

NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES



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Canadian Moravian Historical Society, Edmonton Chapter
2304-38 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6L 4K9

What Have We Been Up To?

The Canadian Moravian Historical Society has held four Board meetings since the April 2017 Annual Historical Society meeting. The April meeting was an organizational meeting for the new board. After a summer recess we held a working meeting at the Moravian Museum in the old Moravian Church, Bruderheim. Due to dwindling interest it had been decided that the museum should be closed and the artifacts or displays should be moved to the archives at Millwoods for storage or status determination. This project will be ongoing.

The next two meetings were routine in nature. Discussions continued on the disposition of the museum. It was agreed that the large display case would be moved to the archives for storage and display of the museum items. The 2018 annual meeting was discussed and date set for Saturday, April 14, 2018. The meeting will start at 2:00PM with snacks and beverages. The theme will be the history of Singstunden with time for singing and sharing. Please keep the date open and plan to attend. If you have attended a Singstunde and have some photos, bring them to the meeting.

We are thankful for all who have served on the Board in the past and look forward to their on-going support in the future. We have Board positions to fill. If interested, contact a Board member listed below.

Following is a list of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society Board (Edmonton Chapter)

Board President - Esther Vitt Gonzalez, 780-966-3766
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Vice President, Newsletter - Joel Henkelman
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Secretary - vacant

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My Testimony

When going through boxes of old letters and correspondence your editor found the following type written testimony by Rev. Ferdinand Drebert. Rev. Drebert immigrated to Canada and on to Edmonton in 1893 when he was 4 years old. He grew up in the Moravian Community of Bruderfeld. In 1912, just before completion of his training at the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, he accepted a call to the Moravian Mission in Alaska. Over the next 42 years he had a direct and important impact on the Moravian Mission work in Alaska. He learned to speak the Eskimo language and it was noted by several elderly Eskimos that he spoke the language better than most Eskimos. His influence continues today through his translation of the New Testament and many Moravian songs and liturgies. Following is his testimony in his own words.

I believe that God called me early to Mission service. Nothing fascinated me like missionary reports, biographies, magazines and books. It was thrilling to read about the conversion of the blacks in Australia. My fond hope was to follow the trail of Livingstone in Africa. But as yet I was not a child of God or worthy to become a missionary. I was a bad boy, always picking a fight with other boys and getting into mischief.

At the age of thirteen I was permitted to go with my older brother Julius to be his shepherd for the summer on the shores of Big Hay Lake. It was a coveted experience for me. But I also received a never-to-be-forgotten lesson there. I had one experience which brought me shame and regret until this day. For I was not a faithful shepherd. One afternoon I had fallen asleep, and when I awoke the sheep had scattered far and wide. The shepherd dog helped me to round them up, but a small number was missing. I did not have time to hunt for them as it was near evening and I had to drive the flock home before it got dark. With shame I had to admit that I had lost some of the sheep. How I wished and prayed all night that the lost might be found. We found them the next day, all dead, six in number. A coyote had slaughtered them. It was all my fault and because of my negligence. I had been unfaithful to my trust. The experience still haunts me to this day.



Rev. Drebert. Photo taken about the time he received his call to the Alaska Mission.

It also constantly reminds me that Christ has called me to be a shepherd over His flock. Have I always been faithful to my trust? Or have precious souls been lost because of my negligence? Have some died in their sins because I was too negligent or timid to warn them? What kind of an account will I give of myself when I meet the chief Shepherd, my Lord and Savior?

The winter following my summer with the sheep I took catechetical instruction. Our pastor Brother Hoyler was a faithful shepherd and made plain to us the way of salvation and the necessity of making a decision. Then to a spiritual refreshing came upon the congregation that winter. We shall let Bishop Hoyler himself tell about it in his account "Pioneering in Western Canada," I quote: "On the 9th of January, 1905, special evangelistic services were begun in the Bruderfeld church. The very first night it became apparent that God intended to manifest Himself to us. From evening to evening the interest grew. People heard what the Lord had done on the southern fringe of the parish and in the city of Strathcona. They expected equally great things in their own church. So they came in large numbers on foot and by bob-sled. Some walked four and five miles in

bitter cold weather. The services sometimes lasted from two to three hours without a dull moment. There was no excitement, but just a deep earnest spirit. We ministers helped each other out at these meetings, and so there were generally two short addresses. We all preached the atonement, the necessity of a new birth and the readiness of the Saviour to receive all sinful men. There was a lot of hearty singing, with and without hymn books.

Opportunity was given for voluntary prayer. As many as twenty to thirty availed themselves of this privilege each night. Young and old participated. There were many broken halting prayers, which betokened deep spiritual anxiety. Others struck a note of joy and praise. We did not ask people to raise their hand or stand up or come forward to a mourner's bench. We simply invited them to pour out their hearts in prayer directly to God as we all lay upon our knees before the throne of Grace. We recognized the voices of those who prayed and singled them out for interviews after the meeting or we visited them in their homes the next day and dealt with them personally in the quiet of their own abode.

About the third night after the meetings began in Bruderfeld, we had the joy of hearing the first notes of praise and thanksgiving for peace and pardon received. Thereafter these testimonies increased almost nightly. A wave of spiritual power swept through the congregation, gripping particularly, many of the young people. One of the evenings was set apart especially for them, although everybody was welcome to attend that youth meeting. The church was crowded. There were many young people in Bruderfeld in those days. That night, I think, they were all in church. The address was on the words "The Master is come and calleth for thee." Many took part in prayer that night. And such prayers. Prayers mostly by the young men and the young women in the audience." Unquote.

I am happy to quote the above account because it is part of my testimony. I was in it. I remember well those meetings when we knelt by the hour on the cold floor. I had great struggles within. The old man within a wild boy's heart did not yield readily. But in the end I could not resist the claims of Christ, and decided to yield my life to him. So the day before our confirmation when Brother Hoyler asked me, in a private interview

concerning my spiritual state, I could readily say that I had yielded myself to Christ.

Then in the same interview he asked me if I had given any thought to my life plan as to what I would like to be some day. Just as readily I replied that I always had a desire to become a missionary to primitive people. He was happy to hear this and promptly devised plans whereby I could enter Moravian College and Seminary to prepare for mission service.

A young person joins the Church through confirmation or adult baptism, making a public confession of his faith. This is not necessarily being born again or making his commitment to Christ his Saviour. It could happen at this time or before. But accepting Christ as his Saviour is a separate act. It is making a covenant with his Lord under the New Covenant. When he is born of the Spirit he is a new creation. "If a man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold all things are become new". 2 Cor.5:17. No one has actually witnessed his new birth. But it should soon be apparent through a changed disposition and through his acts. He will show his love to the Saviour by regular attendance at church and Sunday School, by his eagerness to study the Bible, his willingness to contribute his services and his money to the Lord. He will love his fellow man, thereby manifesting his love to God, and keep himself unspotted from the world.

If he has dedicated his life to God he will readily say, "I will do what you want me to do, I will go where you want me to go. Here am I send me". When we see the shortage of ministers and missionaries we cannot help but believe that it is because some whom God might have called were not willing to be called. On the other hand it is possible that some have answered the call of the Church, but who have not had a definite inner experience and whose testimony therefore is weak.

It was a memorable day for me when, before I graduated from Seminary, I received my appointment from Mission Board for service in Alaska in 1912. This service terminated 42 years later when we were forced to retire for health reasons. My feet just did not stand the strains of traveling and work anymore in the cold climate.

Our work among the Eskimos was not always pleasant and easy. In fact it was sometimes accompanied by dangers and hardships outwardly and by heart-aches and disappointments spiritually. But at such times we always experienced God's faithfulness, His guidance and protection. I have experienced so many close calls that I sometimes wonder why I am still here. But because I am here by God's grace I must witness to His faithfulness.



Rev. Drebert and Rev. Butzin in the Mission Office in Bethel, Alaska shortly after his arrival.

In Bethel, the metropolis of the Kuskokwim, our problems have multiplied due to the by-products of civilization. There are always those who are easily misled. I decided that we needed a more evangelistic type of preaching, that we needed regular evangelistic campaigns. Two other missionaries felt the same way about it, and we undertook to pray and prepare for such meetings and a needed revival. None of us had had any previous experience in this. So it was with trepidation that we announced the special meetings after three months of intensive prayer preparation. But the Lord wonderfully guided us and we were blessed with revival. We witnessed the power of the Gospel through the work of the Holy Spirit in definitely changed lives. The Christian life became a joyous life for many of them. They enjoyed attending church and Bible study. They made new discoveries in God's word every day. Some were saved from the curse of drinking. Others decided to give up gambling, cursing or smoking. Others decided to become titheers.

We ourselves received a blessing from these services. The Lord put it into our hearts to bring the full tithe of all our income. Until now we felt

that we could not afford to tithe on our meager missionary salary. And was not the law of tithing meant for the Jews? But the Lord revealed to us that for the Christian who loves Him, it is not a must - but a privilege. And if we trust Him we can prove Him for the blessing promised in Mal.3:10. We have proved Him and accepted His challenge and can testify to His faithfulness. We have all we need. Often things come to us unexpectedly. If we love our Lord we get a great joy out of denying ourselves, for His sakes, some things that others may not want to give up.



Rev. Drebert with Laplander families Sara and Spein. Laplanders were brought to Alaska to teach the Eskimos how to maintain herds of commercial reindeer. Rev. Drebert tended to their spiritual needs as well as the needs of the Eskimos.

Another blessing that came to me out of the evangelistic services is the "Morning Watch." I had undertaken the morning watch prior to, and in preparation for, the special services. But I found it so helpful and experienced God's answer to prayer that I have kept it up ever since. I feel that I need it, first of all for my own spiritual needs. Satan is always ready to distract us and tempt us in many ways. In my own strength I cannot combat him. I need it in my service of intercession. There are so many causes and so many individuals who need my prayers that cannot afford to neglect my daily tryst with my Lord. I should be concerned for my own family and friends, for the sick and needy. I pray daily for revival in the Church. Christ prayed and agonized for me in Gethsemane. Even now at the right hand of the Father, He is interceding for me and you. It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and accept His gift of salvation.

Oh the prayerlessness of the Church today. No more mid-week prayer services in most churches. So few prayer groups. No wonder the Church has lost her witness and her power. When Christ was here on earth he was in constant communion with the Father. But He had no home of his own, no place to lay his head, no prayer closet. In order to find a secluded place where he could commune unmolested with the Father He often went to Gethsemane. That was where Judas knew he could find Him. Sometimes He would go out before day break to the mountains on the shore of Lake Galilee. Yes and He even spent whole nights in prayer. It must have been damp and cold on the rocks. It makes me feel so unworthy and ashamed, because I have a comfortable room for my prayer closet, and even a soft rug to kneel on, and no one to disturb me. Why do I not pray more? If Jesus felt he needed it, we need it so much more. Then too, we have Christ's example, teaching, His wonderful prayer promises and the Holy Spirit to pray with us and for us. Oh that we might learn to pray more.



Rev. and Mrs. Drebert with Pauline Henkelman in front of their retirement home, the Grey Cottage, Nazareth, PA

The present world crisis demands it of the Church. She alone has the solution for the problem of atheism and our moral decline. It is a battle that must be fought on our knees. We are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Eph.6:12.