

Mission Activities of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren 1889 – 1939

Excerpted from *A Historical Sketch of the Churches of
the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren*, 1939.



Evangelical Mennonite Brethren

The Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches was known as “Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Conference” or “E.M.B.” from 1937 until 1978. Previous to that it was named “Defenseless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America.”

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Preface

The Historical Committee that collected and organized historical sketches of the EMB Churches also collected information about the various missions activities of the Conference. Most of the missionaries and works were still in existence in 1939, so the information that follows often assumes that the readers are very familiar with it. Thus, for example, a section on the Happy Hour Mission gave no indication that it was situated in Chicago. The material has been reorganized for easier access, but the original wording was left intact apart from minor spelling and punctuation changes.

The Fellowship (or Conference) has always sought to spread the Gospel locally and globally. This was reflected even as the first missionaries were commissioned. In 1906, missionaries were sent to Chicago, Illinois and also to Dhamtari, India. Today our Fellowship churches support 100 missionary units in 23 countries including Canada and the United States.

May this short overview remind us to honor and imitate those who have enlarged God's kingdom through their perseverance in difficult and often discouraging work. Their labor was not in vain.

*Paul A. Boeker, Administrator
August 2009*

Forward

In writing the history of our mission work, we have followed a definite plan in order that the reader may get a clear conception of the great work. First, we tried to give a bird's eye view of the work in a chronological order. Then, we presented the work in the different fields. This was followed by a division of the mission work in its different phases, thus calling the attention of the reader to the manner and importance of certain work. Last, we gave the missionary calendar. We hope that this presentation will be used by God to awaken a greater zeal for spreading the Gospel.

*Rev. G. S. Rempel, Secretary
1939*

E.M.B. MISSIONS

1. General View of the Work

It has been the plan of God from the creation of the world that the glory of God should be manifested on this earth. Satan has destroyed it in that he brought sin upon this earth. But God has not forsaken His plan. After He has revealed Himself to mankind, He assigned the duty upon those that knew Him to proclaim it to their fellowmen, that they might also enjoy the love of God to its fullest extend.

Our forefathers knew Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. The Love of God was poured out into their hearts. And as they were led by the Holy Spirit, they saw that they, the individual churches, were not strong enough for the great task of spreading the Gospel. So they united in 1889.

In the early years, the Conference encouraged mission activities. Since we did not have our own missionaries nor a field for work, the Conference indorsed that each church should partake in mission work where ever an opportunity was given. Since the brethren acknowledged the great task of the believers to proclaim the Gospel, and since they had a burden for souls, a committee was elected by the Conference in 1901 for the purpose of finding ways and means by which they might do mission work more efficiently and proclaim the Gospel in those places that had not heard it before. The first committee was composed of Rev. Aron Wall, Rev. Heinrich Fast, Rev. C. M. Wall and Rev. John P. Epp.

They were deeply convinced that they had followed God's plan, since the next year God gave the Conference two brethren and their wives who were willing to lay their lives upon the altar of God and devote their whole time in the service of the Master. They had a call from God to preach the Gospel to a people of a different tongue.

Most wonderful were the ways in which God assigned the field to our Conference. Paul's experiences on his second missionary journey in which the Holy Spirit forbade him to go to certain places and again opened the way into another direction, has been repeated in our Conference. The messengers of God were there to go and the churches were willing to send them, but where is the field? After earnest prayer and outlook for a field, a place in Georgia to work among the Negroes came in view. The prospect for mission work was good, but God did not will it so. The Conference prayed on and kept its vigilant outlook. In the year of 1906, Rev. A. F. Friesen and family were sent through the American Mission Society to Dhamtari, India.

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Again the Lord called others. After Rev. G. P. Schultz had worked in Chicago and the different churches of the Conference for some time, the Lord called him to a definite missionary work. In December of 1908 he took over the superintendence of the Happy Hour Mission. This was a place where vice dominated. Rev. Schultz had great pleasure to work among these benighted men. The Lord greatly blessed this work and the Holy Spirit manifested his power in visible manner.

The colportage and evangelization work was assigned to Rev. G. T. Thiessen in 1914. During this time his call to China came more real, and in 1920 he and his wife were sent to that great field of service. His special work was to give the missionaries' children an education and then help wherever he could. Mrs. Thiessen devoted her time to the Chinese women. During their second term they supervised the mission stations at Yucheng.

Rev. and Mrs. John J. Schmidt had worked on the China Mennonite Mission field, which was founded by Rev. H. C. Bartel, since 1906 with good success. In 1920 the Conference felt led to take over their financial support. Thus we came in closer fellowship with them and the work.

In 1924 Sister Aganetha Regier was sent to the field in China. The Ningling station was assigned to her and to Miss Mary Schmidt. Since there were no men missionaries on this station, they met with many hard problems. Rev. H. C. Bartel, the superintendent of the field, assisted them in their decisions of those problems.

Africa came to the foreground and Miss Kornelia Unrau was sent through the Congo Inland Mission board to the field. After she served one term, she was impressed by the necessity of a nurse's training. Thus prepared, she again went to the field to be of greater service for her Lord. The Lord richly blesses her.

Great pleasure did the Conference take in sending Rev. and Mrs. Loyal Bartel to China in 1928. Rev. Bartel is the son of Rev. H. C. Bartel, the founder of the Mission field. He was born in China and has lived his childhood and boyhood days among the Chinese. Thus he is truly familiar with the customs and habits of the people, so essential to successful missionary work. Rev. Bartel has had his Bible training in the United States. He is the assistant superintendent of the field and the president of the Bible Training School at Tsaohsien.

Rev. and Mrs. Frank J. Enns, who are members of the Bethel church at Inman, Kansas, were sent to Africa in 1931 through the Congo Inland Mission Board. They had had a term of successful work previous to sending them at this time. Their support was divided between the Conference and their home church. Since the Conference felt that

their own members should have the preference, their support from the Conference was withdrawn after their second term. Rev. and Mrs. Enns have gained the hearts of the Conference.

In 1938 we had the privilege of sending Sister Aganetha Friesen, a graduate nurse, to Africa. Helping the needy on the field gives them entrance to preach the Gospel of Christ to many who are close to eternity's door.

2. The Work on the Fields

a. In Chicago

Overview

Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Wiens began their work under the auspices of the Home Mission. Their support and house rent came from the Conference. But soon the hall in which they held their meetings became too small, and since the rent increased, the thought was awakened to buy a hall. Opportunity knocked at the door, and Rev. John P. Epp and Rev. Jacob A. Wall bought the roomy hall for \$2825.00. This hall they sold to the Conference for the same price. Thus in 1912 the hall became the property of the Conference, where the missions work could be carried on unmolested. Rev. and Mrs. Wiens have done the pioneer work of our Conference and have been the founders of our mission work in Chicago.

At the request of the Conference, Rev. and Mrs. G. P. Schultz took up the work in the Rescue Mission in 1916, and Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Wiens opened the Mennonite Bible Mission. The name of the Rescue Mission was now changed to Brighton Mission Chapel. To Rev. Schultz came the task of keeping up the work so nobly begun. In I Corinthians 3:6–8 we read: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." The work in the Brighton Mission Chapel has not only been kept up, but it has grown so that today it bears all the expense of carrying on the work except that half of the superintendent's salary is paid by the Conference.

In 1919 again the hall was getting too small and the building of a new church was contemplated, but again God's plan was different and better. A short distance away was a fine structure of a church only 9 years old for sale at the low price of \$5500.00. Seeing that this was God's finger, the church was bought and dedicated on November 9, 1920. Every week seven or more services are conducted here. The Lord blesses the work.

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b. In China

Our mission work in China will be traced to the missionary activity of Rev. and Mrs. M. C. Bartel and the undaunted devotion to the work of Rev. and Mrs. John J. Schmidt, who followed the call of God believing that He would supply all their needs.

In spite of the disturbed political conditions, China is an open field for the Gospel. Many have come to the light of the Gospel and are faithful witnesses of the grace of God. We especially rejoice that the native Christians take such active part in mission work. They not only take charge of the evangelization work and the preaching in the churches, but also take charge of pastoral work and church discipline. Besides this they have in the latter years taken part in the financial burden. They support their own workers and build their own churches. The missionaries have oversight over the work and help where they can. The training of the Christian workers is still under the leadership of the missionaries.

c. In Africa

This work has been brought nigh unto us through the devotion of Sister Sarah Kroeker, now Mrs. Oscar Andersen. The field is known as the Congo Inland Mission. It lies on the banks of the Congo River. It is an open field for the Gospel. The religion of the natives is a religion of fear and expectation from the evil spirits. Marvelous has been the power of the Gospel, and many have torn loose from fear of heathen darkness and now live in the Light of the Gospel. The missionaries do not only have to combat with heathenism, but also with Catholicism. Thus it has become clear that our missionaries do not only have to be grounded in the Word of God, but also [must] have a good education in order to compete with the learned priests.

3. Types of Missionary Work

a. Evangelization

This is the preaching of the Gospel among the native unbelievers and is done as much as possible by native workers. The evangelist travels from one village to another, preaches the Gospel, sells portions of the Bible and distributes tracts. As soon as there are some believers at one place, the missionary from the main station sees to it that such a place gets a teacher and it becomes an outstation.

b. Church work

This is for the purpose of strengthening and grounding the newly converted, and those that have been baptized that they shall grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This work is assigned to native workers as much as possible as soon as they are rooted in the Word of God. The missionaries have oversight over this work at all times.

c. Bible training

The preparation of the native workers to spread the Gospel and be grounded in the doctrinal truths of the Bible still rests entirely upon the missionaries. As the propagation of the Gospel rests upon the soundness and thoroughness of the workers, this work is considered the most important and the speediest way of evangelizing the fields.

d. Medical work

As this has to do with the healing of the body, it is considered only as means to an end. Since sin has left so many wounds and pains, the touching of the body with healing balm gives the missionary entrance to the hearts to listen to the Gospel. It gives the heathen a practical illustration how Christ came to help their needy souls just as the missionary has come to help their diseased bodies.

4. Missionary Chronology

a. In India

- Rev. and Mrs. P. A. Friesen — 1906 —

b. In Chicago

- Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Wiens
 - ♦ in the Rescue Mission — 1906 — 1916,
 - ♦ in the Mennonite Bible Mission — 1916 — 1938
- Rev. and Mrs. G. P. Schultz
 - ♦ in the Happy Hour Mission 1908 — 1916,
 - ♦ in the Brighton Mission Chapel — 1916.

c. In China

- Rev. and Mrs. John J. Schmidt — 1906 — 1927
- Rev. and Mrs. G. T. Thiessen — 1920 — 1927; 1932 —
- Sister Aganetha Regier — 1926 —
- Rev. and Mrs. Frank J. Enns — 1931 —
- Sister Aganetha Friesen — 1938 —

*(P.S.—Rev. and Mrs. Friesen are not supported by our Conference.)*¹

- Rev. A. F. Wiens died in 1938.

¹ This note was in the original *Historical Sketch*, so it was left here, although it is unclear who the people are or why the note was included.

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- Rev. and Mrs. John J. Schmidt live in the United States since 1927.
- Rev. and Mrs. G. T. Thiessen were in the United States 1927-1932.
- Rev. and Mrs. Frank J. Enns were only for one term supported in part by the Conference.

5. Brethren who in a special way supported our mission work

- Rev. K. P. Epp,
- Rev. J. A. Wall,
- Rev. J. P. Epp.
- Rev. D. A. Friesen,
- Mr. A. A. Wall,
- Mr. Dietrich Stoesz

Besides these, there have been other Conference members, who have devoted their time to missionary work and have received recognition from the Conference but they have not been supported by the Conference nor have they been under the supervision of the Home and Foreign Mission board.

Appendix

Editor's note: The material below was included in the historical sketches of the churches, but it is included here since it shows a facet of home mission activities that have been generally forgotten.

Chicago, Illinois

Happy Hour Mission

The Happy Hour Mission was opened in the fall of 1908 on South State and Polk Street in very wicked locality by Rev. A. H. Leaman and Rev. J. K. Gerig. Both of these men solicited funds from their respective Conferences to pay the rent of the mission hall. We were called to be the superintendent of this mission and were supported by our Conference with \$20.00 per month. Meetings were held six nights a week.

As this was a very wicked part of the city we met some of most degraded people in the city, both men and women. Indeed, we worked in the devil's scrap-pile. Pen and ink fail to describe some of these low down characters of human beings. We praise God for the many that responded to the call of Christ. Drunkards were saved, went home to their families, established family altars and testified to the saving power of God. Young men who had run away from home were saved and went back to their folk. Harlots bowed to the altar and wept their way to the cross. Many happy hours we had in this mission in showing the sinners the way to Jesus.

For seven years this work carried on. 2200 Gospel meetings were held at this place. The attendance was usually good. Nearly 100,000 men have attended these meetings in these years. During the Great War the rent was increased twice, and the hall was rented by a business man, so we had to give up the work. The last meeting was held on April 16, 1916. For seven years the old saloon had served as a place of worship. Eternity will reveal what the Happy Hour Mission has meant and done in that wicked locality.

Submitted by G.P. Schultz

Brighton Mission Church

This mission was opened by the Defenseless Mennonite Brethren in Christ of North America in the Spring of 1907 at the corner of Hayne Avenue and 33rd Street under the name Hayne Avenue Mission. This work was in charge of Rev. and Mrs. A. F. Wiens with Sarah Kroeker as assistant. After a year of labor at this place the Mission was moved to

the corner of Oakley and 35th Street, receiving at the time a new name, namely the Mennonite Rescue Mission. For four years the work was carried on at this place. Up to this time the building had only been rented, which of course is not favorable for building up a permanent Mission Work. After due consideration, a few brethren of the Conference had the courage to buy a building at 3404 So. Oakley Avenue. Later this building became the property of the Conference.

On May 7, 1912, this hall was dedicated and with new zeal and energy the work was taken up. God honored the efforts put forth and on December 8, 1912, the first baptismal and communion service was held at the Mission. Miss Kroeker had entered another field of service. This vacancy was filled by Eva Enns of Inman, Kansas, and by Tillie Stucky. The work was carried on by Rev. Wiens till September 1, 1916, when a change of workers took place.

How well we remember the Sunday when we got off the street car on 35th and Oakley and walked one block north to the Mission, unlocked the door, and went in and knelt down and prayed! The load was very heavy on our heart. This was in the afternoon. Soon some children and some grown-ups came in. With about 30, we had our first Sunday School. We were much discouraged to think that after 10 years of labor only about 30 souls should be present in the service, but we took courage because we felt the presence of the Lord was with us. The evening service was attended by only a few people, but through prayer we gained the victory over the small crowds. Miss Katherine Schmidt, who started with us in the work, made many visits and soon the Sunday School began to grow. Miss Katherine Ratzlaff came in as a co-worker. These two consecrated young ladies did very much to build up the work. With the change of workers the Mission again received a new name, namely Brighton Mission Chapel. The work in the first years was very hard and trying, that at times we were ready to give up the work, but the Lord always gave courage to continue, and we stayed.

The Lord blessed the work and the attendance began to grow and after a few years the Mission Hall proved too small. The matter was taken into prayer and God began to answer. We were permitted by the Mission Committee of the Conference to solicit funds for a new place of worship. We at once took advantage of this and went to a number of churches in the Conference. The Lord in a gracious way blessed these efforts. Enough money was secured so that we could go on with the thought in mind of getting a larger place for worship. The Lord opened the way for the Conference to buy a brick church 44 by 60 feet, only 9 years old, [located] half a mile east of the Mission Hall, at the corner of Lincoln and 34th Place, for only \$5500. We paid cash for the property, of which the E. M. B. Conference now is the owner. On November 9, 1919 we moved to the present quarters. With new zeal and courage we

took up the work at this place. With the blessings of God on the work, there has been a gradual and a steady growth of the work.

We are now an organized congregation with a membership of about 160. Brother Denis has been an able and faithful assistant. He has been with the work from the beginning and has been a wonderful help. We must also mention three other lady workers who labored with us during these years, namely Miss Kathrine Friesen, Miss Kathrine Wall and Alvina Becker. All have helped to make this work here in Chicago a success. At present we have eight different meetings a week. Our weekly attendance is about from 450 to 500. If all those that attend our church should attend at the same time, our church would be too small. With faith in a great God we are looking with courage into the future. We have not always had smooth sailing during these twenty years of service, but our dear Saviour has never forsaken us for which we praise Him.

*Submitted by G. P. Schultz
April 12, 1938*

Narnaka, Alberta

Evangelical Mennonite Brethren

The first Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church originated in Russia, 1905. The document the establishment of this church was signed by 15 brethren on May 16, 1905 on the property H. Guenther, Juschanlee, Molotschna [Ukraine]. Most of these members came from the so called "*Kirchengemeinden*." To the Elder group belonged also some of the Ministers of the "Molotschna Mennonite Brethren." At that time they called themselves the: "Molotschnaer Evangelical Mennonite Brethren." In 1929, just before the general emigration this church counted in round numbers about 500 members. The first church was built in the village of Lichtfeld. Similar congregations, called "Alliance churches" by the outsiders, originated in Sgradowka and Samara.

In the years from 1923–1930 many of these ministers and members emigrated to Canada, and most of these joined the Mennonite Brethren churches in the local places where they settled. However, a group who settled in Ontario did not join those churches, but formed a union between the members of Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren. At first [they operated] under the name: "Molotschnaer Mennonite Brethren" and later "Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren." In this union they have, however, retained their fundamentals in regard to Lord's Supper and receiving members.

In Namaka, Alberta, too, both the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren were represented in the new settle-

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ment, and in 1927 the two groups formed a union under the name of "The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren of Namaka." Soon small local churches were formed at Crowfoot, Gem, Munson, Swalwell (Linden) and Ryley.

The first local church at Namaka counted in the beginning only 30 members, but increased until it reached its highpoint of 60 members. The Lord caused revivals and young souls got saved, were baptized and were taken the church. Then, too, members of the Mennonite Church were given the brotherly hand of fellowship. The Lord has blessed us richly, and our ministers, in proclaiming the Word of Truth in the various places, have been a blessing to many.

The founders of the church were the two ministers A. A. Toews and A. P. Willms, and the minister candidate G. Dirks. Bro. A. A. Toews was elected as leader and Bro. G. Dirks served as Secretary. Bro. A. A. Toews still serves.

The total membership in Alberta is about 160. However, this number has varied from time to time since some have moved away and others have been added to the church.

Bro. Joh. Dirks served as our first deacon till he moved away upon which the church elected Bro. Peter J. Dirksen, who later was ordained. During the brief period of history of the church in Alberta the following have been ordained as ministers: Bros. Abr. G. Martens and Jak. Klassen, Crowfoot; Corn. Penner, Sedalia (Ryley), Nic. A. Rempel, Swalwell; Gerhard D. Huebert, Gem, H. G. Klassen, Munson; Peter Peters, Gem; Nic. Ediger and Gerhard Rempel, Winnipeg; and H. H. Willms, Namaka, have been added to our list of ministers.

In the beginning we had our services and hours of fellowship together with the Mennonite church, meeting in the district school house where the ministers of both churches would interchangeably serve with God's Word. However, in January and February of 1933 we built our own house of prayer, and the churches now meet at separate places for worship. The Young People's Christian Endeavour continued to meet together.

The building of this church was made possible through the purchase of a lumber yard for a very reasonable price, those buildings were taken down and of the lumber the church was built. This building stands on the property of Rev. A. A. Toews, which is about the centre of the community. It affords ample room for visitors and festivals.

The labor at this church was voluntarily done by the brethren. Later a barn and also a room for Sunday school purposes were erected. The whole property costs the church about \$500. These funds were raised by asking each member to pay \$4.50 and the balance by freewill

offerings. There is no indebtedness to the building; but on the other hand it is not quite complete due to crop failures and hardships.

Every week the members meet with their families for services and worship, and on every month for business and the Lord's Supper. On suitable times Prayer and Bible classes are held; and at least once a year so called *Bibel Besprechungen* (Bible Conferences) are held where also outside ministers will take part. Quite often we have visiting ministers of other churches who bring us the Gospel.

Every family practices the family altar in that they gather together twice a day (morning and evening) to read God's holy Word and pray.

Fellowship visits are made at least once twice a year in every home where there are church members by several ministers of the local church or sometimes visiting ministers, who have been invited for that purpose.

The ministers receive no remuneration for their service; but the leader receives enough for his expenses connected with the church work. However, if servants are sent out to the different communities, they receive their expenses plus 50 cents to a dollar per day during their services.

All the local churches of our Conference in Alberta meet once a year where questions concerning home and foreign mission as well as church work are being discussed and the work organized. This Conference elects the Mission Committee, and the chairman of this committee serves at the same time as superintendent of the District Conference. Till now Bro. A.A. Toews has served in this position and Bro. A.G. Martens has been his substitute. To provide money for home missions, members are asked to voluntarily contribute 50 cents a year. The money that goes through this mission treasury runs from \$400 to \$500 per year.

Sunday School is being conducted with the children only in 2 or 3 classes. The teachers are being elected by the church for an indefinite period of time. The collections of church and Sunday School are used for home and foreign mission.

The Young People's Society was organized several after the church was organized. This society is a union with the Mennonite Church. The officers are being elected jointly for a year. Once a month they render a program consisting of songs, music, addresses and readings.

A church choir too has from time to time the church; but since many of the families were forced to move back and forth new ones take their place, the development of singing has been hampered.

Some of our young people have attended Bible Schools at Coaldale, Gem, Calgary and Three Hills, and make themselves useful in our home churches.

The sisters of the church have organized a Mission Sewing circle. Many useful articles are prepared here and sold twice a year at a Mission Sale. The money received for these articles is invested in home and foreign missions. ◇

The Different Stations in Alberta

The congregation at Swalwell-Acme has built itself a neat House of Prayer at Linden, and under the leadership of Bro. Nic. A. Rempel they have their regular services and Sunday School for all, the Lord is blessing the work.

At Ryley, too, a small congregation is meeting for services in a [former] Catholic chapel, purchased that purpose, under the leadership of Bro. Corn. Penner. His co-workers are Bro. Jak Klassen and Peter Schoeder. Bro. Jak. Goerzen serves as deacon.

At Crowfoot, our brethren and sisters in the Lord meet jointly with the Mennonite Brethren for services and fellowship. At present, most of them have moved away on account of the continued drought.

Our members at Gem are united with the Mennonite Brethren in worship and fellowship: except that they do not have their name on the church book with the Mennonite Brethren there.

At Munson there are at present only two families belonging to our conference.

Last year a group of Christians have organized at Yarrow,

British Columbia, and have joined our conference under the leadership of Bro. Jac. Wittenberg, Yarrow.

We can report of many hours of rich blessings in Alberta and the Lord has wonderfully revealed Himself to the efforts of his children, even to the work done in weakness. The work has not been without opposition and temptations of God's opposing forces; but we fully rely upon God's grace strength which has helped us so far and we trust in Him.

Really, the truth is, it is not our work but the Lord's for whom we work. We are called to be co-workers with Him of the Temple of God (Eph. 2:19-22). When some day this framework of all the different church organizations will crumble, then we shall see the beautiful Temple of God and worship Him who made us worthy to work for Him and His cause. May we be found trusting in Him (I Cor. 3:5-15).

Aron A. Toews, Writer.

Namaka, Alberta, Canada, Febr. 3, 1938