for I felt keenly the burden of sin and thought, once I would have received baptism, then it would be lighter, but it made no difference. At that time nothing was said about the possibility of having our sins forgiven.

Sara Balzer was born to Bernhard Klassens in 1853 and grew up in Alexanderkrone, a village in the Molotschna Colony of South Russia.¹⁹ At 21, she married Heinrich Balzer, born in 1852 in Muntau, another Molotschna village. These facts were not given here, however. Sara's intention was to provide a spiritual autobiography, so her chronology followed the custom of such accounts. She selected the events that she saw as taking her to the intertwined goal of conversion and baptism. That journey began at the place many of these accounts did, with earliest spiritual awareness, usually in the childhood or adolescent years.

Many conversion accounts of first-generation Mennonite Brethren, that is, those who had been first baptized in the Old Church, also emphasized, as Sara did, how unsatisfactory that experience had been. Sara Friesen, for example, wrote in her account of 20 April 1892 that after her baptism she was the same

person as before. "I often asked myself," she said, "is that what conversion means?" Jakob Wiens of Bradshaw, Nebraska, described his first baptism in his conversion story of 22 July 1892. A meeting with Elder Benjamin Ratzlaff of nearly an hour had convinced him of his spiritual need, he said, "but there was no talk of conversion at that time." He joined the church "but the [my] heart was not changed...After I had received communion, then godless living really started...[I] sang, danced and drank as hard as I could."

The point here is not to confirm or dispute these perceptions, but to suggest that a steady reiteration of them kept alive the barriers the Mennonite Brethren schism had erected. One story after another reminded readers that the "other" Mennonites had an inadequate understanding of salvation or had at the very least become negligent in their practice of it. It is not surprising that Mennonite Brethren kept aloof from other Mennonites in America²⁰ and that tensions in Russia only abated gradually.²¹

In 1874 I was married [Sara Balzer went on] but the longing for salvation remained in me. We talked about this with each other but told no one else. In 1876 we migrated to America. After three days of travel, our baby boy, 10 months old, died, which was almost unbearable for us. It was pitch dark as he was carried outside. The train stopped for only 5 minutes. Oh how painful this was for us and we took refuge in prayer. When I was struggling with this and begged the loving Lord to send me some comfort from his word, so that I could surrender myself to his will, these words came to me [*da hiess es in mir*]: "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."²² Because our child could not be buried, this was a great comfort to me. The Lord really drew us to

himself at that time. When we first arrived here in Mountain Lake [Minnesota], our friends were already there, waiting to pick us up. Oh how dreary everything looked then: the grasshoppers had taken everything, and we often promised ourselves, if we could just have food and clothing and a small shelter, then we would be contented. The Lord granted us this, that we could soon earn our livelihood here, but he did not cease working in our hearts by his Spirit.

Baptism signalled adulthood--taking on the responsibilities and commitments of the community; a euphemism for it was "*gross werden*" [becoming big] and marriage usually followed. Sara also married. Not once during this writing did she mention her husband Heinrich by name, even though the second half of the piece was devoted to an account of his death. She may have assumed people knew him, either personally or from a brief notice of his death that had appeared in the *Zionsbote* earlier. It also indicates that personal writing was exactly that, inward and experiential. Mennonite Brethren historians have discussed and argued at some length the denomination's mix of theological influences, whether Anabaptist, Pietist, Baptist, American Fundamentalist or other.²³ The culture of the *Zionsbote*, however, was unmistakably subjective, and its stories practiced the "theology of experience" which is often considered the heart of Pietist theology.²⁴

The facts of migration, since this was not a travel account, were compressed by Sara into a single reference to an extremely painful experience, the death of a child and the fact that proper burial could not be offered.²⁵ This tragedy undoubtedly colored the Balzers' entire experience of migration. The single story here probably stood in for the loss, isolation, and strangeness that

many readers as immigrants had also experienced. It was also used here as an important signpost of the journey towards God.

There were few accounts of, or even references to, pioneering in the extant copies of the *Zionsbote* during our period. Only occasionally did small details such as Sara Balzer gave in her mention of the dreary grasshopper-infected landscape glint out of stories or reports. This omission is puzzling, for surely these experiences were not outside the scope of the subscribers' concerns. Such accounts may have appeared in the first years, for which no copies exist. More likely, however, these references were lodged in the specifically "immigrant" papers such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, with its blunter and somewhat more secular tone. They did not become part of the *Zionsbote* discourse, and so no precedents were set for their inclusion. For a church paper bridging a community on both sides of the ocean, the pioneering experience did not challenge or contribute to the aims of unity in the same way migration did.

Other sources provide some background to Sara's few sentences about arrival and pioneering. The first Mennonite families settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in 1873, after being persuaded by agent William Seeger to leave Yankton, Dakota, where some other agents had lured them, and to travel to Cottonwood County instead. It was an open treeless prairie region with rolling terrain. At that time some two-thirds of the state was still west and north of the frontier line. Mountain Lake came to be inhabited almost completely by Mennonites, with the first families acting as a magnet for others. A total of 295 families

came between 1873 and 1880. The area had some previous settlement and the first Mennonites bought farms complete with equipment from Americans who were ready to move on. They were able to purchase them at reasonable prices because grasshoppers had spoiled crops for several seasons. Also, recalled a pioneer later, some of the Americans, especially veterans of the Civil War, did not want to live with the "foreigners".

The Mennonites, said Ferdinand P. Schultz, who wrote a history of the settlement, became "ardent boosters for their community by seeking to influence their relatives and friends to come and live with them in Minnesota."²⁶ Some of this was through personal letters, but the settlers also addressed a circular letter of some 1200 words to "our Friends and Fellow-believers in Prussia and Russia" which was published in the early immigrant paper, *Zur Heimath*, in May 1875. On occasion they also went to ports such as New York to meet immigrants; in one case a group heading to Manitoba was re-routed, not quite honestly, to Mountain Lake. In spite of their "chagrin and dissatisfaction" they ended up staying.²⁷

The Balzers, as Sara indicates, had friends already living in Mountain Lake. Their persuasive enthusiasm may well have downplayed the difficulties of pioneering in the area. The grasshoppers kept the settlers at near subsistence level until 1877 when this plague disappeared, said Ferdinand Schultz, "as suddenly and mysteriously" as it had come. This problem was followed by blight and rust. After 1880 crops were somewhat better, but the early years of the decade were very wet, with an

"extraordinary" winter of much snow between 1880 and 1881. During these wet years a group of 44 packed up and moved to Kansas.²⁸

(All were members of the Mennonite Brethren congregation which had formed in the area in 1877; the group numbered only 107 members at the time, so it was a sizeable loss.²⁹)

By the 1890s conditions had improved to the extent that people "no longer wished that they had remained in Russia, or that they had settled elsewhere in America..." Between 1896 and 1902 some 200 families emigrated from Mountain Lake to North Dakota and Canada (especially Saskatchewan), but these migrants were not poorly off, for they took train-loads of equipment for farm and household as well as livestock. They were attracted to these regions for the free or cheap land.³⁰

Sara continued her account:

I always felt within myself [*In mir hiess es*] that I was too wicked, there was no more grace for me. I felt keenly that I was spiritually lost[;] we prayed together much and searched in God's Word; we were also able to receive some comfort together, for example where it says, "A bruised reed I will not break, and a dimly burning wick I will not quench." For a time I had great anxiety and severe temptation when I prayed, could only cry and say the words, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But suddenly one day as I was again overtaken by such great fear, it came to me [*es hiess in mir*]: "In the world you have fear, but be of great cheer, I have overcome the world." Then I fell down in repentance and shame and thanked the dear Lord, for I felt the burden was gone from my heart. Oh how happy I was at that time, that I could claim God's Word like that. Especially important to me at that time were the poet's words: Swing heavenward, my spirit, for you are a heavenly being." Oh *Geschwister*, to have a heavenly nature within oneself is priceless and it becomes increasingly precious to me these days. A year and a half later my dear husband also received forgiveness through this Word: "But where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more." Oh the grace and love of God is the only thing that can

bring us through this storm-tossed world.³¹

Church life on the Mountain Lake frontier was disorganized and informal. The first Mennonite church in the area was not established until 1876; people had tried to keep up religious practices by meeting in homes. Some of the American denominations like Methodists and Baptists regarded the Mennonites as good candidates for evangelistic activity. Nevertheless, said Ferdinand Schultz, religion was "much more important to the Mennonites individually and collectively than it was to the average American frontiersman."³² In the 1880s, there was a marked increase of serious interest in religion in the Mountain Lake community, which Schultz attributed to emigration, the hardships of pioneer life, and the activities of the American evangelists among them. He also credited the Mennonite Brethren efforts. "The small number of Brethren who came to this community were looked down upon by the other Mennonites in the same way as in Russia and therefore were not particularly welcome in the new home, but they were earnestly evangelistic and conducted regular Bible study and prayer services to which they invited all who would condescend to come."³³ It was this period and this group that brought Sara Balzer's spiritual quest to a culmination.

Although the Mennonite Brethren understood their movement as one of recovering what the larger Mennonite church had lost, the emphasis on regeneration rather than sanctification undoubtedly came from the pietistic influences the early Brethren, even before secession, had absorbed. When Sara Balzer stated that her "burden" was gone, she had reached the goal, not only of her own longing,

but of the narrative as well. This was the outcome every conversion story pursued; this was the point that needed to be presented and "proved" in the meetings of examination preceding baptism. Sara had "appropriated" the scriptural message of forgiveness personally; this was also an emotional climax for her.

She went on:

Because we read much in God's Word and because salvation was a serious matter to us, we soon discovered that we should let ourselves be baptized yet, for Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan, where he says in Matthew 3[:15]: "In this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Oh how the faithful Saviour stooped to us sinful people, He prepared the way, now we can follow him and often we find it so hard. We were buried in Christ's death through baptism on October 29, 1882. As we walked to the water, the song "Jesus, Guide our Way" was sung. I was especially struck by the verse:

Though difficult our way,
steadfast let us be
Even in the hardest days
Firmly, uncomplaining
For through adversity
Lies the way to Thee.

I have learned to understand this more over time than I understood it then, still Jesus goes before, we need only follow. We have enjoyed various blessings from the Lord in fellowship with his children.

Since the written *Zionsbote* conversion accounts came from church members, and thus appeared after baptism had occurred, the description of the baptismal experience became an important and additional part of the print narrative of conversion. Sara mentioned scriptural justification for their re-baptism. Some accounts presented the decision about baptism as another hard journey, including descriptions of the various stages of struggle they had to overcome before they became convinced that this step

was necessary. Often there were barriers of resistance raised by others or even personal humiliations to overcome. In the early years in particular, when the Brethren group was relatively small and generally derided, re-baptism was a difficult and consequential act, one that might entail a drop in sociocultural status. Hence it formed a significant part of the narrative of the group, and its reiteration, along with negative details about the Old Church, would reassure those inside the group--those reading the account--that they were correct in what they had done. It became a crucial point in the ongoing process of self-identification. Thus, conversion accounts usually ended at the point at which the writer joined the church by baptism.

In the article "The Early Brethren and Conversion"³⁴ John B. Toews analyzed the *Zionsbote* conversion stories for early Mennonite Brethren understanding of conversion. As has already been seen, this was a process characterized by disillusionment with religious experience in the Old Church and then the climax of conversion after a period of struggle. The climax was a happy, momentous occasion, which then led to affiliation with the Brethren. Many of the accounts also portrayed penitential agony [*Seelenangst*; lit. soul fear], or spoke of prior sinfulness. Sara Balzer told of fear but her account was milder than many. Other accounts, Toews wrote, also revealed particular practices that formed Brethren identity: praying aloud during the open prayer time at some services (considered a kind of breakthrough in conversion) and confession of sins to someone else, perhaps one's spouse or a friend.

Toews suggested there were certain dangers in "the constant reaffirmation of this 'theology of beginnings'"³⁵, thus confirming that the repetition of the experience was as powerful a force in identity formation as the experience itself. The emphasis on personal experience generated two dangers, he said. First, it became the main means of validating biblical truth and thus set the standard by which others were judged. As such, it was a form of "border control" which hindered contact with others and caused Brethren-Old Church tensions. Second, the emphasis on personal experience might create a community desirous only of repeating the emotions of the original experience.³⁶ From a communications perspective, it can be asserted that repeating border stories does indeed form borders. Whether members wished to repeat the emotions of conversion is harder to substantiate, but in published form these accounts were permanent, widely distributed, and could be re-read. They certainly established models of experience which must have affected the selection of detail for subsequent accounts as well as the conversion experiences of younger people reading them. The stories of first-generation members had a genuine, if occasionally uncomfortable, feel; their fears and struggle were not surprising against the backdrop of circumstances that might include a drunken husband drowning in the well, for example, or the temptation to commit suicide.³⁷ The conversion accounts of children of these members generally lacked these dire mitigating circumstances and also often reflected a conversion experience at a younger age. Yet their narrative reached for the same emotions of fear and relief. They were articulating a conversion emphasis

within the language and structure that had been produced and fixed in print by the *Zionsbote*.

Sara Balzer's account was more than a conversion account, however. She also wanted to tell of her husband's death, and found the transition to that event in the song sung at her baptism. She presented the death story as the culmination of a series of adversities which were continuing to bring her closer to God. There were many stories like this in the *Zionsbote* as well; they expressed a view of suffering as a crucible of spiritual refinement. Here too, in accord with editor Harms' instructions to writers of conversion accounts, Sara grounded the narration of her experiences in biblical references and allusions. She wrote:

In 1885 misfortune came our way when we were burned out through lightning, everything burned except the livestock. It was painful for us to stand by, almost naked. We then went along with my siblings for the night and since I could not sleep at all that night, I got up and went outside and gave free rein to my tears. It was June 20 and quite a cold night and because I was wearing everything I owned, I was filled with worry, but Matthew 6:25-26 became a comfort to me, that the heavenly Father would care for us and he did too, thanks to him for it.

In 1886 the Lord took all our four children. There we were, lonely and forsaken; often we had to ask, Why Lord? But there was nothing to do but yield ourselves to God's will. The Lord sought to draw us nearer to himself and oh how often he let us feel his presence, blessed hours indeed. We could share our joys and sorrows with each other then and kneel side by side and pour out our hearts before God. In spring of 1888, my dear husband became ill...

The four children Sara mentions were ages 7, 6, and 2 years, and 2 months. They had died within the space of several months, the first three within one week and the baby several months later.

One report cited scarlet fever, another diphtheria. Two other children had died earlier, besides the one who died on the journey. Heinrich and Sara, married 12 years by 1886, had had seven children and had endured seven deaths.³⁸ But these details were omitted in this account. Stories of suffering were not all-encompassing autobiography, but were meant to "serve." Since she was preparing readers for her husband's death story, Sara emphasized their marital closeness, especially in being able to share joys and sorrows and to pray together. Their relationship, it was implied, was an example of the intimacy of community when people shared the same spiritual values and sources of comfort. Accounts in which both partners had joined the church often hinted at the difficulties this had resolved in their lives; writers without this advantage sometimes hinted at marriage problems. Sara Balzer seemed to be holding up a spiritually companionate marriage as a particularly close example of the "fellowship with [God's] children" she had praised earlier when speaking of the Mennonite Brethren church.

Sara briefly described her husband's earlier illness and physical symptoms, and then came to 1898 and his last week, which she set down in some detail:

One week before his death [*Heimgang*, lit. home-going] he said it seemed urgent to him that he prepare to die [*sein Haus bestellen*, lit. order his house]. I could not comprehend it and said, "what shall I do alone then with the little children?"³⁹ I also do not believe the Lord will take you from us." Then he said his heart was so afraid when he thought about soon appearing before God's face, it would only be grace if he were saved, for he had nothing to show for himself. Then we knelt and prayed and my dear husband asked especially, if it was God's will that he depart from here, He

would give him the grace to meet Him joyfully... [She relates more details of things he said, his worsening condition, her distress about it.] Saturday night to Sunday I was overcome with such fear and my chest hurt me so much that I had to groan and ask: Lord, what's the matter, I am surely not steel or stone that you have to take such a way with me. I implored the Lord to give me strength to yield to his will. I did not want to add to my dear husband's suffering by not being able to let go of him. In the morning he was again very short of breath and said, I will suddenly be gone and I have not put my house in order. When he was breathing somewhat easier again, he said: "Now I have to order my affairs." Again I could scarcely comprehend it, but he said, "Mama, we've reached that point." Only someone who has experienced this understands how I felt then. Then I told him what I had gone through that night and how we had to let go of one another. Then he shared with me his ideas of what would be best for me and our children, and as he came to the children he said, "It seems to me it will be somewhat difficult for you, but what would we do if we remained [together?]; after all, the Lord must do it and he will also do it." Then he added, when it would seem dark to me and I knew no way out, I should not look to myself or my loved ones, but rather over there to the other side, then the Lord would compensate for everything and would have special grace for me, to bear everything that comes, and I should always remember that none of us has a permanent abode here. Oh Geschwister, I will never forget that Sunday, how heartbreaking and yet blessed it was. In the afternoon we read together the Word: "There remains therefore a rest to the people of God." Several times he said yet, "How blissful a rest it will be, when I am finally able to enter the rest prepared for the children of God." It seems I still hear him saying it. Then we knelt side by side yet and thanked the loving Saviour for all the blessings he had given us together and asked for further help in our situation. It was the last time we bent our knees together. When we rose from prayer, my husband was very happy and said, "We already enjoy heavenly delights [Speise] here!" I could only cry. He looked at me so kindly and said he loved me very much and felt so relieved that I would let him go if this was God's will....

The death story was not unique to the *Zionsbote*. The Victorian era told stories of death in books and periodicals,

often in sentimentalized fashion. In putting her husband's death into writing Sara was commemorating him, but more importantly she was stating the meanings to be derived from the experience, one in which she was valued and affirmed, one in which she grieved and found spiritual strength in the vision her husband conveyed of his imminent departure. She professed the community's conviction that it was important to be properly prepared for death and illustrated what this preparation involved.

Sara continued to trace her memories of that last week, with her husband's condition worsening, then improving slightly, and worsening again. She told more of their last activities, his last prayer, his "Amens" to the prayers of those who were with him, the last song, and his last words: "Soon, soon, the struggle is finished." Death, in this story and many others in the paper, paralleled journey stories with their long, heartbreaking farewells. She then said:

...Now he felt so tired and wanted to sleep; we settled him as comfortably as possible in the rocking chair and soon he had sunk into a sweet sleep, sleeping peacefully like he had not slept for two months, until 4:30 in the morning and because we did not sit up with him, we did not notice when, peacefully, without movement or sound, death broke the bond of marriage, and only one who has gone through it will understand. To stand there alone, the children small. Then one asks: Lord, why this? But I must say to the glory of my God, he has carried me on the wings of love to this very hour. Even though fear sometimes overcomes me, the loving Saviour has promised to be with us every day to the end of the world, that's often my comfort.

As difficult as it was, the parting of the couple also had something beautiful about it. By writing it, Sara was able to

preserve those parts of it that would give her comfort. Her story could presumably also give her children comfort in the future and offer them a representation of their father's last caring thoughts about them and his positive spiritual outlook. We could also speculate that Sara wanted to celebrate her husband's memory in the community. His death may have been eclipsed in the public mind by the shocking death of Maria Enns, a young woman of the congregation who was a missionary in Cameroon and whose passing was announced at Heinrich Balzer's funeral. (Maria Enns' detailed and emotional account of her husband Heinrich Enns' death had appeared in the 12 January 1898 *Zionsbote*, about a month before Balzer's death.) Sara's written document thus became an artifact that transcended the limitations of memory--both hers and the community's. The long story ended like this:

Five weeks after my dear husband's death I got sore eyes. Two weeks later the Lord gave me a baby son and my eyes got considerably worse; then the *Geschwister* took turns nursing and caring for me and my children, physically as well as spiritually. The Lord will reward them. After six weeks, through medical help, my eyes also got better. Oh how thankful I was when I could once again look after those the Lord had entrusted to me, but how much it hurts that the head is no longer in the family; but in looking to Jesus, who has faithfully led me until now, I can firmly believe that also this way will be beneficial for me. I have often been comforted by this song:

The heat of tribulation has shaken me,
 God himself fans the flame,
 Each one's heart quakes and trembles
 On this journey of suffering,
 I whisper, 'whatever God wills'
 And in the fire, hold myself still.

[chorus and second stanza follow]

Because a long time has again passed and I have not sent off the report, I just want to add that Sunday, August 14, was an especially blessed day for me. Eleven souls were buried in Christ's death through baptism, among them also my oldest son. May the

Lord bless these young plants to his praise.
Warm greetings with Isaiah 43, I remain your
sister in the Lord, Sara Balzer.

This was the only time, to my knowledge, that Sara Balzer wrote for the *Zionsbote*. Her sufferings and her plight as a widow had given her a reason to speak. Although early and frequent death and hardship were far from unusual at the time, Sara had had more than her share of tragedy; this gave her account particular credibility. It cannot be known whether reading her own published story caused her satisfaction or regret, or how others in the community reacted. A report from Mountain Lake in the 15 December 1909 *Zionsbote*, telling of her marriage to a widower, the Rev. Abraham Buhler of Reedley, California, praised her by saying that she "had to meet various storms of life alone in her twelve years as a widow, but she was able to meet them with God's help in quiet resignation." Her identity had submerged once more into the face-to-face reality of the local congregation and community, but it can be assumed that her story, like her own life, had been integrated into the Mennonite Brethren identity.

A story like Sara's could be analyzed on many levels, for texts, as contemporary literary critics remind us, are "multivocal". But the task here has been to observe how collective and individual identities were shaped by what was written and read. The "original" writing of the *Zionsbote* formed a community ethos or identity in print. It can be summarized as follows.

First, what was being written and read here emerged from and sustained a church identity. The act of writing grew out of reading and was framed in the religious terms of duty, vow, and

service. This seems almost too obvious to state, for it has been clear all along that the *Zionsbote* was a religious periodical. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the communication transactions conveyed and constructed the paper's overall purpose. This writing was analogous to the rituals of congregational services. One spoke of certain things, in certain ways, in this particular setting that were not discussed or performed elsewhere. Just as the continued enactment of congregational rituals such as sermons, music, prayer, baptism, and communion can be said to contain the "meaning" of people gathering as a church body, so the textual rituals of the *Zionsbote* created structures for and contained the meaning of people's encounters via print.⁴⁰

Different rituals and conventions were employed in commercial dailies of the time, or even an inter-Mennonite paper like the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, depending in each case on the intentions of the communication and the constituency engaging in it. In the *Rundschau*, for example, writing employed a more generalized and inclusive religious vocabulary; it carried more practical and commercial concerns; its news about people often sounded as if it would be spoken on the village street.

Second, since the identity being written and read in the *Zionsbote* was a church identity, it was weighted with "insider" perceptions, both about themselves and about outsiders (whether Old Church or the "world"). The newspaper promoted and justified distinctive theological understandings and practices. It proceeded out of assumptions of "how we talk about things." Allusion, directly or indirectly to scriptural text, gave this identity

authority. It employed a language ultimately comprehensible only to those within the group. Cornelius Bergen of Plum Coulee, Manitoba, wrote on 5 September 1894, for example, that his wife was converted before he was. At that time, he said, "I did not understand her, it was a foreign language to me." Abraham Wiebe wrote on 20 March 1895 of finding a "brother" on a trip who believed as he did; "we could understand one another," he said. Reading and writing participated in an ongoing sense of resonance, as Georg Schaubert of Russia expressed in writing of his conversion on 4 December 1895. He was "blessed" by reading conversions, he said, "because in nearly every conversion some part of it touches what one has also experienced."

Last, the identity was characterized by intimacy. Sara Balzer and hundreds of writers like her assumed they were talking to "*Geschwister*." This familiar, familial expression for the members of the community was constantly used in the paper. Also, the adjective "dear" was used to describe the paper, one's spouse, other people in the church, and blessings at services. Since the German word *liebe* is used for both "dear" and "love", the warm intentions of the adjective were accentuated.

A certain amount of openness and vulnerability was possible in this setting. Such openness in its turn fostered closeness within the group; it assumed firm boundaries at its edges. When editor Harms sat down soon after his son's funeral and poured out in some detail the account of the boy's drowning (for the 15 July 1891 issue) though "nearly unable to write for sadness", he portrayed their hours together before the event and something of

the boy's lively spirit, as well as the circumstances of the death. Even worse, his wife was on her way to visit her parents in Russia and had missed her son's burial; she may even have missed her husband's telegram bearing the news. Harms also expressed his terrible fears about the boy's eternal destiny. The piece was raw, the grief unbearably fresh, and the author's feelings exposed. But he obviously felt the *Zionsbote* was a place where they could be expressed.

The effect of intimacy in the discourse made the path of communication between reader and writer seem relatively seamless. The close link produced a circular effect in which interpretations and language meshed in both the act of reading and the act of writing. The writer addressed the "brothers and sisters", the reader received the communication from a "brother" or "sister". Inspirational articles or stories might be borrowed from non-Mennonite Brethren sources, but these would only be selected if their ideas and terminology fit; in effect there were, for the most part, no outside voices heard in this periodical.

Print had made possible an imagined church community. Within the print church, conventions were established, certain ways of speaking and experiencing life were ritualized. Reading and writing interacted in the production of an internal, separatist, exclusive culture. The relationships, culture, and history, which as Charles Tilly said, compose public identity, were enacted, defined, and enhanced week by week in the pages of the church organ. The in-group conversation became fixed and familiar. Sara Balzer's story was one of coming to accept the understandings of

the group. She set her life into that meaning. She read what others wrote and then made the effort to construct an account of her life within that meaning for the benefit of others. Readers likely found her competent and confident recitation of her troubles and triumphs both helpful and reassuring for their circumstances. They were reminded of where they belonged and what they believed. In this community life was safer and more hopeful; they were inside.

Conclusion

Before this study of communication makes its summary statements, some questions (or possibly objections) must be anticipated and addressed.

First, why study the communication of a *church* paper? The Mennonites are, among ethnic groups, proportionally small, and to focus on a sectarian organ among them instead of an inter-Mennonite periodical, like *Zur Heimath* or *Mennonitische Rundschau*, simply further divides an already limited focus. The objection is a valid one. Sectarianism, schism, anything that emphasizes differences, seems distasteful in our culture which emphasizes mergers and similarities.

Nevertheless, several arguments can be made for studying a religious periodical. It has been seen that in the late Victorian era, a world in which newspapers and press organizations of all sorts were burgeoning, people had access to any number of print organs. There were large urban, commercial, and usually secular dailies, but also weeklies, journals which, as Gerald Friesen said, "imagined the world not in terms of consumption or politics but as networks of families and acquaintances." The *Zionsbote* was such a journal. In his study of communication within Canada, Friesen went on to say that both kinds of organs, with their differing purposes, could be absorbed by readers; the differences did not seem to disorient them. "The contradictions represented the varieties of ways in which readers adjusted to the changing-- and overlapping--dimensions within which they lived."¹

Communication, then, was happening in all cases, and any one organ could be studied for what its particular transactions contributed to the recipients' "intellectual maps of the new age."² In spite of this increasing compartmentalization, however, one need not rush to label one part, especially the larger and secular, as more significant or more "real" than the other.

If one wanted to make any judgments, in fact, it could be argued that religion was particularly important as an organizing principle for many immigrant groups. There is growing recognition among immigration historians, and perhaps other historians as well, of the importance of religion for their work. "Religion provided continuity to the immigrants," Randall Miller and Thomas Marzik wrote; "It bridged the Old World and the New World and made adjustment possible and bearable."³ Writing about ethnic settlement on the great plains, Frederick Luebke reminded his readers that the role of the immigrant church must not be underestimated. It was usually the first of the immigrant institutions to be established, the most effective, and the last to be abandoned.⁴ This was certainly true of the Mennonites. The church dominated their pioneer lives.⁵ Even their schismatic tendencies--those forces that threatened to break up the community from within, can be seen as a corollary to the prominence of religion in their worldview.

Timothy L. Smith has shown how significant religion was in identity-formation among ethnic groups; he claimed that religious affiliations were "decisive determinants" of ethnic affiliation in America.⁶ In his essay "Religion and Ethnicity in America" Smith

said that migration to America produced three important alterations in the relationship of faith to ethnic identity: the boundaries of peoplehood were often redefined in religious terms, religious reflection and commitment were intensified, and millennial and messianic convictions were revitalized.

A church journal, then, demonstrates the process of communication as well as any other newspaper, but for an immigrant group of the time also provides an opportunity to probe what Thomas Luckman called a people's "sacred cosmos", that domain of reality where both "the ultimate significance of everyday life and the meaning of extraordinary experiences" can be discerned.⁷ It would, however, be valuable to this study to look at other periodicals of the same period, to compare the communication interactions, and to identify what might be unique to the *Zionsbote* and why.

Second, mention must be made of what this study did *not* include. More attention has been paid to the personal and congregational writing of the *Zionsbote* than to the devotional or doctrinal content of the paper. The missions content (such as reports from "fields") has not been emphasized either. These aspects of the paper were also communicating and also played a part in shaping the community. An examination of the doctrinal content, for example, perhaps by tracking what biblical texts or topics were expounded and how frequently, would contribute to understanding theological development within the Mennonite Brethren denomination. Mission efforts could also be profitably studied, perhaps with a view to how both moralism and religious

commitment fed the impulse to recruitment, as Timothy Smith suggested, within "clearly 'modern' terms."³ From a communications perspective, however, these aspects of the periodical would probably not substantially affect the conclusions of this study. But it must be emphasized that they constituted a significant part of the paper's content and purpose; an accurate picture of the *Zionsbote* must keep them in mind.

Third, something must be said about change. This study has not focussed on change within the period. Rather, it has "freeze framed" the period as it were, in order to view the *Zionsbote* as communication. To discuss communication "effect" is, of course, to imply some change. The revisions that occurred between 1884 and 1906 such as in the appearance, size, stability, and content of the periodical have been noted. To take the study beyond 1906 would necessitate considering a new editor and his influence, new or shifting language and discourse, and further institutionalization of the Conference's publishing efforts. The deliberate discourse of unity across the migration divide has been noted. It should be mentioned, however, that the use of a Supplement (introduced as a two-page monthly addition in 1894), and then the enlargement of the paper to eight pages only for subscribers in America, must have subtly contributed to a process of distancing. The Supplement carried items of particular interest to American-side readers, but also items about Russia that presented that country in a negative light, such as news of its oppression of minority Christians, the uprisings spurred by the Russo-Japanese War and so on. The gap between Mennonite Brethren

in Russia and America probably continued to gradually widen beyond 1906 due to the inevitable shifts of time and generations. Another change was the transition among Mennonite Brethren in America to the English language. In 1937 an English periodical, *The Christian Leader*, was founded, symbolizing the switch from German to English in the churches. The *Zionsbote* was increasingly a communication of an older and minority population. Many of these changes were gradual and could have been traced through our period as well. But, as mentioned, the emphasis has been on a broader continuum of communication, and so the entire period has been treated as something of a unity for purposes of our analysis.

Communication, as we have seen, is a multi-layered process and must refer to the medium--in this case, a print technology--, the producers and receivers of the communication, the texts, and the effects of the communication act. Every communication is unique because of the many variables at work in the process. This study of the *Zionsbote* has tried to incorporate all the elements of communication into its consideration of the question, "what was happening as the *Zionsbote* was written and read week by week?"

The social context--the horizontal framework--of the communication was investigated. The *Zionsbote* was a religious paper for a religious and ethnic group. It was produced by immigrants to America, but was intended to communicate also with co-religionists in Russia and to unify the group as a whole. Its discourse reflected the reality of the migration experience

(whether staying or leaving) and resettlement of Mennonite Brethren on the frontiers of America and Russia.

Talk of *Reise* (journey) filled its pages, because that represented the new and frequent experience of its readers and writers. It was also the way in which life as a whole was understood: one's passage through time was a pilgrimage. It was important to be on the right road to heaven in this journey. Since everyone was on such a journey, one might live in any number of earthly locations, because some day, reunion in a single place--heaven--would occur. This consolation mitigated the pain of farewells and the hardships of life.

The *Zionsbote* has also been situated in its technological context--the vertical dimension of communication. It was a print medium, portable and regular. It enlarged the potential of communication; it could reach many places and thus instigate a relatively simultaneous interaction. It transcended old experiences of time and space to create a differently imagined community.

The *Zionsbote* also entered Mennonite Brethren experience at a particular juncture in the history of orality and literacy within the community. This was distinguished by a relatively high value placed on reading and writing because of the group's relation to the Bible as Anabaptists, and by the Mennonite Brethren exposure to and acceptance of more reading materials, especially those from outside. The *Zionsbote* constituted the fascinating phenomenon wherein the immigrant portion of the group, stimulated by the opportunities of the New World, founded a

publication. The immigrants acted as communication producers for Mennonite Brethren in both America and Russia. This enabled them to remain rooted among their Old World co-religionists but also in Old World values, as well as to plot the geography of the new Mennonite Brethren community in reference to its originating places. The *Zionsbote* was certainly not their first exposure to newspapers, but it was their first experiment with communicating in print for group purposes; the communication reflected the newness of the venture and the intersection of print and face-to-face values. The use of biblical text in various layers of the discourse suggested recourse to an ultimate site of "listening" where print might otherwise fail to convey the important experiences of congregations and individuals.

The possibilities offered by print reflected an enlarging literacy, but there was another dynamic at work. By using such a medium for conversation within one specific group, the *Zionsbote* revealed print's tendency to also create smaller constituencies, overlapping and segmented identities, and competition. Individual and group identities were being produced and interpreted in each issue of the paper. Stories told in the paper reiterated the group's history, their relationships as insiders and with outsiders, and their community and ecclesiastical culture. These stories were written by readers. To observe how they were told and constructed within their context tells us something of how that process of identity-formation worked. The communication itself was forming bonds and boundaries that gave the participants a sense of being Mennonite Brethren.

The *Zionsbote* was a small print organ, of significance mostly to one stream of the Mennonite world. In spite of its specificity, however, a study such as this one provides an example of the themes that emerge in the investigation of communication. It has demonstrated that people fulfill their deep human needs to communicate in a variety of ways. It reminds us that communication is always multi-layered, dynamic, and historically situated.

Footnotes to Introduction

- ¹ . The account comes from the hired hand in question, Abe Heinrichs, and describes procedures in the period around 1899 to 1904. In Orlando Harms, *Pioneer Publisher* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 41-42.
- ² . J.C.D. of Mountain Lake, *Zionsbote*, 7 Feb 1900; P.H. Neufeld, North Dakota, *Zionsbote*, 11 April 1900.
- ³ . Abram Friesen, *Zionsbote*, 15 April 1891. Friesen was a missionary in India and wrote in part, "For some time now I've had the deep inner wish to get to know you, good friend, you with all your news out of Zion. That's why I took the opportunity...to invite you to come to us."
- ⁴ . John S.Kulas, *Der Wanderer of St. Paul* (New York: Peter Lang Pub., 1996), 15 n.4.
- ⁵ . William H. Lyon, "The Significance of Newspapers on the American Frontier", *Journal of the West* (Vol.XIX, No.2, April 1980), 5.
- ⁶ . George Pozzetta, "The Italian Immigrant Press", *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (Vol 1, No. 1, Spring 1973), 32.
Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (New York: Harper, 1922), Table XVIII, shows the number of foreign language papers at 794 in 1884, 1323 at the peak in 1917, and 1052 in 1920. German language papers show a somewhat different pattern relative to the total: they numbered 621 in 1884, reached their peak number of 796 in 1898-94, and had dropped to 276 in 1920.
- ⁷ . George Pozzetta, 33, following Park's divisions, suggested three categories of foreign language papers: commercial papers (published to make money), "organ" papers (published by religious, fraternal, nationalistic or other organizations for the aims of that group), and "propaganda" papers (published by "radical" groups with a sense of mission).
- ⁸ . Park, 7.
- ⁹ . Park, 8-13, gave 3 reasons for the popularity of the foreign press: immigrants were eager to read in their own language because not permitted to do so in their home countries; there was "more going on that they need to know" in adjusting to a new environment; and their press satisfied the "human desire for expression in [the] mother tongue." To these factors must be added the stimulus that the migration undertaking gave to the acquisition and practice of literacy.
- ¹⁰ . Lyon, 5.
- ¹¹ . Pozzetta, 32 and 42 n.2, citing studies of German, Finnish, Chinese, Polish, Yiddish, and French language publishing in America. The major study of the German language press, to which the *Zionsbote* belongs, is Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (University of Kentucky Press, 1957).
Robert E. Park was optimistic that the inevitable evolution of the foreign language press "under the influence of American conditions" (77) made it useful for the ultimate Americanization of its audiences, even though its own motivations might be the prevention of the same; he proposed a government policy of "benevolent control" (451).
- ¹² . Kulas, *Der Wanderer of St. Paul*, 10.
- ¹³ . Willard D. Rowland in Crowley and Heyer, *Communication in History* (New York: Longman Publishers, 1995), xi.
- ¹⁴ . A good example is Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority* (University of Toronto Press, 1982). Rutherford's study of the growth of daily newspapers in Canada between 1870 and 1900 placed its subject in a complex social environment including the rise of major metropolitan centers, issues of community and class, and the development of literacy.
- ¹⁵ . Rowland, xi-xii.
- ¹⁶ . G.W. Peters, *Foundation of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 121.

¹⁷ . John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren and Conversion," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (Vol.11, 1993) and "Patterns of Piety", *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (Vol.12, 1994).

¹⁸ . See, for example, J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975) ch. 17, and John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950), ch. 5.

¹⁹ . Quoted in John F.Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, KA, 1943), 173. The Mennonite Brethren congregations of American (U.S. and Canada) were part of a "Bund" or association; in Mennonite historiography this is usually translated Conference.

²⁰ . David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change* (Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Pub., 1993), 2.

²¹ . This paper, the *Friedensstimme*, first published in 1903 by Abraham Kroeker of Halbstadt, South Russia, was a private venture but he was a member of the Mennonite Brethren church and the periodical was considered the group's semi-official organ.

²² .Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Making Their Own America: Assimilation Theory and the German Peasant Pioneer* (New York: Berg Publishers, 1990); Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review*, (83, 1978).

²³ . See overview in Wayne A. Wiegand, "Introduction: Theoretical Foundations for Analyzing Print Culture as Agency and Practice in a Diverse Modern America", in Danky and Wiegand, *Print Culture in a Diverse America* (University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1-12; quote on 1.

Footnotes to Chapter ONE

- 1 . John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 80. About a third of the Russian Mennonite population immigrated to Canada and the United States between 1874 and 1880. Although the number of Mennonite Brethren at that time was small, the proportion of those leaving was the same, about a third.
- 2 . See James Urry, *The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889)* (PhD Thesis, 1978).
- 3 . Toews, *A History*, 26-37.
- 4 . Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Churches and Religious Developments in Russia 1850-1914", John Friesen, Ed. *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 156. Other Mennonite groups baptized by pouring or sprinkling water. All Mennonites, however, practice adult rather than infant baptism.
- 5 . An example of this self-perception is seen in the *Zionsbote* obituary, 6 January 1926, of Margaretha Becker, who is described as belonging to "the early persecuted Christians at the founding of our Mennonite Brethren Church."
- 6 . John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren and Conversion," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993), 78.
- 7 . John F. Harms, *Eine Lebensreise von Anfang bis zum baldigen Ende* (Hillsboro, Kansas), 4. These children were exemplary and eager students, Harms says, but also belonged to the landless class of the village. Harms was of a well-to-do landed family. This may have been a factor in the parents' decision, but Harms suggests religious differences were the reason.
- 8 . Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Churches", 155.
- 9 . Quoted in Dueck, "Mennonite Churches", 159.
- 10 . The major reason for leaving, as articulated by those who emigrated, was the threat to faith and religious autonomy posed by new government policies of russification, especially the universal conscription law of 1874. Those who stayed in Russia eventually negotiated a form of alternative service that they felt preserved the principle of nonresistance, but to many who left this was a dangerous spiritual compromise. [See for example, Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, trans. Helen Janzen (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981).]
Mennonite historians have written extensively about the 1870s migration and continue to debate its motivations. [John B. Toews, "Nonresistance and Migration in the 1870s: Two Personal Views" *Mennonite Life* (June 1986) 10, listed 17 articles or books written about the event to 1986. Recent additions include articles by P. Albert Koop, Harry Loewen, and the important work of James Urry in *The Closed and the Open*.] The larger context of European migration in that period was the industrial revolution which began in England in the eighteenth century and swept across Europe in the nineteenth, with its huge increases in population through higher birth rates and falling death rates. [Gerald Friesen, "Immigrant Communities 1870-1940: The Struggle for Cultural Survival" in R. Douglas Francis and Donald L. Smith, eds. *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1986) 165.] In the Mennonite colonies too, emigration was driven not only by the religious dissent mentioned above, but by economic factors, kinship considerations, and a complex web of tensions over land and authority. "To put it bluntly," stated James Urry, "the Mennonite migration was in part a series of separations, schisms might be more accurate, of Mennonites from Mennonites." [James Urry, "The Russian State, the Mennonite World and the Migration from Russia to North America in the 1870s" in *Mennonite Life* (March 1991), 11-16.]
- 11 . Timothy L. Smith's important essay, "Religion and Ethnicity in America" showed that emigrants "regrouped on this side of the Atlantic into larger aggregations that both preserved and revised inherited patterns of language, religion, and regional culture." (1158). This "dynamic relationship between religion and ethnicity" taking place in the New World is often overlooked by Mennonite historians, who, noting schisms, seem to imply static models for

original groups. Mennonite Brethren on the frontier gained members from other Mennonite or German-speaking groups and also lost members to the Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists and others. The Hillsboro (Kansas) MB Church, which became the most important MB center of the early period, is an example of religion as an organizing impulse for immigrants. The church was "born" out of a revival among West Prussian and Polish Mennonites in 1880-81. These were baptized by a Mennonite Brethren minister 40 miles west and thus became MB. Smith pointed out that migration itself was often a theologizing experience. Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review*, 83 (1978): 1155-85.

12 . John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950), 80. These figures refer to adult members. Numbers jumped significantly in the 1920s with a second large Mennonite emigration from Russia to North America of some 20,000, many of them Mennonite Brethren and all settling in Canada.

In 1971 the Mennonite Brethren were the second largest Mennonite group in Canada (17,982) and the third largest in the United States (14,767). [John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 438.]

13 . See Abe Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922* ((Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1997).

14 . Theron L. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 288-9 and 292.

15 . Al Reimer, "The Print Culture of the Russian Mennonites 1870-1930", in John Friesen, Ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 223.

16 . Helen Gates Kolb, *Bless the Lord, O my Soul: A Biography of Bishop John Fretz Funk 1835-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1964), 101-2. See also Clarence Hiebert, ed. *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook about Mennonite Immigrants from Russia 1870-1885* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1975). Much of the material in this scrapbook came from Funk's publications.

17 . This fact is mentioned in some accounts of these papers, but not in other important sources (such as the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* or C. Henry Smith's *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*) and cries out for further research and analysis. There is no indication that the subsidization involved editorial control, but the steam companies were great supporters of immigration, of course, and the rail companies were interested in settling those areas under their jurisdiction; the steamship and rail advertising in the papers must have been part of the deal and the attitudes to pioneering and content at least indirectly affected. Smith's remarks that *Zur Heimath* "with its news from the various western states and Canada as well as Europe and Asia seemed quite cosmopolitan in its outlook...its advertising pages...carried more notices of ship and railroad companies with dates of sailing and price of passage than the great New York dailies" (157) seem somewhat naive in light of this involvement. The Herald of Truth of June 1875 assured its readers and donors to the Board of Guardians fund that all contributions were applied strictly to the aid of the poor, adding, "The expense of [*Zur Heimath*] is paid by the Inman Line Steamship company, and is intended as an advertising sheet for their benefit." (*Brothers in Need*, 238). The *Nebrasker Ansiedler* was financed by the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad; they offered this support to John F. Funk if he would present settlement possibilities in the west. (Bert Friesen in "The History of Die Mennonitische Rundschau" in *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. XIX, No.3, September 1993.) Bert Friesen stated that the railroad stopped supporting the *Ansiedler* when the influx of immigration ended, and that the *Mennonitische Rundschau* was founded in 1880 as a result. I do not know how long the Inman support for *Zur Heimath* lasted.

18 . The *Christlicher Bundesbote* was, then, an ecclesiastical counterpart to the *Zionsbote*. Dennis E. Engbrecht described and charted General Conference publishing in *The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 114-5.

- 19 . Later in its history, however, ownership changed and it became more of a church organ; in 1945 it was sold to the Canadian Mennonite Brethren and is published by them to this day.
- 20 . Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde* (Hillsboro, KS, 1924), 263-280. He included sums, numbers, discussions and recommendations about the paper at the annual conferences, as well as slipping in editorial-type comments on the proceedings.
- 21 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 263, and P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), 521-2.
- 22 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 263-4.
- 23 . *Konferenzberichte der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde von Nord Amerika 1883-1919* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1920), 26.
- 24 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 264. Zion refers to a hill in Jerusalem given wider biblical meaning both as a holy place and as God's chosen people. In New Testament usage it included the church and the heavenly city. The word was used by Mennonite Brethren to refer to the spiritual community one belonged to and the place one was travelling to beyond death.
- 25 . Isaiah 2:3 and Philipians 4:8. These remained on the masthead until the paper discontinued in 1964.
- 26 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 266.
- 27 . While the paper enlarged to eight pages in 1904 this was for American-side readers only; the paper that went to Russia continued to be four pages only; pages 1,2,7 and 8 of the unpaginated paper went to Russia. Editor's note, *Zionsbote*, 11 May 1904.
- 28 . John A. Toews, *A History*, 288.
- 29 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 266.
- 30 . In a 23 March 1904 article titled "Why our readership in Russia is declining" editor Harms suggested three reasons for the drop in circulation: one, the representatives of "open communion" (with groups other than Mennonite Brethren, especially other Mennonites, which had become a controversial issue in the Russian MB church around the turn of the century) were against the *Zionsbote* (presumably because it sided with the opponents of open communion) and neither wrote for the paper, nor read it; second, the new Russian Mennonite paper, the *Friedenstimme*, was displacing the *Zionsbote*, not intentionally but because it could bring news from Russia to its readers more quickly; third, the responsibility of gathering subscription monies and organizing the paper's affairs in the various Russian congregations had, in some cases, become burdensome and some communities now lacked a representative for the *Zionsbote*.
- 31 . The *Herold der Wahrheit* was a publication of John F. Funk's Mennonite Publishing Co. When Funk moved to Elkhart, Indiana in 1867 from Chicago, he brought along a hand-powered press of conventional construction in that day, but also a new Taylor County cylinder press, the first of its kind in Elkhart "where it caused quite a sensation." Kolb, *Bless the Lord*, 65.
- 32 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 270.
- 33 . Biographical details are from Orlando Harms, *Pioneer Publisher: The Life and Times of J.F. Harms* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984) unless footnoted separately.
- 34 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 4. These were typical books circulating in the Russian Mennonite colonies; *Wandelnde Seele* circulated as a German equivalent of *Pilgrim's Progress*. John B. Toews, "Russian Mennonite Intellectual History" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LIII (April 1979), 1488-9.
- 35 . John F. Harms recalled this in a 12 August 1903 *Zionsbote* review of *Ein*

Gnadenwunder in which the author critiqued the Templar Movement. Harms said founder Hoffman's attacks on the atonement (in his brochures of 1877-82) brought him into "spiritual darkness" in his mid-20s.

36 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 10.

37 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 4.

38 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 12. Thiessen later moved to Kansas.

39 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 16.

40 . James Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 45-6.

41 . Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 50.

42 . Harms, *Pioneer Publisher*, 34.

Footnotes to Chapter TWO

- 1 . Harold Innis, "Media in Ancient Empires," from *Empire and Communications* (University of Toronto Press, 1950), excerpted in Crowley and Heyer, *Communication in History*, 29; and Crowley and Heyer, 9.
- 2 . In Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 229.
- 3 . James Carey, "Time, Space, and the Telegraph" (1989) in Crowley and Heyer, *Communication in History*, 154-159 and Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 4 . Kern, introduction.
- 5 . Marvin, 112.
- 6 . "Railroads" in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. V (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1990), 743.
- 7 . Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas," Rudolph J. Vecoli & Suzanne M. Sinke, Eds., *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930* (Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 1991) 42.
- 8 . Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, 1900 original translated by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1981).
- 9 . Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia 1789-1910* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), 592.
- 10 . John F. Harms, *Eine Lebensreise von Anfang bis zum baldigen Enden* (Hillsboro, KS, 1943), 16.
- 11 . Harry Loewen, "A House Divided: Russian Mennonite Nonresistance and Emigration in the 1870s." John Friesen, Ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989).
- 12 . Peter G. Epp, *Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story*, first published 1932, trans and ed. Peter Pauls (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1986), ch. 11.
- 13 . Places and dates of founding with particular reference to Mennonite Brethren migration given in John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 86-93.
- 14 . This could be constructed from *Zionsbote* reports but is taken from Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, KS, 1924), 92-5, 98-100.
- 15 . Harms, *Geschichte*, 100.
- 16 . This was not their first experience with different calendars, however. Mennonites in Polish Prussia and Danzig operated on Gregorian time. When Mennonites emigrated to Russia from 1788 onward, they continued to use the Gregorian system for some time, although aware of the Julian system used by their new host country. The Russian government's request around 1820 that they switch to the Julian Calendar aroused strong reaction among conservative forces and contributed to a schism in the church, because of fears this would bring them closer to religious practices of the Orthodox Church. Eventually the Mennonites in Russia adopted and adapted to the Julian calendar. The annual Mennonite almanacs demonstrated "how, by 1900, Mennonite marking of time was rich, complex and integrated with the world around them". James Urry, "Mennonites Marking Time: A Message for the Millenium" in *Mennonite Historian* XXV (No.4, December 1999), 2.

Another example of this complexity concerns the "Abreiskalendar". Since many American Mennonite Brethren used this calendar, consisting of daily tear-off pages with devotional readings, produced by the Kroekers' publishing firm in Russia, *Zionsbote* editor Harms suggested in the 5 July 1899 *Zionsbote* that both

- dates be printed on the sheets, the Russian date on the left and the American on the right. This suggestion was adopted.
- 17 . The provenance of the word "imagined" as used here is Benedict Anderson's study of the origins of nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). "[A]ll communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact...are imagined," Anderson wrote, "Communities are to be distinguished...by the style in which they are imagined."(6)
- 18 . Maria Wiebe, *Zionsbote*, 29 March 1899.
- 19 . David Kaufer and Kathleen Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change* (Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Pub., 1993), 5.
- 20 . Walter Ong, "Print, Space, and Closure" in Crowley and Heyer, eds., *Communication in History*, 121.
- 21 . The *Zionsbote* was mailed to Russia two issues at once.
- 22 . Victor G. Doerksen, "In Search of a Mennonite Imagination," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* (Vol. 2, 1984), 108-9.
- 23 . Harms, *Eine Lebensreise*, 4.
- 24 . Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), 7.
- 25 . The language of *Reise* shifted to a growing use of battle (*Kampf*) language in the second decade of the 1900s, continuing into the 1920s and 30s. (The number of travel reports also lessened). This may have reflected American MB circumstances of now being more "at home", the influences of the Great War on language, and Fundamentalist-Modernist theological controversies of the period.
- 26 . The *Zionsbote* has been indexed in 3 volumes (1884-1919, 1920-1940, 1941-64), published in 1984. It contains lists of : I. Articles by title and author; II. Article titles without author; III. Subject index; IV. Scripture texts treated in articles; V. Obituaries; VI. Weddings; VII. Congregational and local reports by place. The Index is useful for locating articles written by people, for tracking the history of a particular congregation through reports written from it, or for finding data about people through death or marriage notices. (Marriage notices are listed alphabetically by the man's name only, however.) The weaknesses of the *Zionsbote* Index are its lack of cross-referencing and its broad and often imprecise subject categories. These categories include, for example, general and overlapping subjects such as "answers to prayer", "experiences--testimonies", conversion experiences" and "faith experiences". If a letter was published under a location by-line, furthermore, it would probably be indexed under the place name, even if it was a travel report or personal account of some kind.
- 27 . The occurrence of accounts of migration from Russia corresponds to the trends documented in Jacob Peters' study of Mennonite chain migration to Canada between 1881 and 1914, with the largest numbers between 1891 to 1894, and 1901 to 1903. These waves corresponded to economic circumstances in Russia. Jacob Peters, "The Forgotten Immigrants: The Coming of the 'Late Kanadier', 1881-1914", *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 28, 2000: 129-145.
- 28 . Johann J. Friesen, "Reisebericht", *Zionsbote*, 26 October 1892.
- 29 . An example in religious practice: early "fellowship" meetings of the "brethren" in Molotschna Colony were held "every Saturday afternoon during full moon so that people from other villages could drive home in the moonlight." Jacob P. Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973).
- 30 . Jacob Loewen, "Report" *Zionsbote*, 18 September 1895.

- 31 . No author is given, but this was probably a report by editor Harms for, in the names of those who travelled together listed at the end of the article, his name is given last.
- 32 . Quoted in Kern, 217-8.
- 33 . Norman Cantor, *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times* (New York: Harper Collins Pub., 1997), 39.
- 34 . For example, "Koeniglicher Gnadenszug", *Zionsbote*, 23 July 1890; for an elaborate treatment of this analogy in the form of a dialogue, see "Die Reise", 3 December 1890.
- 35 . Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917*. (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 83.
- 36 . My impression is that an inter-Mennonite paper like the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, without the pressure to maintain unity along confessional lines, was much more outspoken in these matters; my knowledge of this paper is not nearly as extensive as of the *Zionsbote*, but the impression was confirmed in a conversation with Bert Friesen who indexed the *Rundschau*.

- 1 .It could be argued that this "necessity" was eventually, as the Mennonite Brethren grew in numbers, driven by conference elites and the institutional structures of a denominational impetus, but at this period it seems safe to say because of earlier geographic and extensive friendship and kinship networks, their status as "strangers" in their host societies, German speakers in Russian or American societies, this was a widely shared value of laity as well as the leaders of the congregations; the same needs attracted them to inter-Mennonite papers such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau*; personal and congregational interests tended to overlap.
- 2 . See minutes of Russian MB conferences in Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922* (Kindred Productions, 1997) and North American MB conferences in *Konferenzberichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde von Nord Amerika 1883-1919* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1920).
- 3 . Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), 37-50.
- 4 . Ong, 7 and 121.
- 5 . Ong, 132.
- 6 . Eisenstein, Elizabeth L. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1983). This is a summary of two earlier volumes.
- 7 . Gerald Friesen in his history of Canada, for example, charts development from "oral-traditional societies" to "textual-settler societies" to "print-capitalist national societies" to "screen-capitalist societies". *Citizens and Nations: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2000).
- 8 . Ong, 26. An example is Homeric poetry. Milman Parry's important discovery of the oral nature of this "written" text, in fact, contributed heavily to Ong's thinking on these subjects.
- 9 . Ong, 68.
- 10 . Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), quoted in Arnold Synder, "Orality, Literacy, and the Study of Anabaptism", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65 (1991), 377.
- 11 . Synder, quoting Robert Scribner, 374.
- 12 . Delbert Plett, "Print Culture of the East Reserve 1874-1930", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (October, 1994) and Al Reimer, "The Print Culture of the Russian Mennonites 1870-1930", John Friesen, Ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989) have documented in some detail what print sources were produced by and available in specific Mennonite societies, the latter lamenting how little there was and the former insisting how much there was. These are good overviews but need to be enlarged by greater attention to differentiation between print materials and their use. (A rare and treasured book of doctrine passed down within the family and studied by a church leader represents a rather different practice of literacy than a newspaper read by the entire family and then used for wrapping purposes, for example.) What were the material values of the "literature" in question? Who was reading and interpreting? What authority did various texts have? Royden Loewen opens an intriguing line of communications inquiry with a somewhat different kind of written text, in his anthology of Mennonite diaries, *From the Inside Out* (University of Manitoba Press, 1999). These show that written texts not only reveal social and religious contexts but emerge from and are shaped by them.
- 13 . James Urry's work is the most thorough and probably most credible to date, see "The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889)", (PhD Thesis, 1978). Also Al Reimer, "The Print Culture of the Russian Mennonites 1870-1930", John B. Toews, "Mennonite Experience in Russia" and Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education in Russia" in John Friesen, Ed.,

Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988.

14 . John B. Toews, "Mennonite Experience", 143, and Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education", 76.

15 . Urry, 344.

16 . Urry, 399.

17 . Urry, quote 750, the "open order" 734-759.

18 . Urry, 576.

19 . Urry, 223.

20 . Al Reimer, *passim*. and Ens, 93-4.

21 . Gustav E. Reimer and G.R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar: Cornelius Jansen and the Great Mennonite Migration, 1974* (Newton, KS: ;Mennonite Publication Office, 1956), 52, 66. From bills paid to printers it seems Jansen printed at least 7 different pamphlets.

22 . Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and its Control* (New York: Harper & Bros. Pub., 1922), 10 and 79.

23 . For example, A. Kroeker, "Einige Gedanken ueber unser Lesen", *Zionsbote* 20 May 1891. The author was probably Abraham J. Kroeker, the "father" of MB publishing in Russia, publisher of the *Christlicher Familienkalendar* (beginning 1897), the *Christlicher Abreiskalendar* (beginning 1899) and the *Friedenstimme* (beginning 1903). In this article his "principles" of reading include reading the Bible; evaluating other Christian writings; reading a daily "political" newspaper, depending on one's position (for others a weekly Christian paper has enough of the "world", though "in a certain sense everyone should know what is going on in the world, in order to evaluate the signs of the times, to see when the fig tree puts forth leaves, Luke 21:30"); reading good books for one's vocation (here assumed to be farming); avoiding "story-books" (worldly romances and novels); encouraging children to read, watching over their reading, not forcing the Bible on them so they hate it.

Other *Zionsbote* articles on reading: 1 September 1897; "Kannst du gut lesen?" JWF 25 February 1898; "Ueber das Lesen der Romane" 16 March 1898; "Was wird in deinem Hause gelesen?" J.W. Fast, 10 and 17 October 1901; A. Kroeker, "Unser Schriftenverbreitung" 25 October 1901.

24 . David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change* (Laurence Erlbaum Assoc. Pub., 1993), 23-4.

25 . Jacob P. Bekker, one of the 18 original founders of the Mennonite Brethren, described the "services of edification" of the secession group: Various members read from the Bible and different ones "would testify about matters of special importance to them. The women were not allowed to speak at these meetings." Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), 95. Heinrich Voth described a meeting during his itinerant ministry in Manitoba. He said the men brought Bibles and hymnbooks and the women brought handwork [projects they were doing for missions]; "while their men read and discuss God's Word, they wish to quietly listen to and receive it in their hearts, but at the same time be active in mission work..." Report, *Zionsbote* 29 January 1890.

26 . I have been tracking every instance of women's writing (names were usually given) in the *Zionsbote*; so far, in the extant copies from 1890 through 1900 I have listed 250 pieces of writing by women. Of these, 116 are conversion stories, the rest are "experiences" of various kinds including reports of travel, health, death, and participation in missions. As stated, editor Harms encouraged women to write; his wife Margaretha obliged on several occasions. Many women wrote only once; some wrote fairly regularly. Although women wrote in the more personal genres of the paper, and their experiences, not surprisingly, usually centered in home and body, they wove pieties and scriptural allusions

through their writing no less skillfully than men. Although they placed their writing in an acceptable context by various means such as those mentioned, many of them did speak and often with considerable confidence.

27 . Noble Prentis in Cornelius Krahn, ed. *From the Steppes to the Prairies (1874-1949)* (Newton, KS:Mennonite Publishing Office, 1949), 16 and 22.

28 . In her unpublished autobiography "What a Heritage," Elizabeth Schultz, who migrated with her parents to Nebraska in the 1880s, wrote, "We had a box with cards in it with Bible verses on them; and I would draw one out each morning as a comfort...there was one of these boxes in every home we came into."

29 . Bekker, 115.

30 . Bekker, 95.

31 . Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), 211-212.

32 . John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 30.

33 . Pastor Dobbert, quoted in Friesen, 209.

34 . Friesen, 208.

35 . Ong, 283.

36 . Abe Dueck, "Mennonite Churches and Religious Developments in Russia 1850-1914" in John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia*, 154.

37 . John A. Toews, 64-66.

38 . John A. Toews, 70.

39 . Abe Dueck, 155. Historian P.M. Friesen opined in his inimitable manner that in contrast to the foolishness that had expressed itself in "their more intimate church life" in this period, "In their official documents--a remarkable guidance of God--the 'brethren' have been kept from enunciating any kind of religious nonsense." Friesen, 262-3.

40 . The differences in practice that marked the early years have persisted in assessments to this day, though they are by now rather stereotypical. Re. faith, "MB's talk it," someone said recently, "GC's walk it." (GC's here standing in for the Russian Kirchliche Mennonites; strictly speaking the General Conference was an American Mennonite movement with which many Russian Mennonite congregations affiliated.) Discussion at Jubilee Mennonite Church, autumn, 2000.

41 . Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale University Press, 1967), 114.

42 . Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 75.

43 . The question of how the sacred "spoken" Word related to the paper version of it is reflected in some discussion in the *Zionsbote* in response to a reader's question whether old, used-up Bibles could be burned. The answers were varied: it is no sin to bury bodies, so no sin to bury or burn Bibles; they should be buried, citing passages re. burial; scatter the pages so others find them; there is no law, the paper with its letters is impermanent like all other words that are printed; loose pages can be a blessing to others, re-bind for the poor or wrap things in them, or store in safekeeping for the time of the Antichrist.

44 . Obituary of Jacob J. Kroeker, *Zionsbote* 30 Jan. 1929.

45 . Michael Schudson, "The New Journalism" in David Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History* (New York: Longman Publishers, 1995), 160. Schudson describes the two kinds of newspaper journalism of the period, information journalism and story journalism, as well as the moral dimensions generally

associated with the two types.

46 . Schudson, 162.

47 . This is not to say that such techniques, of either informational or story journalism, did not exert a competing pressure even upon a small group paper. As we have seen, people were reading other papers; their appetites and/or expectations were surely being developed in these encounters, and the difficulty of holding people as subscribers and readers in a less sophisticated conversation increased.

48 . Friesen, 515. Friesen goes on to ascribe this modesty in reporting, not to Christian humility, but to racial ancestry! "The Mennonite is the taciturn, reserved 'Boer' with the exception of the fact that he does not fire guns or cannons; Boer and Mennonite have the same ancestry, predominantly Dutch."

49 . It would be interesting to explore the itinerant ministry within the theory of the migrant and his relation to innovation and authority. (See chapter 10, "Migration and Authority" in David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change*.) Sociologists argue that the stranger is better equipped than locals for some roles because he/she is not "enslaved by the community's local biases, stereotypes, and narrow habits of inference." (394) Although the importance of migration has usually been studied in the areas of scientific and intellectual innovation, the idea has been extended to other areas such as political innovation; Peter the Great and Catherine I are two historical figures whose innovative leadership was linked to travel. The concept might have religious or immigrant application as well.

50 . Abe Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1997), 87-8.

Footnotes to Chapter Four

- ¹ . Charles Tilly, "Citizenship, Identity and Social History" in *International Review of Social History* 40 (Suppl.3, 1995), 7.
- ² . Tilly, 5.
- ³ . This distinction is based on definitions of culture by Clifford Geertz and Raymond Williams (culture as the way one experiences, explores, reproduces, and communicates meaning) followed by many scholars, here drawn from Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 225 and 292-2, n.14,17.
- ⁴ . Mention of Kertesz' book and this quote are in Janice Radway, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Function of Romance Reading" in Mukerji and Schudson, *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 465.
- ⁵ . Carl F. Kaestle, *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (Yale University Press, 1991), 50.
- ⁶ . Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Italian Immigrant Press and the Construction of Social Reality, 1850-1920" in Danky and Wiegand, eds. *Print Culture in a Diverse America* (University of Illinois Press, 1998), 19.
- ⁷ . Radway, op. cit., 474, see also 469. The subject of readers and reading is only hinted at here, but there is a large body of scholarship about the reader and the reading process, and a variety of theoretical approaches. Jane Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of literary Response" in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, Jane Tompkins, ed. (John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), 201-232 and Janice Radway, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Function of Romance Reading" in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture*, 465-486 provide helpful overviews.
- ⁸ . Tinsley and Kaestle, "Autobiographies and the History of Reading: The Meaning of Literacy in Individual Lives," ch. 8 in Kaestle et.al., *Literacy in the United States*.
- ⁹ . These are the words that come up in a survey of 1890 *Zionsbote* writing; similar expressions appear throughout the period.
- ¹⁰ . Janet Emig, "Writing as a Mode of Learning" in Richard E. Young and Yameng Liu, eds., *Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Invention in Writing* (Hermagoras Press, 1994), 95.
- ¹¹ . "A Weak Brother," *Zionsbote*, 12 February 1890.
- ¹² . David S. Kaufer and Kathleen M. Carley, *Communication at a Distance: The Influence of Print on Sociocultural Organization and Change* (Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc. Pub., 1993), 39. "A content can be original in a strong sense because it offers new ideas or, in a weaker sense, because it offers new treatments, emphases, or presentation of known ideas to novitiates."
- ¹³ . Kaufer and Carley, 39 and 45.
- ¹⁴ . Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 4.
- ¹⁵ . Kath. George, "Answer to Prayer," *Zionsbote*, 5 August 1896. Another example was Andreas Heier, 1 March 1899, who had vowed to report if his son who had run away would return.
- ¹⁶ . Ailments attributed to nerves were common at the time; it is not possible to say whether this was a nervous breakdown or another illness. Conversation with Dr. Helmut Huebert, fall 2000.
- ¹⁷ . Reference is to Matthew 7:13, that is, "the broad way that leads to destruction".

¹⁸ . Baptism in the Mennonite churches of Russia were held annually, after catechism classes, on Pentecost Sunday.

¹⁹ . This information comes from an obituary written by Sara's elderly second husband; he says she was born in Alexanderkrone. The village was founded in 1857 by Molotschna settlers, so she was likely born elsewhere and moved with her parents as a small child.

²⁰ . Theron Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), 288-9.

²¹ . John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, CA: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature, 1975), 93-4.

²² . The reference is Luke 16:22, from a story Jesus told about a beggar and a rich man.

²³ . For example, J.B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America 1860 - 1990* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993); Paul Toews, ed., *Pilgrims and Strangers: Essays in Mennonite Brethren History* (Fresno, CA.: Center of MB Studies, 1977); Peter J. Klassen, "The Historiography of the Birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church: An Introduction" in Abraham Friesen, ed., *P.M. Friesen and His History* (Fresno, CA: Center for MB Studies, 1979).

²⁴ . Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), 27-30. The personalizing of religious faith, however, should not be confused with making it individualistic, Timothy L. Smith reminds us. "The many forms of religious revivalism...were not 'individualistic' in the usual sense that term suggests; though they made faith a profoundly personal experience, their aim and outcome was to bind individuals to new communities of belief and action." Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), 1179.

²⁵ . Heinrich Balzer's obituary, in the 16 February 1898 *Zionsbote*, said of this incident that "they had to give it [the child's body] into strange hands, to let it be buried [by others]."

²⁶ . Ferdinand P. Schultz, *A History of the Settlement of German Mennonites from Russian and Mountain Lake, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: published by author, 1938), 55. The information in these paragraphs about the settlement at Mountain Lake is taken from this book.

²⁷ . Schultz, 55.

²⁸ . Schultz, 67.

²⁹ . J.F. Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, KS, 1924), 87.

³⁰ . Schultz, 67. He says they were attracted "by the prospect of easily making large profits." (68) It must also be remembered, however, that Mennonite families were large and the newer areas made it easier for children to get established.

³¹ . The references cited by Sara Balzer in quotation marks, as they appear: Isaiah 42:3/Matthew 12:20; Luke 18:13; John 16:33; Romans 5:20. The poetic reference unknown.

³² . Schultz, 59.

³³ . Schultz, 84-5.

³⁴ . John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren and Conversion", *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993), 76-97. Toews says there are over 150 conversion recollections, including 65 female accounts, but his number is low. There were 113 female conversions in this period alone. The Index, which may have provided his figures, is inadequate in subject classification; also Toews says the years 1892-3 are lost. They are not micro-filmed, but a good number of the issues of those years exist (xeroxed copies at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies

in Winnipeg). Toews also uses his analysis of the conversion accounts in "Patterns of Piety Among the Early Brethren (1860-1900), *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 12 (1994).

³⁵ . John B. Toews, "Patterns of Piety", 139.

³⁶ . John B. Toews, "The Early Mennonite Brethren", 91.

³⁷ . These two examples, respectively, from accounts by Elisabeth Harder, *Zionsbote*, 26 Aug 1903, and Franz Wiens, *Zionsbote*, 19 August 1908.

³⁸ . Other sources for Sara and Heinrich Balzer's lives: *Zionsbote* 15 December 1909 and 9 July 1919; *Mennonitische Rundschau* 26 May and 2 Jun 1886. The report of the funeral service of the last remaining child reminds one of the power of an especially appropriate text: the reporter to the *Rundschau* said H. Voth had preached on John 11, giving the parents particularly verse 35 as a comfort. The reader who knew the text or looked it up would encounter the two words "Jesus wept."

³⁹ . By this time, Heinrich and Sara had four more children and Sara was pregnant.

⁴⁰ . If ritual contains meaning, it may also deaden it, as discussed by MB philosopher Delbert Wiens's *New Wineskins for Old Wine: A Study of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1965) in which he described the shift from "living in" to "talking about" an experience, in which the "fluid freshness of poetic modes hardened into...[MB] forms of ritual cant." (23)

Footnotes to Conclusion

¹ . Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 150.

² . Friesen, 152.

³ . Miller and Marzik, *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), preface.

⁴ . Frederick Luebke, cited in Dennis Engbrecht, *The Americanization of a Rural Immigrant Church: The General Conference Mennonites in Central Kansas, 1874-1939* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 70.

⁵ . Engbrecht, 70.

⁶ . Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America", *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), 1168-1173, 1174.

⁷ . Thomas Luckman quoted by Rudolph Vecoli, "Cult and Occult in Italian-American Culture: The Persistence of a Religious Heritage", in Miller and Marzik, *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America*, 26.

⁸ . Timothy L. Smith, 1165 and 1167.

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