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**“Canadian Moravian Historical Society-A Personal
Perspective”**

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CANADIAN MORAVIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
– A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Wm. G Brese (February 25, 2023)

My involvement with the Canadian Moravian Historical Society began on a Greyhound bus which was returning to Edmonton from Calgary carrying a group of Moravians home from a church related meeting. A gathering of people seated at the back of the bus was in a discussion about how the Moravian church got started in Western Canada. I distinctly remember that Mary and Art Lange, members of the Heimtal congregation, were prime movers in that discussion.

The idea emerged that a Canadian Moravian Historical Society should be established.

I arose from my seat and went to the front of the bus where Rev. John Henry Weinlick sat, just behind the driver. I made the proposal to John, who was our Board of Elders of the Canadian District (BECD) President at that time. John wholeheartedly agreed! The seed for the idea was planted.

I became the founding President. Never did I imagine that I would serve as the President for 25 years. Nor did I expect that this involvement would affect me personally by shaping my Christian faith and blessing me ineffably. Now as I approach the end of my life it is the time to share some insights with you. They are written from my personal historical perspective.

At the outset I would like to set out the names of the people who signed the application for incorporation for the CMHS. They were:

Otto Drebert - New Sarepta Moravian Church

Beverly Kadatz - Millwoods Moravian Church

Mary Lange - Heimtal Moravian Church

Kurt Vitt - Bruderheim Moravian Church

William Brese - Edmonton Moravian Church

I cannot say enough about these people and their dedication to our task which briefly stated was: “To chronicle Western Canadian Moravian Church history so the service of those who have gone before us can inspire the following generations to emulate their commitment to Jesus Christ and the extension of His kingdom.”

The Board believed in and carried out the work of the CMHS (Canadian Moravian Historical Society) with devotion to duty, which was exemplary. It was a personal joy for me to be associated with them. Harmony and unity of purpose was lived out in our meetings and work assignments.

I must single out Beverly Kadatz for special recognition. Beverly served as Secretary and was with me every step of the way for 25 years. Our overall success was due to Beverly’s unfailing efforts. It went far beyond expectations with cheerfulness, graciousness and efficiency.

The newly formed CMHS stood on the shoulders of Edward and Lydia Sampert. Edward Sampert served as the Treasurer of the

BECD. He and the President of the day, Rev. Elmer Stelter, became aware of the fact each congregation had church records stored away in different places in the church, often in the attic. At their initiative the records were assembled and stored for safe keeping in the Sampert home. Lydia Sampert became the Archivist. Not only did Lydia organize the records but she spent countless hours transcribing them from the old original German Gothic script to the modern-day German Latin script. This helped us immensely when we started translating and publishing some of these early church records.

Two men in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania helped us set up the Historical Society. They were Vernon Nelson the Archivist for the Northern Province of the Moravian Church in America and Rev. Henry Williams, a former Moravian pastor, who became the Librarian at the Reeves Library at Moravian College. He was also involved with the Moravian Historical Society in Bethlehem.

Happily I had developed a good relationship with Henry Williams after I had been named to serve on the Board of Homeland Ministries which had responsibilities for new church starts. This involved my attending annual meetings in Bethlehem where I was often billeted at the home of Henry Williams. We spent many enjoyable evenings together. Henry shared with me his love of Bach music, his interest on hymnody of our church and especially church history. Accordingly, I knew where to turn for help and advice when we addressed setting up our new Historical Society.



Dr. Kurt Vitt



Andreas Lilge

Another fortuitous event should also be noted. A year before we became involved with establishing the CMHS, Rev. Dr. Kurt H. Vitt, who was then serving the Bruderheim Moravian Church, was sought out by members of the Lilge family. They had in their possession a cardboard box which contained the “Andreas Lilge Letters”. This sheaf of material was a treasure trove of inestimable value from a historical point of view. The correspondence of Andreas Lilge, written in German, came into the possession of the one man who had the talents, German background, ability, curiosity and energy to prepare the manuscript for “The Founding of the Moravian Church in Western Canada and The Andreas Lilge Story, 1982.” It was our cornerstone publication, and it laid the foundation for all of our subsequent work and undertakings.

As a postscript I must add that Kurt Vitt's untimely death, early in his retirement, robbed us of using his services to do an array of projects which we had in mind. However, we do remain grateful to him for the many important works in our Library which bear his name.

Following this long preface, I would now like to turn your attention to several aspects of the establishment of the Moravian Church in Alberta, which were unique in many respects.

Most of the Moravian churches in North America were originally founded by actions of the Moravian Church headquarters in Herrnhut Germany. The church administration took the initiative and church growth occurred.



Shitomir Church, Volhynia, Russia from Otto Drebert book.

Here, in the Alberta District, the initiative came from the settlers from Europe. Most of them came from Volhynia in Russia, now

part of Ukraine, under the leadership of Andreas Lilje. Lilje had been influenced by the diaspora work which had been fostered by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, the Moravian Church leader who was responsible for initiating this work from Herrnhut, Germany.



Count Nicholas von
Zinzendorf

Zinzendorf is frequently linked to the commissioning of mission work of the Moravian Church, but diaspora work was his first love. It was aimed at linking people closer to Jesus Christ and to help deepen their faith and Christian service. It was rooted in the fact that the state church could only serve the needs of the people in an incomplete manner. The Moravian diaspora sought to fill the gap. Accordingly, pastors from Herrnhut were sent out to establish prayer halls in many communities and offer opportunities for Christian gatherings to deepen their Christian lives through a ministry of preaching, teaching, prayer meetings, rich musical offerings of leadership in group singing, choirs and instrumental bands. They organized a variety of annual festivals and exposure to visiting missionaries from far flung places. Some of the prayer halls were able to accommodate 400 people.

The people were keen to have their own Moravian Churches rather than worship in the state churches which were chronically short staffed and served only periodically by ordained clergy.

Lilge had served the people as a lay preacher in the state church. He aspired to be a Moravian pastor. The longing of the people connected with the Moravian diaspora to be able to worship the Moravian way gave rise to Lilge at aged 42, his wife and family of 10 children travelling to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1892 to check out prospects in America.



Andreas Lilge and his family

Discussions between Lilge and Moravian Church leaders in Bethlehem were positive. Lilge sought to find land for the settlers from Volhynia so they could immigrate to North America.

Lilge's investigations led him to the conclusion that the best prospects were in Canada. He pursued that end with determination, devotion and all of his energy.

Equipped with the contents of the cardboard box containing the Lilge letters, Kurt Vitt was able to unravel and write the story of Lilge's dogged activities for the next 3 years. His heroic efforts resulted in the acquisition of land for a colony of settlers northeast of Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta District. Following the instructions from Bethlehem two Moravian congregations were organized with one at Bruderheim and the other at Bruderfeld, southeast Edmonton. A formal request from the settlers was submitted to the Moravian Church Headquarters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to send homeland missionaries to serve their spiritual needs.

To their credit, the Provincial Elders' Conference (PEC) responded with positive action immediately. They commissioned a member of their board, the Rev. Morris W Leibert to travel to Alberta. He spent a month in Alberta assessing the situation and reported back. His 33-page report was detailed and glowing with optimism about Alberta prospects for the Moravian church.

The PEC concurred with Liebert's recommendations and launched a special fund drive to finance the undertaking. Without delay the Rev. Clement Hoyler, who was serving at Elizabeth, New Jersey was invited for an interview with the PEC at Bethlehem. These were preliminary discussions prior to issuing a formal call to homeland missionary service in Alberta.



Early 20th century train outside of
Edmonton.

Hoyler stepped off of the train at the community of Strathcona, on the south side of Edmonton, in evening the 6th of February 1896. His arrival marked the beginning of the Moravian church work in Western

Canada. The dreams of the settlers were to be realized. Their prayers had been answered. Lilge's untiring efforts had been rewarded. The positive and supportive response of the Moravian Church administration to the settlers' requests would remain engraved in the minds and hearts of the generations which followed.

The Moravian church administration leaders of the day were men of vision. Their sincere desire to extend the cause of Jesus Christ to those with a sincere desire to worship as Moravians guided their decision making. What followed on the Western Canadian scene was exceptional and exemplary.

The Canadian Moravian Historical Society undertook the telling of this story. Foundational to the success of this undertaking was the attitude for this undertaking expressed by the President of the PEC, the Rev. Edward Kluge, in a letter to Hoyler dated July 1, 1896. He felt that only the best men should be called into service as homeland ministers. Thus, he is defending the decisions to call

Rev. Clement Hoyler and Rev. William Schwarze to assignments in Alberta. Hoyler was 23 ½ years old with three years of pastoral experience. Schwarze, a recent Seminary graduate, was 21 and had stood highest in his class in the Seminary.

What emerges from the historical records is amazing. It reveals that these two young men had the foresight and realization that they were laying the groundwork for the creation of the Canadian District of the Moravian Church. It would evolve into a unique identity in the life and work of the worldwide Moravian Unity.

This foregoing observation came to me over time and through repeated exposure to the historical documents which we produced during my 25 years with the Canadian Moravian Historical Society.

Hoyler arrived in Alberta six months ahead of Schwarze. Together they immediately established a co-pastor relationship, sharing their assignments on equal terms.

Fortunately, both of these young pastors were excellent diarists so their church diary entries, along with reports to the Moravian (Monthly publication), provide us with clear insights into their activities and feelings about how they overcame the challenges of frontier life. Their reports also served to sustain the needed financial support from the congregations of the Northern Province Moravian Church. Pertinent extracted reports were reproduced and published in the Canadian Moravian Historical

Magazine, which is available online. (For access instructions see the Appendix.)

First and foremost, the young pastors soon came to love their flocks and the people responded in like manner.



Home of Andreas Lilge, 1896. The better homes were of log construction as seen in the house on the right. Many early pioneers lived in crude houses built with sod similar to the house on the left.

After getting acquainted and housed in a newly fashioned attic room in the home of one of the settlers Hoyler started his pastoral service by making visits to his parishioners. The first worship services both at Bruderfeld located eight miles southeast of Edmonton and Bruderheim some 50 miles northeast of Edmonton soon commenced. The services were held in the homes of the settlers.

Construction of a parsonage at Bruderfeld started immediately. As soon as the parsonage was completed Hoyer's mother would join him and Rev. Schwarze would soon follow.

Conditions on the frontier at the time are hard for us to imagine. Settlers were flocking into Edmonton to find new farms either by direct purchase of land or by applying for land as a homestead. A farm consisting of 160 acres of unimproved homestead land could be had for \$10.



Travel could be very difficult. This photo shows a Bruderheim spring flood and efforts being made to keep the road from washing out.

There were no roads, only unmarked trails. Travel was on foot or horse and ox carts. Streams and rivers had to be forded or crossed. Many crossings by ferry in the summer and on the ice

during the winter. The 50 mile distance to Bruderheim could be shortened by 10 miles by making two ferry crossings at a cost of 10 cents for each crossing. To avoid the cash payment many early settlers walked the longer route to Bruderheim, when looking for land.



Even with the advent of formal roads and automobiles rural travel was still very difficult as seen in this photo on the road to Bruce and the Bruce Moravian church.

A colony of land had been reserved by Andreas Lilge at Bruderheim for the Moravian settlers. Those people with enough funds chose to buy land in the vicinity of Bruderfeld which was much closer to Edmonton. The remainder of the group found their way to Bruderheim and were established there.

The diary accounts of both Hoyler and Schwarze tell explicitly of the difficulties of travel. Funds from Bethlehem provided for the horses, harnesses, carts, and sleighs, which the pastors required. Because I kept horses for over 42 years and engaged in both riding and driving, I related to adventures which these two young pastors contended with. In the Appendix, reference is made to the publication, "Pioneering in Western Canada", by Clement Hoyler. It details the travel difficulties which he encountered.



Jack, the first
Moravian
horse in
Alberta.
Pausing for a
feed of oats at
Horse Hills
on the way to
Bruderheim.



Rev. and Mrs.
Hoyler with
Cyril in
Saskatchewan
1910.

Divine Providence was behind the selection of Clement Hoyler to establish the work of the Moravian Church in Alberta. Hoyler was certainly the answer to the prayers of the settlers whose deep longing to worship freely in the Moravian way was fully satisfied beyond their wildest dreams and expectations.

The challenges of the frontier suited to Hoyler's adventurous spirit coupled with an unlimited curiosity to discover all aspects of this new land.

History was in the making and Hoyler was fully conscious and aware of it. He recorded every imaginable detail to our benefit. The demands of the situation were eclectic. Hoyler's gifts were a perfect match. Praise God!

What unfolded was the establishment of the Canadian District of the Moravian Church in the Northern Province, with its own distinctive characteristics and spiritual orientation imprinted by the team of Hoyler and Schwarze. These young men in their early twenties, full of vision, unlimited energy and total commitment to the cause of Christ laid a firm foundation. Others who came after followed their example. The blessings which evolved from their foundational work flowed on to succeeding generations in Western Canada and to the Moravian Church at large.

Both Hoyler and Schwarze were preacher's kids. Clement Hoyler was a precocious student. He attended the Moravian College at Bethlehem at the age of 14. He had grown up in a log house in Laketown, Wisconsin where his father served the Zoar Moravian

church. These humble surroundings suited him for life in the newly emerging Canadian west.

William Schwarze was also the son of a Moravian pastor and as a 20-year-old freshly minted seminary graduate soon learned the difficulties of coping with the rigors of frontier life. His congregants immediately came to appreciate his creative sermons and teaching ministry. The settlers had sincere admiration for this this well-educated team of ministers.

When I read the Hoyler Diaries for the first time it was as an editor. I was looking for sentence structure and translation accuracy. In May 1990, eight years after the Canadian Moravian Historical Society published the diaries, I read the publication again with two felt pen markers in hand. The red one was to highlight every reference to the Gottfried Schultz family and the green one to highlight the same for the Christian Paul family. Thus, I came to understand and appreciate the roles of my maternal grandparents the Schultzes and my wife's paternal grandparents the Paul's had in the life and work of the Bruderfeld Moravian Church. Both families were founding members.

Subsequent reviews of the Hoyler's Diaries led me to look more deeply into the records. I began to look beyond the factual presentations of activities that answer the questions of "what" and "when" and try to understand "why" he did what he did. I was looking for clues about his inner motivation and indicators which accounted for his total dedication to helping the people with any task which came before him.

I began looking for back stories. It took deduction and thoughtful consideration to sleuth out what Hoyler was up to. Essentially, this approach became a macro-overview of his ministry and its impact over the almost 30 years of Hoyler's service to the Moravian Church in Western Canada as a homeland missionary, a Bishop and as President of the Canadian District Board.

I will illustrate this with some stories which elaborate on this point.



Mail pickup and delivery was accomplished with horse powered transportation.

Both the diaries of Hoyler and Schwarze contain frequent references to “going for the mail”. The Bruderfeld parsonage, where they lived, was about seven miles from the post office in Strathcona (South Edmonton) which was the end of the rail line

from Calgary. A horse with a good gait would travel at 4 ½ miles per hour when the trail was in good condition. Often, they recorded that they waited for the train if it was late. Much later we learn that each young pastor had a lady friend in the USA. This accounted for their frequent trips to the post office and their long waits for the train from Calgary to arrive with the mail.

Later Hoyler made reference in his diary to the fact that he was going to the USA to get married. Schwarze mentioned that he was leaving on a trip to the USA. When he got back, his diary entry says, “Mrs. Schwarze and I returned”.



Rev. Schwarze and his wife.

The photo includes Dick, the second Moravian horse in Alberta. It was purchased for Bruderheim by Schwartz for use by himself and his new wife.

The settlers in the Alberta District, which Hoyler and Schwarze served, were a heterogeneous group. The varied German dialects

used by the settlers told of their different origins in Germany prior to their families settling in Poland and later, in the early 1880s, in Volhynia, Russia. Hoyler studied the German accents and dialects which various families used. This helped him trace their family origins aback several generations, to different regions of Germany. It also explained the different beliefs which various people held with respect to religious customs and practices.

Some people were literate and others were not. The pastors often wrote letters for the people who wanted to keep in touch with friends and relatives left behind in Volhynia.

The pastors also helped them with a host of other circumstances faced in the new country. These included the acquisition of land, purchase of farm equipment, organization of schools and getting medical help. The list was long and varied.

Not only did they speak German differently but they had varied ideas about how to “do” church. For example, attendance at communion services was initially sparse. The young homeland ministers extended their efforts to improve communion participation by bring up the subject at home visitations to explain the “Moravian Way.” Over time their efforts were rewarded with success. Attendance at communion services were faithfully recorded in the diaries and their entries noted the improvements.

In order to become effective homeland pastors, they soon realized that their first priority was to get personally acquainted with the people. Home visits were given first priority.

This strategy was in complete accord with Hoyler's orientation that home visits were basic to his pastoral work. While in Seminary Hoyler had prepared and delivered a paper on the subject of home visits oriented towards spiritual conversations to help with spiritual formation and to propagate understanding the "Moravian Way." The activities of the young pastors illustrate that home visits were of high priority and highly effective in accomplishing their purposes.

They learned that most of the settlers in their congregations had forged strong ties with and deep appreciation for Moravian diaspora work in Volhynia, Russia and before that in Poland. When the pastors made entries into the church registers, they recorded place of birth for each person. It was clear that many of the parents and grandparents were born at various places in Poland. Many of their children were born in Volhynia, Russia. This was after the mass migration of the 1880s when thousands of people of German origin left Poland. It followed the abolition of serfdom in Russia which occurred in 1863. They formed German speaking villages and set up German schools for their children. These migrants brought with them a strong work ethic and progressive farming methods. They prospered and looked to the Moravian Church to meet their spiritual needs through diaspora work.

The concessions offered to the migrants from Poland by the Russian government were not kept. By the early 1890s the people felt deeply disappointment in their situation. Russification of the schools was in prospect. Moravian Churches which had been established at Schadura and Kamenka were denied permission to continue to operate. The migrant's sons faced conscription into the Russian army. Additionally, they would only be granted title to their provisionally leased land if they joined the Orthodox Church. These disappointments led many people to the decision that their future was in Canada. Land was opening up in Western Canada with Canadian Government promotions and assistance.

All of these considerations helped the young pastors address their primary tasks to gradually form them into Moravian congregations. This was helped enormously by the diaspora contacts they had previously experienced in the old country. Many of these people were deeply committed Christians but of different orientation with respect to worship practices such as communion and public prayer. They knew hymns of the church by memory and loved to sing and participate in choirs and instrumental musical groups.

In relatively short order the newly established congregations at Bruderheim, Bruderfeld, and Heimtal grew steadily. The remarks of the pastors in the church diaries attest to high levels of satisfaction and accomplishment with the participation of the people. The immigrants and new church member's lives were centered in the church which met their spiritual needs and provided a focus for their social lives.

The pastors preached a threefold truth that God's grace is free. It makes us happy in this life and gives us hope for eternity. Often the pastors mentioned in the diaries how spiritually troubled people came to peace though worship or pastoral counseling.

The diversity of the group sometimes led to disputes and sharp differences of opinion. Even people without any formal education could express solidly held views and arguments. Conflicts for various reasons remained to be dealt with. As a group the people respected the fact that the pastors were highly educated. It was their custom to turn to the pastors to arbitrate disputes and help them come to a resolution. Thus, the young pastors served as peacemakers.

Hoyler records on page 220 of the diary, "...in the evening I met with ...who were having a quarrel. The dispute was settled favorably in the presence of the elders."

P 329 "Several also found peace through the forgiveness of their sins."

P332 "They too had found peace and were very happy."

P332 "...they found peace and were extremely happy."

P346 "She went home with a happy heart."

P391 "She reached a state of grace and she was joyful in the Lord."

P446 “Bro.... has found peace and is now rejoicing in his salvation. “

It was evident that peace, unity and accord were high values to be strived for in this emerging community of believers.

My first exposure to the homeland missionary team of Hoyler and Schwarze was as the editor of their church diaries. These were published by the Canadian Society in 1990 and 1991 respectively. Fortunately, both pastors realized that they were making history. They were faithful, perceptive and detailed chroniclers.

My editorial function was to address literary style and translation accuracy as the diaries had been written in the German language of the settlers. We had the distinct good fortune to have had the assistance of Klaus Gericke during the translation process. Klaus and his family came to Edmonton from Herrnhut German in the early 1950s. In his retirement he gave unstintingly of his time and talent. His devoted service could justly be described as “invaluable”.

The Hoyler Diary includes the first 13 years of Hoyler’s Canadian service and contains 453 pages. Schwarze was less verbose. His diary covers four years of service and contains 94 pages.

The Hoyler and Schwarze diaries help us understand how the foundation for the Moravian Church in western Canada was laid. They help us understand how the spiritual lives of the people

were molded, strengthened and shaped. We come to fathom how the values structures of the people were undergirded by faithful attendance at worship services, prayer meetings, mission emphasis celebrations and teaching events.

Life on the frontier involved travel which presented many challenges, adventures and dangers. I chose to extract two episodes which in my opinion illustrate how extreme some of these conditions could be.

The first account came from Hoyler in his second year of service while travelling to Bruderheim on October 5, 1898.

He was on his way to Bruderheim via a stop in Beaverhills to visit Mr. P. Anderson in a Norwegian Settlement south of Beaver Lake. His diary entry tells the story. Following are his own words:

“I had to be on my way by 3:00 p.m. to get to the vicinity of Bruderheim, my usual destination, by night fall. Shortly after sunset I came to Ross Creek where I watered my horse but did not linger. I wanted to get away from the settlement before the onset of darkness because I did not want to get lost among the many trails one finds near a settlement. Even when I was on the main trail from West Beaver Lake to Fort Saskatchewan, I had difficulty staying on the trail. There other trails branching out from it. “

“Now it was pitch dark and on several occasions, I had to stop and light a match to ascertain that I was still on the right path. At

10:00 p.m. I arrived at Mr. Commak's who lives 10 miles from Bruderheim. They had already gone to bed but fortunately were home.... However, they welcomed me in a friendly manner, took my horse to their stable, made supper for me, arranged comfortable quarters for me in a homemade folding bed and entertained me royally."

October 7

"We got up at 7:00 a.m. Since I had my violin with me Robert Commack and I played duets for a while. At 9:30 a.m. I was on my way to Bruderheim."

It looks like Hoyler wanted to bring a little sunshine into Robert Commack's life, so he took the time to play duets with him before departing on his journey to Bruderheim. Another observation is that Hoyler spent the night on the folding bed supplied by the Commacks. Otherwise, Hoyler likely would have used his hammock which he carried with him for just such emergencies.

In our modern lives few of us are ever in complete darkness. Those of us who have some spelunking experience will understand. It is easy to skip over this episode being unaware of just how challenging and dangerous these events were. Striking a match could frighten the horse and cause severe problems. It seems likely to get the best benefit from the illumination of a single match would mean getting out of the buggy and standing ahead of the horse attached to a lead rope, to see the trail better. Success would depend on there being little or no wind. It took courage and ingenuity to succeed.

The second exceptional episode took place on October 5, 1901. Hoyler wrote:

“Drove to Heimtal. The service did not get started until after 8:00 p.m. because the roads were muddy and hard to navigate after the arrival of fresh snow. I got home at 12:20 a.m.”



This photo, taken in the New Sarepta area, shows that no one mode of transportation was completely reliable.

“I then had to rush to Bretin’s to baptize their child who was very ill. I could not drive across the bridge because the water was high and flowed over the bridge. In the darkness I could not see if it was safe. I walked across the creek on a log and baptized the child at 1:30 a.m. The young Ludwig Schultz brought me back to the bridge using a sleigh even though I had used a buggy all day. It was 3:00 a.m. by the time I came to rest.”

In those days the people held the view that if a child died before being baptized its soul was not assured of a place in heaven. This dictated the urgency of the pastor's visit and his determination to succeed in his call to this mission while overcoming serious difficulties. This was extravagant service exemplified without limits. I was totally impressed!

The Canadian Moravian Historical Magazine, established in 1995, was dedicated to the memory of Clement Hoyler and launched in the 100th Anniversary year of the founding of the Canadian Moravian Church. In the same year we published Hoyler's account of "Pioneering in Western Canada". In his own words it provided an account of what happened under his watch.

The Magazines essentially contain a collection of stories written by various people who dedicated their lives to the work of the Moravian Church. The Magazine carried on for 19 successive years. Those annual issues contain 119 articles which give voice to a variety of women and men, who share personal accounts of their involvement in work of the Moravian Church.

As editor of the Magazine I edited their submissions. While working on this paper I re-read all of the articles to refresh my memory. As I reviewed the articles I searched for answerers to the question "why?"

I would like to share with you some of the answers which came to my attention.

Western Canadian Moravians were brought up in an atmosphere of an emphasis on mission work. Missionaries on furlough often visited the congregations and shared their individual experiences. Mission festivals focused on the mission fields and the needs for both people to serve with the missionaries and funds to support the work.

Pastors frequently stressed aspects of mission opportunities from the pulpit. In Sunday School and during home visits challenges were placed before individuals to consider serving those needs. Women's groups gathered clothes and prepared care packages for the missions. They wrote letters, gathering medical supplies and pharmaceuticals to ship to medical clinics on the mission fields. Short term mission opportunities were organized and filled by people willing to do what they could to help the missionaries carry out their chosen tasks.

In the first issue of the Magazine, which came out in May of 1995, two women shared their experiences. Both were from the Bruderheim Moravian Church. Gladys Bartz (nee Kittlitz) wrote an article entitled, "Why Go to Alaska?"

In 1956, when she was in her early 20's she responded to the call which went out to all the churches for a teacher at the Children's Home near Bethel. In Gladys's own words she related, "After much deliberation and prayer I accepted the challenge and left Edmonton for Alaska on August 2, 1956 for a term of three years."



Shortly after her arrival at the Children's Home in Alaska several of the older boys hooked up the dog team to give Gladys Kittlitz her first dog sled ride.

Gladys's story tells us not only of all the varied activities in which she was engaged but how she spent her evenings after a full day. In order to help to give the children the experience of home life the evenings of the staff members were spent engaging the children in crafts, games, singing and reading stories to them. All of these activities were above the call of duty. These regular daily efforts were planned and given freely, to give disadvantaged kids a semblance of home life. They were

expressions of love in action. As Gladys tells, “the staff members tried to provide a real home atmosphere for them.”

Leah Frauenfeld, in her article about her Alaska service, told that it all started in confirmation class when Rev. Wolff suggested that I go into training to go into mission work. That thought stayed with me for many years. Then one day there was an item in the Moravian which announced that a housekeeper was needed at the Children’s Home in Alaska for a period of two years. It was hard to forget. It seemed like that was where I should be.



Leah Frauenfeld, right of photo with fur coat, chatting with Children's Home staff members in front of the superintendent's house.

Leah left her home in Bruderheim on November 20, 1963. Those two years stretched into nine years. Leah sums up her faithful service by writing, “How thankful I am that God’s call to service comes even to those who are just cooks and housekeepers.”

Like Gladys, Leah spent many of her evenings engaging the children in singing and having fun together. It was very clear from her account that her love for the children knew no bounds. Not only did Leah teach them songs but in her kitchen she taught them home making skills like baking bread, preparing food and the multitude of tasks involved in keeping the home running smoothly by keeping the everyone well fed.

Issue #1 of the Magazine was followed by 18 additional publications. Themes began to appear as more and more people responded to the invitation to share how they heeded the call and found their way into full time or short-term Christian service.

As editor of the Magazine it was a rich and rewarding experience. Every time my invitation went out to a person to write about their lives in Christian service it was met with a positive response. As I reflect upon this, I cannot recall anyone not participating unless it was for health reasons. A rich accumulation of historical information on Canadian Moravian Christian service has been chronicled for posterity.

I re-read the articles repeatedly and marveled at the variety of ways that various people heard the call, felt the call or were inspired by others to enter Moravian Church Christian service.



During their first winter in Alaska, 1948-49, Clarence and Pauline Henkelman made a trip by dog team into Bethel and returned with mail, on the front of the sled and three children in need of the care provided by the Children's Home.

Clarence and Pauline Henkelman of New Sarepta recalled, "As young people both Pauline and I felt keenly the Lord's call to missionary service. We knew we could never have peace of heart unless we would serve where and in the capacity the Lord would lead us and wanted us to serve." Rev. Samuel Wedman told them that a couple was needed to serve as house parents at the Children's Home in Alaska. The Henkelmans went for two years and stayed for 25 years at the Orphanage, later renamed the Moravian Children's Home. They followed that by serving 5 more years in pastoral service in Dillingham, Alaska. Their response to the call was typical of many of the accounts which are published in the Magazine.

After reading all of the issues of the Magazine, I paused to reflect upon this compendium of information. My first thoughts were about the impulses which were followed by so many of the authors which led them into Christian service. I reflected on the conditions of their upbringing which prepared their hearts for dedicating themselves to sacrificial service. This often meant leaving behind the comforts of home, family, friends and the opportunity for personal gain through joining pursuits in the secular world. The influences of their family and church provided answers to personal prayers for guidance and courage. A path into the unknown meant combating the feelings of uncertainty and doubts about personal abilities.

Over the 19 years, from 1995 to 2014, when the publication of the Magazine ceased, an important and rich aggregation of Canadian Moravian Church history was assembled. As I re-read this material, I gained a new appreciation for the loving service of our people. The service was exemplary, beneficial, inspiring and so faithful to Moravian traditions.

The beneficiaries of the efforts of these servants of God were blessed and we can also receive blessings by knowing that our support of the church work past and present is an ongoing effort to meet the needs of those in need aid of for their bodies, minds and spirits.

So vast, comprehensive and consequential was their service that words cannot express their dedication and service. In their writings I saw glimpses of authentic Christianity being lived out. Reflecting upon it I was truly blessed, in awe and inspired.

The accounts which Canadians committing their lives to missionary service have a common theme. The authors tell of how early in life they felt the support of their families to consider a life a Christian service. During morning devotions, the prayers of parents would focus on praying that a member of their family might feel the call to missionary service. These petitions would be reinforced by a picture on the kitchen wall of the Nicaragua missionary, E.J. Reinke, who had been formally adopted by the Canadian District. Weekly Mission services to enlighten the people about mission activities were held. Mission festivals would feature mission speakers and appeals for financial support. Camp Van-Es programmes often had a missionary emphasis.



Over the years, particularly during the 1940s, a ground swell emerged which resulted in more and more young Canadians volunteering for missionary service. They found their way to the

Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, into schools of nursing, or other training centres to prepare them for lives of service.



The accounts of missionary service which were published in the Canadian Moravian Magazine embody an important record of their lives and their contribution to the extension of God's kingdom in a wide variety of places.

Clarence Riske, Sam Schultz and Elmer Stelter on their way to Moravian College.

For example, in 1915 Ferdinand Drebert was the first person from the Canadian District to enter the Seminary. Upon graduation Ferdinand served in the Alaska mission field for 42 years. His book Alaska Missionary documents this remarkable achievement.

I got to know about Ferdinand Drebert early in my life. My mother's sister married one of the eight Drebert brothers and Ferdinand's name often came up during family gatherings. In 1971 when Rita and I moved with our two children to a farm in southeast Edmonton, we learned that we were living in the original William Drebert farmhouse, built in 1900, where

Ferdinand had grown up. This oblique connection caused me to correspond with Ferdinand. He was in retirement and living the Grey Cottage in Nazareth, Pennsylvania.

I went to Alaska in 1969 with nine other Canadian lay people for a short term, one month assignment to help build the Dillingham Moravian Church. We found our way to the Children's Home in Kwethluk. Rev. Clarence and Pauline Henkelman were serving there at that time.



Rev. Ferdinand Drebert, from the Canadian District, served in the Alaska Mission field for 42 years.

Clarence took us up the mighty Kusokwim River to Tuluksak where he held a service. We stopped at fish camps along the way to advise the people that the service would take place at 3:00pm at the Tuluksak church.

The Tuluksak church had been built under Ferdinand Drebert's supervision and inspiration in 1927. While in Tuluksak I penned a letter to Drebert telling him of how connected to him while there. People treated me royally when they learned that I was his distant relative.



Bill Brese, left side in photo, and a work group from the Canadian District in Dillingham, Alaska, 1969. They assisted in the construction of the new Moravian church.

Becoming aware of Rev. Ferdinand Drebert's work in Alaska gave me a feeling of extended family connectedness to this service. It inspired me.

Later as the team lead I was inspired to go on short term mission trips to Limon Costa Rica for earthquake damage repair work, to Ahaus Honduras to do upgrading to Clinic buildings, and to head up the Rajpur Foster Children project which recruited supporters for needy children to get cared for and educated in a Christian environment.

All of these experiences in my life came out of influences which I was exposed to as I carried on my service with the Canadian Moravian Historical Society.

Hoyler was a wise young man. He lived out history and recorded the making of the frontier. He inspired me to become a historian and to gather the accounts of contemporary servants of God for publication and preservation for posterity.

The Canadian Moravian Historical Society was established in 1982 to enable succeeding generations to gain an understanding of and appreciation for the dedicated service to the cause of Jesus Christ our Chief Elder by those who have preceded us. As I look back on how I engaged in a leadership role with the Society from the very beginning, I now realize that my life was shaped by the dedicated services of our forbearers.

The people who shared their lives of service as homeland and foreign missionaries became examples to me. Their dedication to Christian service impacted and inspired me to do what I could to support the work of meeting the needs of others and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

Hoyler and Schwarze planted the seeds. Schwarze stayed in Canada for 4 years before going into mission work in Antigua. Hoyler stayed for almost 30 years to guide and influence the path of growth and development of the Canadian District. The more I learned about the influence of these two men on both the clergy and parishioners in the Canadian District the more my appetite was honed to find out more about the consequences of their

foundational work. At first it was about historical curiosity. In time this fostered deep appreciation and admiration.

The early pastors laid the foundation for the value structure of the Moravians in Canada. Over time I adopted that value structure.

Through their lives I saw true authentic Christianity lived out. I was blessed and inspired. They truly could be described as emulators of Jesus Christ our Chief Elder.

It is 128 years since the first Moravian Churches were established in what was then the Alberta District of Western Canada. In those years the church had its glory days, rising to new heights of Christian endeavours. Happily, we recorded that in the publications of the Canadian Moravian Historical Society. Recently, I was asked by a retired President of the Provincial Elders' Conference about the state of our church in Alberta. With regret I told him that in my considered opinion, our beloved Moravian Church is sliding into oblivion. We only have a remanent left.

On another occasion the President of the Board of Elders of the Canadian District asked me to share my thoughts on what the Board might do with the funds which will be accrued from the sale of closed churches. In accordance with Canadian taxation law these funds must stay in Canada. If the Moravian Church is no longer operating the funds can be designated to other non-profit organization.

Didsbury Moravian church closed in 1964, New Sarepta Moravian Church (right) closed in 1982.



In closing I will set out the outline of my vision for the future and how to put these funds to good use.

In keeping with the traditions of the Moravian Church and our own beginnings, I think that we should set up an international organization to engage young people for Christian Service to serve people in need and by word and deed. In effect it would be a Christian Peace Corp serving people internationally. A host of young Christians would rise to the occasion and devote their lives and energy to help people in need. The Board of World Mission could be engaged to help identify needs and possible candidates for service from the breadth of the Unity.

Camp Van-Es could be the centre where training would take place. We could develop a curriculum founded on the template

used by Hoyler and Schwarze and modified by the basics outlined recently in the recently published Seminary textbook, Our Moravian Treasures, edited by Dr. Peter Vogt.

We have the track record lived out by a wealth of talent from the Canadian District which I alluded to in this paper. We would have the money and talented young people to engage in the limitless opportunities which exist. It would just take vision and leadership to make it happen.

I close with this thought. Pray about it!

Shalom,

Bill Brese

APPENDIX

Issues of the Magazine are online and may be reached by Googling:

Canadian Moravian Historical Society Magazine

See the list of each of the 19 issues.

Below sees the “index”, followed by “Notes from the Archives.”

The first issue of the Magazine was published 1995. Prior to this in 1990, The late Rev. Wilfred L. Dreger, a Canadian Moravian who spent 33 years in Central America and Caribbean, was commissioned by the Canadian Moravian Historical Society to document the service of other Canadians in this area of mission service. His account, entitled.

“A HISTORY OF CANADIAN MISSIONARY INVOLVEMENT IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARAIBBEAN” was published in Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society Volume 26,

It is planned to have this article included online with our Magazines.

Included in the Dreger Article are references to the service of: Will and Lorraine Dreger

Samuel Wedman
Dorothy Stoltz Weingarth
John and Violet Befus
Jane Wedman
Grace Hoppe Marx
Lorraine Sampert
Lorenz and Nora Adam
Irene Prochnau
Marvin and Wilma Henkelmann
Gordon Sommers
Norman Prochnau
Lily Prochnau
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Harvey Prochnau
Gerry and Brenda Befus
Stephen Prochnau
Janice Steinbach
Brenda Lange
Hazel Schattschneider

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Bruderheim Moravian Church Diary
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By Clement Hoyer
Hoyer's reflections on 30 years of Canadian service
- They Came to Serve
(Bruderheim Moravian Church History 1893-1982)
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