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FOREWARD

This issue of the Canadian Moravian Historical Magazine is dedicated to the memory of the late Rev. Dr. Kurt H. Vitt. Br. Kurt left us on December 9, 2000, a great loss especially to those of us in the church history fraternity.

In this issue we feature the initial publication of an essay which Kurt Vitt had recently completed. This work was undertaken at the invitation of Dr. Bassler, a professor at Memorial University, St. Johns, Nfld., who was preparing a compilation of historical accounts for publication. The assignment was challenging in that it was to be a fully researched and documented scholarly work, yet brief. In the end, Dr. Bassler could not include this essay in his compilation, which is to our benefit, since we can publish it here.

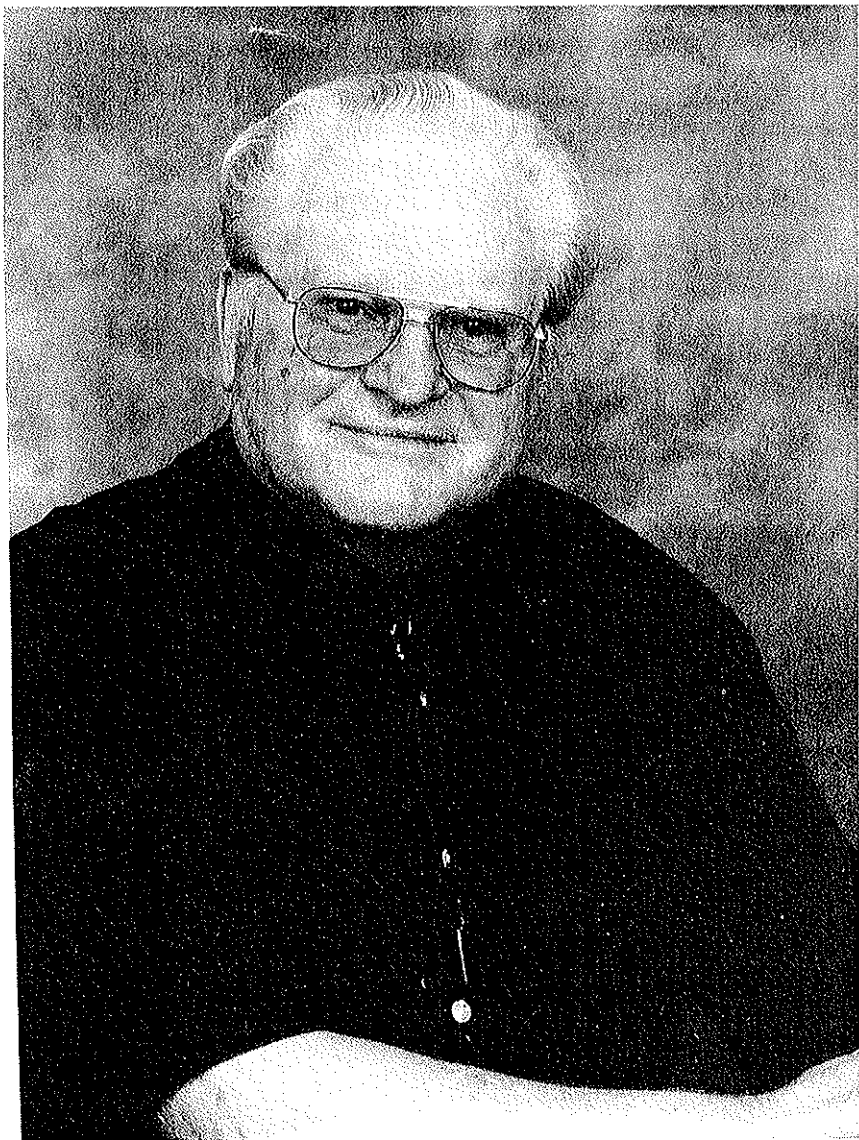
The essay referred to above is but another example of Kurt Vitt's dedication to the cause of church history. He was dedicated to fact finding and his work always reflected detailed research and diligent investigation. He was rigorous in his approach and the many accounts that he produced are all illustrative of this approach. On page 9 in "The Founding of the Moravian Church in Western Canada and the Andreas Lilge Story," he said, "the task before us is to write the "History of the Moravian Church in Canada." That means to research and establish the facts which led to the founding and formation of the Moravian Church in Canada, and the subsequent development to the present time of the congregations and organization of that church." Not only was Kurt Vitt a faithful fact finder, but he was a willing worker who gave so freely of himself in sharing what he discovered.

I had the privilege of sharing in Kurt Vitt's love of church history. He was an inspiration to me as we served together over the years as founding board members of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society. I helped where I could in editing his numerous works. It was always a joy to work with him. He was open to suggestions and always willing to redraft a paragraph if it could be improved.

The article by Stephen Hishey gives us insight into the side of Kurt Vitt that was devoted to the Mission work of the Moravian Church and to making it known. The interaction of Kurt Vitt and Stephen Hishey gave rise to the Rajpur Foster Children Project. The project was started by Kurt Vitt and is still a force today in helping to educate destitute and impoverished children at the Moravian Institute in North India.

On page 88 of Kurt Vitt's "The Founding of the Moravian Church in Western Canada and the Andreas Lilge Story," a tantalizing reference is made to a Mr. Morton of England who had made an offer to give financial aid if the Moravian Church would send Home Missionaries into Western Canada to care for the spiritual wants of the immigrants. This led to some investigations to learn more about Mr. Morton. This information is included in this issue.

Wm. G. Brese
Editor



The Rev. Dr. Kurt H. Vitt
April 14, 1931 – December 9, 2000

Kurt Vitt's life was one of exemplary Christian service. This man was a friend, missionary, pastor, administrator, scholar, writer, educator and historian. It was our good fortune to have him in our midst to be a founding director of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society. His legacy is manifold. His historical writings will live on to bless and inspire those who follow.

A CENTURY OF MORAVIAN PRESENCE IN WESTERN CANADA

THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF THE MORAVIAN PRESENCE IN THE WEST

By Dr. Kurt H. Vitt

INTRODUCTION:

This essay will cover in outline form:

The Origins of the Moravian settlements in western Canada

1. The Growth of the Moravian work over the years
2. The World War situations and Moravian Pacifism
3. The Moravian Youth Movement and Camp Van Es
4. Modern Times and Developments
5. The Nature of the Moravian Presence in western Canada

Origins

The Origins of Moravian Settlements in western Canada are quite different from the establishment of Moravian Mission stations in Northern Labrador¹ or the founding of Fairfield in Upper Canada, i.e. in southern Ontario.² The work in Labrador was initiated by European Moravian missionaries among the native Inuit as a pioneer mission ministry. Fairfield was founded by German Moravian missionaries to provide a refuge for the Christian Delaware Indians from the United States.³

Moravians, who had been served previously in Central and South Eastern Poland and Southern Russia, i.e. Volhynia,⁴ by evangelists and pastors of the Moravian Diaspora ministry from Herrnhut, Germany,⁵ came to western Canada as part of the emigration movements from the European continent in the late 19th century, especially from western Russia. They came as Christian immigrants, seeking economic, religious, and political freedom. Invited by the government of the Dominion of Canada to settle in the wide open spaces of the prairies, they left behind what had become an increasingly oppressive situation in Volhynia, Russia, i.e. the western Ukraine. For over 100 years, German settlers had worked hard to clear land and established homesteads and cultivate farms in Poland and later in Volhynia, which were supposed to become their own property.⁶ They had been promised title to their land, religious freedom and liberty from military service, i.e., conscription.⁷ By the mid 1860s new "Ukases"⁸ changed the law of the land. From that time on, title to real estate and farmland could be held only by individuals who were, or became adherents, of the Russian (Greek) Orthodox faith. Equally, conscription to military service was applied to all young men, including the pacifist Moravians who had settled earlier in Volhynia, Russia. Moreover the attempts to establish Moravian congregations were thwarted by the political and religious Russian and Lutheran authorities.⁹

By that time many of the Moravians in Volhynia had already been pressed to join the Lutheran Church in Russia, after the Moravian Church was no longer permitted to function as an approved religious body in Russia.¹⁰ The Lutheran Church had maintained a privileged status since the reign of Catherine the Great. However, the Moravians were still allowed by the Lutheran authorities to conduct a type of

Christian fellowship meetings with lay leaders, i.e. principally school teachers, in structures, e.g. prayer halls, owned and maintained by the Lutheran Church.¹¹

The breaking point for most of the German Moravians in Volhynia, aside of being unable to have religious freedom and own their farms, was the obligation placed upon them and their sons to render military service in the Russian army.¹²

Others, who had been in Volhynia for a shorter time as invited German colonists, mostly from Poland,¹³ were even denied profitable sales of their actual properties in Volhynia¹⁴ by the local authorities.

Leaving their homesteads, they generally travelled on foot or by wagon via Libau, (on the Baltic Sea), and by ship to Hull, (in eastern England), Liverpool, (in western England), on to Halifax or Montreal by ship. Then they travelled by train to Winnipeg, Calgary, and Strathcona, (South Edmonton), a relatively recently built station of the CPR, established in 1893.¹⁵

Neither the Moravian Church in Germany or the U.S.A. had plans to assist these emigrants. Both the German and the U.S. Moravian Churches, with contributions from the world-wide Moravian Unity, had previously supported Moravian emigrants from Volhynia to establish new settlements in Brazil.¹⁶ The groups of Moravian settlers from Volhynia that came to western Canada, i.e., the Northwest Territories, later Alberta, in 1894, owed their good fortune of finding this place (to establish a new way of life) in large part to the initiatives, efforts and leadership of one man, Andreas Lilge.¹⁷ No documentation is on hand as to the history i.e. of the birthplace of

Andreas Lilge's father, Andreas Lilge Sr. Lilge Junior's mother, Anna m.n. Blank, was born on May 1, 1828, in Neuhof, Poland, and Andreas Lilge was born on Nov. 2, 1852, at Augustuwok/Warsaw, Poland. His wife, Wilhelmine Kopp, was born at Neudorf Siervera, Poland. They married in 1871, and their first four children, Anna, Auguste, Hulda Ernestine and Amalia Christine were born between 1872 and 1877 in different places in Poland.

New German colonies and settlements had become established in Volhynia ever since the 1860s as documented in the *Heimatbuch 1962/1969-72*. Andreas' elder brother, Ludwig, who had become a teacher, had left Poland in 1876 and moved with his family to Majdan, Volhynia, Russia. The two brothers had been very close. In 1878 the Andreas Lilge family moved to Volhynia, Russia where Andreas was offered a position as teacher by the Lutheran Church, which meant that he had to join the Lutheran Church. For years he had strong aspirations to become a Moravian minister. In 1880 Andreas offered himself for ministerial theological training to the Moravian Church in Herrnhut, Germany. He was well known in Herrnhut, but the leadership there discouraged him, because he was married and had by that time already a large family - five children and the sixth one on the way!

Undeterred, Andreas made contact with a pastor in the United States, and by 1881 the Lutheran Concordia Theological Seminary, in Springfield, Ill., had accepted his application. Andreas left in 1881 for the U.S.A. His wife Wilhelmine agreed to the arrangement, especially since Andreas had hoped, she would be able to later join him in Springfield. The training was to take three years. For reasons unknown to us, Andreas, returned to Volhynia in the fall of 1882,

after only two years, to serve again as a sacristan-teacher with the Lutheran Church in Russia.

Time and again he was disappointed by contacts with the Moravian authorities in Herrnhut, Germany, who would not approve of his various plans to establish a Moravian ministry and presence in Volhynia. Even the Reverend Hermann Steinberg, in 1885, could not convince the German board, that there were possibilities for Andreas Lilge to serve as assistant to a Moravian pastor, while there still seemed opportunities for a Moravian ministry in Volhynia.

By 1886, however, Lutheran church authorities in Russia in connection with the Russian government denied any approval for Moravian work. This effectively spelled the end of any possibility for Andreas Lilge to receive further theological training in German Moravian circles.

Lilge then focused again on immigration plans to the U.S. He had received good news from former neighbouring Mennonites in Volhynia who had found a good reception upon their immigration to Kansas, U.S.A., where land was freely available through the U.S. government for various religious groups.

In 1893, eventually, Andreas Lilge emigrated to the U.S.A. with his family. He soon travelled to Canada, where he met with Mennonite friends. He made contacts on behalf of possible immigrants from Volhynia with the Canadian government in Ottawa. This resulted in granting permission and financial assistance to establish a settlement (in Alberta), which Lilge chose, for immigrants from Volhynia.¹⁸ Lilge informed his friends in different villages and towns in Volhynia and

Poland of the opportunity and sent them Canadian immigration literature as well.

By the summer of 1894, a contingent of 225 people from Volhynia had arrived at Strathcona. Not every one liked the area assigned to them for free homesteads at Spring Creek, northeast of Fort Saskatchewan, about fifty miles from Edmonton. Some families, who had personal funds, purchased land on the former Papaschase Reserve southeast of but close to Edmonton.¹⁹ In both areas Lilge organised Moravian congregations in 1895, and functioned as their lay pastor.

The settlement near Ft. Saskatchewan, was given the name Bruederheim (Home of the Brethren). It was organised on May 6, 1895, listing 45 communicant adults, 16 youth, and 57 children, for a total of 118 persons.²⁰ The one near Edmonton became Bruederfeld (Brethren's Field),²¹ which was organised on June 27, 1895, also by Andreas Lilge, with 45 communicant adults, 20 youth, and 52 children, a total of 117 persons. This was all done in strict accordance to the procedures of the Moravian Church, outlined in correspondence with the church authorities in Bethlehem Pennsylvania U.S.A.

With the completion of these tasks, at the initiative of Lilge and the immigrants, the Moravian Church leadership in Bethlehem, PA began to show a specific interest in the work in the Canadian West.²² A member of the Provincial Elders Conference, PEC,²³ was "*sent... .. late in 1895 to investigate the possibilities in Alberta.*"²⁴ After the visit and recognising the need for well- trained and qualified leadership, the PEC called the German-speaking Rev. Clement Hoyler by December 1895 to become the pastor at Bruederheim and Bruederfeld. In 1896, the Rev. William N. Schwarze, just out of

seminary, was also called to serve at these places together with Hoyler.²⁵

With the arrival of Clement Hoyler the sought after possibility for ministerial advancement for Andreas Lilge effectively ended. Lilge had invested most of his adult life, abilities, physical and mental strength to achieve a pastoral position as a Moravian pastor serving his fellow-Volhynians.²⁶ He had also done everything humanly possible to help his fellow-settlers survive the fall and winter of 1895-1896.

It was the Mennonite immigrants in Manitoba, recently immigrated themselves, whom Lilge knew and turned to, seeking help for the Moravians at Bruderheim with food, livestock, and farm implements. The Mennonites, who had arrived in Canada only three years earlier, were very generous. It is doubtful if some of the Moravians at Bruderheim would have survived without their help.²⁷

Later, after personal disagreements with the very immigrants Lilge had helped so much at Bruderheim Moravian, he left the Moravian Church and went on to serve as the founding pastor of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Bruderheim and the Bethany Lutheran Church, south of Bruderheim.²⁸

The Growth of Moravian Work

With two ordained pastors serving the Moravians full-time, the congregations felt cared for. Word went out to Volhynia of the

difference in the situation, and that the immigrants had their own Moravian churches. Hoyler, a truly gifted man, was a most effective minister, not only in the religious realm, but equally in his contacts with government agencies and local authorities.²⁹ He was beloved, appreciated and trusted by the people, both within and outside the church. Hoyler was “a man of peace”, and proved himself a most capable leader.

In both Bruederheim and Bruederfeld church structures and parsonages were built within a year of his arrival with the support of the Bethlehem, PA Moravian church administration. Even an English Tea Merchant, a Mr. John Thomas Morton, became involved, as part of his legacy had made funds available for new mission enterprise in the new world.³⁰

Hoyler lived at first in the parsonage at Bruederfeld.³¹ He later was elected the then youngest Bishop of the Moravian Church worldwide, and he became the district president of the Moravian churches in western Canada.

As the influx of immigrants grew, so came added opportunities to establish additional congregations. As neighbouring settlers learned of the way Moravians were looked after by ordained clergymen, they became eager to be cared for in the same way.

In short succession, over the next ten years, congregations were added in Heimtal (1896),³² Calgary (1902),³³ New Sarepta (1904),³⁴ Strathcona (1905) and Edmonton (1907).³⁵ Heimtal and New Sarepta were farming areas and relatively small communities. Strathcona, Edmonton and Calgary were business and administrative

centres with a growing compliment of shops, stores, hotels, and banks. They had major growth potential.³⁶

In time, by (May) 1909 the Canadian District was officially incorporated with the approval of the House of Commons, the Senate, and the Governor-General.³⁷ In 1910, at a synod in Calgary, a five-member District Executive Board was elected.³⁸ The church leaders, especially Pastor Hoyler, who had been elected a Bishop of the Moravian Church in 1908,³⁹ looked for growth outside the Alberta provincial boundaries.⁴⁰

Saskatchewan had seen an influx of Moravian settlers from Minnesota beginning in 1904. They were asking for the services of Moravian pastors. In short succession five congregations were established there too: Pleasant Point and Dundurn in 1909, Watrous 1910, Rosthern 1911, and Esk 1921. In 1910, the Dundurn Moravian Church,⁴¹ experienced a special development. The members at Dundurn formed a "joint stock company" and built the Dundurn Moravian Church Ltd. Moravian settlers were the main stockholders. The purpose: all faiths should have access to worship in the Dundurn church building.

In later years, however, as a result of a shortage of Moravian pastors, the work was handed over to the United Church in Canada.

Rev. Reinhold Riemer,⁴² after the completion of his college and theological studies at the Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, PA in 1913, became the first ordained Canadian Moravian to serve as pastor in his home congregation,⁴³ New Sarepta.

Eventually, as some of the original Volhynian immigrants in Alberta grew older and more prosperous, a number of them moved for retirement to the warmer climate of British Columbia. In 1927 a Moravian Church was established in Vancouver, and eleven years later, 1938, in Rosedale, BC.

Expansion took place in Alberta too. From 1928 - 1930, churches were organized in Hobbema, Bruce, Champion, Carstairs, Eigenheim, Didsbury, Torrington and Westlock.⁴⁴ In all, forty-two pastors served within the first fifty years in the congregations of the Canadian District. Nine of these were "sons" of the district.⁴⁵

Beginning with a "revival" at Bruederfeld in 1905, young men⁴⁶ and women from the Moravian communities in Alberta made commitments to Christian service and entered mission or theological schools, including the Moravian College and Seminary in Bethlehem, PA, to be trained for full-time Christian ministry. Therefore, as the need for more pastors in the Canadian West increased, many of these positions could be filled with "sons" of the Canadian District.⁴⁷

Larger numbers of men and women entered Christian service or became pastors' wife's and missionaries.⁴⁸ The question has often been asked, "*why do we in the Canadian District ever lack pastors to serve us?*"⁴⁹ In reality, for the Moravians in Alberta, there was no shortage of ministers, not those that had been born in the Prairies. Still, many young Canadian Moravian clergy decided not to return to the Canadian District after completing their seminary training at Bethlehem, PA.

Now, after well over a century of Moravian service, 1895 - 1998, there are still more males and females who have trained and some are still in training for the Christian ministry.⁵⁰ For the most part, they too have decided not to serve in Canada upon completion of their studies.⁵¹ By the end of this century, (1998), eighty-nine fully trained pastors and student-pastors have served the twenty-eight established congregations in the Canadian West.⁵²

The World War Situations and Moravian Pacifism

The Moravian Church - a Church of Peace? Was the title of an essay by the German Bishop Theodor Gill, from Herrnhut. He investigated the historical Moravian positions in regards to "not bearing arms" and not giving "an oath."⁵³ He concluded that from the very beginning of the Moravian Church/Unitas Fratrum in 1457 and 1467, while there decisive leaders, i.e. like Gregor, who steadfastly maintained: "We are those, who have once and for all decided, that we are led through the Gospel and the example of the Lord Christ and the holy Apostles, to function with gentleness, poverty, patience and love for enemies."⁵⁴

During World War I Bishop Hoyler became a central figure in Canada with respect to many of the younger Moravian members choosing to abstain from rendering military service. Hoyler counselled and defended them, and he became involved with the War-Time Election Act Tribunals established in the Canadian West. The Proclamation of Oct. 13, 1917 was seen not to be in conflict with the British Act of 1749. It was clearly understood by the Government authorities that the Act of 1749 would have "pre-eminence,"⁵⁵ and that was

comforting to Bishop Hoyler. Still, Hoyler found that certain members of the Tribunal for Alberta would not understand that position. Several Moravians were incarcerated regardless of the British Act of 1749. They had the feeling, that Canada was an independent autonomous country, making it's own laws and acts of parliament. The call to arms was, for most of the war time, for volunteers. However, some Moravian young men joined the Canadian armed forces as volunteers and several of them "died in action."

In 1917, one young man, David Fenske, had to undergo quite a barrage of arguments from the Tribunal and was ultimately incarcerated in Calgary until Bishop Hoyler intervened and had him set free.⁵⁶ His eldest son, Kenneth Gordon Fenske, joined the war effort in 1944, and was killed in action as a navigator/flying officer on February 1, 1945, at 22 years of age.⁵⁷

The Bruederheim congregation lost three young sons due to involvement in the War. In 1943, Gordon R. Schneider, son of Alex Schneider, who was 22 years old, and also in 1943, Norman A. Stelter, son of Fred Stelter, at age 23, were killed in action, and lastly, in 1944, Elmer A. Lilge, son of Adolph Lilge, at age 25.⁵⁸ These young men had volunteered for war service. In 1950 at Camp Van Es a memorial chapel was built, dedicated to those who gave their lives in service to their country.⁵⁹

The Youth Movement and Camp Van Es

There is general agreement that the camping program has been the strongest contributing factor for so many young people to enter the

Christian ministry since the 1940s.⁶⁰ Prior to 1940, a “Canadian Moravian Young Peoples’ Society” (since 1914, later also CE⁶¹) had organized annual Jugend Tage (Youth Days) in one or the other of the local congregations.⁶² They would conduct rallies and youth conferences, often attended by over 100 young people, and eventually lasting three days and longer.⁶³ In 1940, a camp at Gull Lake, AB, was rented and the camp situation proved to be right as far as program, provisions and location was concerned.⁶⁴

At that period in time there was still a strong separation of males and females among the young people in church activities. Only after the principles of the Christian Endeavour movement were applied did the youth-work become co-educational.

Women almost always played a more subdued part in those early years in the church - but nevertheless theirs was a very important contribution. The women too found and elected their own leadership for women’s groups. Later on, i.e., in more recent decades, women were elected to any and all congregational and district offices, including district president.⁶⁵

When in late fall of 1939, a tract of woodlands on the north shore of Cooking Lake, 35 km east of Edmonton, became available, it was deemed a “God-send.”⁶⁶ The family who donated it had been members of the Bruderfeld Moravian Church. The only cost to the Moravian Church involved in the transfer of the five acres was the expenditure for the survey.⁶⁷ The land was a wilderness area without a road. It took some hard labour to clear a site, make a road, and build accommodations and an activity lodge.⁶⁸

The name given to the property was VAN-ES, the first letters of the motto around the Moravian seal, *Vicit Agnus Noster, Eum Sequamur*.⁶⁹ Translated it means: "*Our Lamb has Conquered, Let us Follow Him.*" The young people who attended the annual Camp Van-Es programs were challenged to live a dedicated Christian life, and for some it involved the "Call" to enter the Christian ministry, i.e., training for Christian service.⁷⁰

Over the years the camp program has changed and seen its ups and downs. Strong conservative religious presentations were at times exchanged for more recreational activities, always depending on the personal convictions of the camp leaders. There were those in the early years who followed a very fundamental biblical agenda. Later on some liberal pastors determined the message the young people received.⁷¹ The responses of those in attendance, however, have mostly been positive.

At the 1970 synod of the Canadian Moravian Churches it was determined that the church would heavily invest in the future of Camp Van-Es. As a result in 1971 the "Samuel Wedman Memorial Lodge,"⁷² a large, very modern (two-story) building with an approved kitchen facility, was erected at Camp Van-Es. The synod of 1974 approved the building of a residence for a permanent caretaker. By 1977 the task was completed.⁷³

The expansion of Camp Van-Es has continued in recent years. More land was obtained. Today the camp property encompasses over 100 acres. The out-lying areas now provide a good shelter against impact by neighbours and near-by highway noise. The synod in 1990 decided that an heated (indoor) swimming pool, a hot tub, and a separate

multi-purpose hall be built.⁷⁴ The project was started by June 1991, and complete by 1992. The building was named the "Harmony Centre."⁷⁵ Today the Camp can be used year-round by different groups.⁷⁶

Modern Times and Developments

Over time the Moravians in the Canadian West became more affluent. The oil boom, beginning in the 1950s in Alberta, and the accompanying industrial expansion provided young Moravians, like other Albertans, with ever more choices regarding their employment, schooling, and professional training. Even those who had spent their early years on farms, now found work off the farms in construction and in factories. Others went for higher education to near-by colleges, technical schools, and universities and entered professional fields of employment. In turn many Moravian families became more sophisticated. Church and church-life no longer constituted such a central position in their lives. Questions were raised concerning the validity of the Christian challenge or Christ's call upon the individual. In all of this, there were, of course, those who remained still very sensitive to the Christian message and in certain instances they decided to train for full-time Christian ministry.⁷⁷

The Nature of the Moravian Presence

A goodly number of those who in the early years came as farmers to build a future for themselves and their families, had remained German speaking. Their children, however, went to Canadian schools, learning

English. In time, after the Second World War (1939-45), the German language lost prominence. The old guard had passed on. The young people felt far more comfortable communicating in English. In reality, the Moravians, as part of the social and cultural structure, had become fully integrated. Unlike other ethnic groups, Moravians did not observe German cultural festivals or presentations in any of the western Canadian congregations.

During the last forty years most Moravian settlements and congregations have changed. For the most part so have the structures of the Moravian families involved. Farming communities-- like Bruderheim, Bruderfeld, Heimtal and New Sarepta-- have become increasingly populated by non-Moravians. In certain instances a competitive spirit between the different churches developed. Other denominations took care of their own, building churches and some became evangelistically active. Moravian membership started to get impacted by these activities in addition to increasing numbers of interdenominational marriages. Later, rural population decline resulted in certain churches declining in membership. Difficult decisions were made to close some Moravian churches that had insufficient support. These decisions had to be made, sometimes by the leadership, other times by the remaining membership. Many of the still active members in those communities had opportunity to join other evangelical churches in the neighbourhood. Practically all the Moravian churches, which had been founded during the years of expansion from 1925 - 1940, in Alberta and British Columbia, "closed their doors", e.g., Rosedale members joined the Vancouver congregation in BC. The Hobbema, Bruce, Champion, Carstairs, Eigenheim, Torrington, and Didsbury congregations in Alberta could not be sustained.

Fifteen years later, from 1955 onward, the trend was reversed. Moravians decided it was time to reach out to the neighbourhoods of nearby existing Moravian churches. In 1955, Jasper Place in West-Edmonton was started and organised. It remained a small enterprise which ten years later became absorbed into the new, very modern Rio Terrace Moravian Church. That church had been started in 1960 in a new affluent residential area and organisation took place in 1964.

Equally in Calgary new avenues of ministry were sought predominantly among non-Moravians. By 1966 the Christ Church in southeast Calgary was begun. The congregation organized in 1969.

The existing small and old Central Moravian Church⁷⁸ in Calgary was relocated in 1977. It became the Good Shepherd Moravian Church in a new residential district in the northern part of Calgary with a very modern, large centre of worship.

The congregation at Strathcona-Edmonton needed more space. They constructed a grand new building plus parsonage three blocks to the east in 1957.

A major relocation took place also for the Bruderfeld/Millwoods Moravian Church, if only by moving one block west in 1981. The old historic church building⁷⁹ was eventually torn down. A completely new modern structure was built, making it possible for program and ministry to be upgraded and enlarged.

The Edmonton Moravian Church sponsored a sister-congregation in neighbouring Sherwood Park during the same period. By 1982 a new congregation became established and was soon organized. Proceeds

from the sale of the church property in Vancouver, which had been closed in March 1981, were used in part to build a new church in Sherwood Park, AB. The name chosen for that new congregation was "Good News Moravian."

At the same time the New Sarepta Moravian Church, which before the oil boom had numerically been one of the largest rural congregations, had to be closed. The membership had declined so sharply that a feasible congregation no longer existed. In the 1970s, however, the New Sarepta church served as the place where once a year a special ministry was provided, fondly called "Old Timers Day". On that day, worship services and fellowship meetings were conducted in German to allow Old Timers to not feel forgotten.⁸⁰

Meanwhile Bruderheim and Bruderfeld/Millwoods have celebrated their centenary in 1995. Bruderheim too has built a new modern structure during the last decade. Memberships in these renewed congregations are growing. Many non-Moravians are joining these churches, because the children, youth and adult programs offered and the ministries rendered are what the people want and need.

In 1970, the first layperson, Br. Donald Laverty, was elected as President of the Canadian District at the synod held in Banff, AB. Laverty was later followed by Br. Bill Brese, Br. Elmer Kadatz, and Sister Ruth Humphreys.⁸¹

During the 1970s a young Tibetan, Stephen Hishey, who had been active in the Moravian Mission work among Tibetan refugees in northern India, obtained a scholarship and came to Canada to complete his theological studies.⁸² During the summer breaks he

served as an intern at the Heimtal Moravian Church, where he was ordained in 1975.⁸³ Following this he returned to northern India to engage in Moravian service.

In 1978, visitors from Labrador came for the first time to the Canadian West to share in the Youth Convo. These young people spent some time at Bruderheim and other congregations in the district.⁸⁴

In 1980, on the occasion of the 85th Bruderheim anniversary, the Alberta government presented the Moravian Church with a bilingual road sign in English and in German, acknowledging the cultural contributions made by Moravians in Alberta,⁸⁵ and replacing the unilingual sign that had been erected in 1970⁸⁶ also by the Alberta government.

The Moravians in Western Canada have no schools of their own, and have no interest in sectarian activities.⁸⁷ The Moravian ministers in Alberta work closely with pastors of other denominations wherever such service is made possible.

The immigrants who came to Alberta and were willing to live in crude huts and log cabins are no more. The descendants of the pioneer families, however, over the past 100 years, have become fully integrated into the cultural, economic and sociological Canadian mosaic. They form a part of (what is called) the mainstream in Canada.

The efforts and sacrifices of the pioneers have produced fruit. Moravians today live in liberty, in one of the best countries in the world. They have religious freedom and can worship in their own churches and congregations. They can live by the old Moravian motto.⁸⁸

“In essentials unity, in non-essential liberty, in all things love”

* * *

Editor’s note: The Endnotes for this essay contain 88 detailed footnotes.

The Selected Bibliography is five pages in length. It is beyond the scope of this publication to provide this detail. We will happily provide this information to serious researchers upon request.

WHO WAS MR. MORTON?

(By Wm. G. Brese)

I made a presentation to the Alberta Genealogical Society at the Prince of Wales Armories in Edmonton, on February 24, 2000 on the subject of "The History of Moravian Settlement in western Canada." About 60 people attended.

While preparing my talk, I reviewed a considerable amount of material, among which was Kurt Vitt's book, "The Founding of the Moravian Church in Western Canada and the Andreas Lilge Story." I was particularly interested in the section of this book that dealt with the response of the headquarters of the Moravian Church in Bethlehem, Pa., to the request of the "Moravian" settlers in the Edmonton area to set up congregations at Bruderheim and Bruderfeld. This appears on page 88, where I read something that had previously escaped my attention. It appears that the church was facing the difficult task of financing a founding pastor and funding the establishment of church buildings and a parsonage. Just when they were struggling with this decision, the Provincial Elders' Conference minutes for May 15, 1895, record: "The P.E.C. was further encouraged since at the time that the conference discussed the matter of projects in Canada, a specific offer of support had come from England. A Mr. Morton had written, 'that he would give financial aid if the Moravian Church would send Home Missionaries into western Canada to care for the spiritual wants of the immigrants'."

Certainly this offer from Mr. Morton came at an opportune time and the P.E.C. acted swiftly to support the requests of the western Canadian settlers by sending out Rev. Clement Hoyler to start the work. But who was Mr. Morton?

Contact with the Moravian Church headquarters in London, England was able to shed some light on the matter. A letter from Mr. Paul Blewitt, Archivist, revealed that John Thomas Morton of London, was a tea merchant who had already on more than one occasion lent liberal aid to Moravian Missions. Upon his death, a large part of his estate, estimated at several hundred thousand dollars was left to help Moravian Missions.

In addition, the Rev. Dr. Gordon Sommers of Bethlehem, Pa. was able to provide some additional information about Mr. Morton. It comes from the Minutes of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, August 26, 1897. "Mr. J. T. Morton, hearing of our Mission debt (\$29,000), made accurate inquiries and has very generously undertaken to pay off the whole amount, for which we give thanks and take courage."

Contact was also made with Edna and Joe Cooper, co-editors of the British Moravian Historical Magazine, and their help was sought. Edna Cooper's research about Mr. Morton was most helpful. From the December 1897 "Periodical Accounts" relating to the Foreign Mission of the Church of the United Brethren, we learn several interesting facts. Mr. Morton's generous support of our Foreign Mission work began in 1894. He wiped off the deficiencies in the Foreign Mission Accounts for the years 1895 and 1896.

A fairly lengthy account entitled “Mr. J. T. Morton’s legacy and gifts to the Moravian foreign missions and rural mission” is contained in the *Moravian Messenger*, December 16th issue, 1897, p. 585.

Apparently the Moravian Church officials knew very little about Mr. Morton personally. This is revealed by the following quotation: “Perhaps if we had known more of the man, we should have had some explanation of what we do not now understand. But Mr. Morton kept himself in the background. No member of our church has ever seen him, or even seen more of his handwriting than the signature of his name.”

The article goes on to explain that Mr. Morton had several concerns which he supported. He established his own Rural Mission that revealed his thoughtfulness for classes of people too often overlooked; especially the rural poor. One suspects this particular interest gave rise to Mr. Morton hearing about the migration of needy settlers to western Canada, and resulted in his offer to the Provincial Elders’ Conference in Bethlehem to support sending a home missionary to Alberta. The following quotation is illuminating in this respect:

“Besides his munificence, an interesting and pleasing feature in his character was his thoughtfulness for classes of people too often overlooked. Whilst the migration of large numbers of people into towns naturally draws attention to their spiritual and material needs, Mr. Morton had an eye for those who are left behind in our country villages and hamlets. Too frequently there is great spiritual destitution there, as our rural missionaries can testify. And it was further his conviction that while much is done at the present day to alleviate the

sufferings of mankind at large, the Christian Church is not sufficiently alive to the wants of her own members, hence his frequent enquiries about “poor Christians” and his remittance of sums of money to be distributed amongst them.”

Another subject of interest to Mr. Morton was his zeal to promote the observance of the Sabbath. Apparently he regularly included tracts on this subject in his correspondence. Another quotation makes reference to this interest:

“So strict was he in his views that he gave instructions that none of his money should be invested in any business or company that did not observe the law of the Sabbath. Not long before his death he offered one hundred prizes of £3 each for as many essays in Germany, which should urge the necessity of a better observance of the Lord’s Day in that country. His views on this subject were coloured by his Presbyterian training, but if we cannot use all Mr. Morton’s arguments, we heartily sympathise with his earnest desire that the Lord’s Day should be kept sacred to the high purposes for which God has given it.”

Not only was the Moravian Church a benefactor of Mr. Morton’s “liberal hand,” but Waldensian Church in Italy and the China Inland Mission were also among his favorites. Mr. Morton left nothing to his own church (English Presbyterian), nor did he leave anything to those who laboured in his employ and had helped to build his vast wealth.

Mr. Morton died on September 11th, 1897. The following account of his passing, taken from “The Moravian Messenger”, September 23rd,

“We regret to have to announce that Mr. John Thomas Morton, the originator of the Rural Mission in England and the generous benefactor of our Foreign Missions, died at Falmouth on September 11th. Mr. Morton had for some years been a sufferer from rheumatism, which induced him to spend the winter in southern latitudes, but it was not till recently that the illness which brought about his end, namely cancer of the stomach, set in. The funeral took place on Thursday, September 16th, at Darenth, a village near to Dartford, a town on the South Eastern Railway, not very far from Gravesend. A small procession of half-a-dozen carriages conveyed the mourners to a little chapel by the roadside in the country, where were a few scattered houses. The chapel belonged to the English Presbyterians, and two clergymen of that denomination conducted the service, which consisted of nothing more than the reading of passages of Scripture with prayers, in one of which the minister gave thanks to God for the good which Mr. Morton had been able to accomplish both at home and abroad in the heathen world, and also “on building this place of worship in which we are assembled.” Thereupon the little company drove to the village churchyard, and the coffin, which was of plain oak, and unadorned by any flowers, save a simple wreath which had been placed upon it at the chapel, was lowered into the grave, whilst the younger of the two ministers read the prayers. Two sons of Mr. Morton, men in middle life, were present, but besides his solicitor and private secretary, and a few gentlemen who probably came from the large London establishment, there were only two Moravian ministers to represent the vast numbers of people throughout all the world, who have been benefited by the open-handed charity and Christian generosity of one who evidently did not seek the praise of men but of God.

Shortly before his end, Mr. Morton sent to P.E.C. a remittance which will enable them to carry on the Rural Mission on its present footing for about three years. Unless means derived from other sources shall be forthcoming to enable this useful work to be continued longer, the Mission will then of necessity come to a termination. Whether this is to be so or not, will be a question for our Church to consider.”

My conclusion is, you just have no idea of how God will answer when you pray. I can imagine that the “Moravian” settlers arriving in the Edmonton area in 1895 were praying that they might be blessed by having their deep longing to establish Moravian churches in their communities crowned with success. As well, I can imagine that the P.E.C. members in Bethlehem, Pa. were praying to find a way to respond to the requests of the Alberta settlers. Mr. Morton would appear to have been the instrument of God’s purpose. God bless Mr. Morton!

**ORIGINS OF THE RAJPUR FOSTER
CHILDREN PROJECT
(By Stephen Hishey)**

A 3-year Scholarship at the Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Saskatchewan, brought me to Canada from Rajpur, India in the extreme winter of 1973-74. I had heard of the Moravian Church in the United States but was not aware, at that time, that there were Moravian Churches in Canada, too.

The family who had originally thought of setting up this Scholarship had been missionaries themselves in the northern area of Tibet amongst the Tibetans for many years. The region is known as the Amdo. So it was quite expected that I spend my summer vacations with them in Jackson, Michigan and they had also looked at various possibilities of keeping me busy, during the vacation, so that I could earn some pocket money for my College. As it worked out, the Pastor of the local Church wished to go for a holiday with his family and asked if I would be willing to help out during his absence. He had given me several days to make a decision.

It was during these several days of trying to make a decision that I received a long distance call from Edmonton Heimtal Moravian Church. Speaking on the line was the Rev. Kurt Vitt who had tracked me down to this place. My college had given him the contact address. In the course of the conversation, he made it very clear that I should return back to Canada immediately and be involved in the Church Missionfest at Heimtal. Without a second thought, I agreed to do so.

Br. Vitt was there at the Edmonton airport to receive me. During our short drive back to Heimtal he gave me a brief on the upcoming Missionsfest programme and that he would want me to be the main speaker with the whole emphasis on Mission in Northern India, the Moravian Church and the Tibetan Refugee Orphanage at the Moravian Institute. I was quite unprepared then except for the fact that Br. Vitt was greatly thrilled. Over the next two weeks, we both worked day and night on preparing our first set of slides on the Ministry. I have yet to come across someone who could be so skilled and precise with preparing for a Mission meeting like Br. Vitt did. That summer of 1974 was my first student pastor internship at the Heimtal Moravian Church under the leadership of Br. Vitt. I was very excited and the people were greatly thrilled. They surrounded me with their love and concern. Heimtal became my second home church. The children and the Youth loved me very much as I participated in their Camps, VBS and Youth meetings.

As I prepared to go back to the Seminary, Br. Vitt wrote to the President of the Seminary seeking permission if they would allow me to return back the next summer to continue my internship. This was agreed. In the meanwhile, plans were underway for the Vitts to go for a holiday the next summer and the Elders had accepted me as their intern-pastor. And during the time in the Seminary, I was encouraged to take driving lessons which was successfully done.

I returned back to Heimtal Church the next summer and a full programme was set up for me. The focus this summer was also on Missions. It was a great privilege for me to present the children's Ministry at Rajpur as a challenge to the Canadian Churches to be

involved in sponsoring them as a part of their mission outreach. As young lives grew under the love and care of Christian teachers and house-parents, there were opportunities for them to hear the Gospel and understand in some way God's love for them. The Moravian Churches in Edmonton and Calgary took that as a real challenge and started their sponsorship programme. I am glad that a very close relationship has been established between North India and Canada and that there is a deeper involvement in Missions by the Canadian churches.

During the last year of my Seminary, and in the process of my returning back to North India, I was encouraged to apply to the British Mission Board for my ordination. Through the recommendation of the District Board of the Moravian Church in Canada, this request was accepted and in the summer of 1976, Bishop Milo Loppnow ordained me a deacon in the Moravian Church in an Ordination Service at the Heimtal Moravian Church.

As I recall my years in Canada, specially the three summers I spent in the Moravian Churches, my heart is filled with gratitude to God. Mission becomes more personal when you can put a face beside a name that is known and heard of. The Moravian Churches in Edmonton and around were of tremendous encouragement to me all throughout the times I was able to share with them. They responded with great generosity and concern.

May the Lord bless each one of you and keep us united till the day when Christ shall come.