In This Issue

At the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the (Old) Mennonite Church in the United States faced a serious crisis. The outbreak of World War I had posed the most immediate and obvious challenge. The war—with its universal conscription, intense patriotism and virulent anti-German sentiment—had caught Mennonite church leaders by surprise. Hundreds of young Mennonite men suddenly found themselves in military training camps, uncertain of their legal status as conscientious objectors and unsure about how to respond to the pressures to participate in various aspects of military life. At the same time, other tensions were dividing the church. New cultural currents of Progressivism and the Social Gospel, marked by a confident optimism regarding human potential, challenged traditional Mennonite virtues of humility and separation from the world. Even as church leaders embraced a more centralized denominational structure along with new institutions promoting missions, higher education, Sunday school, and periodicals—all of which reflected elements of this new spirit—they also vigorously rejected other expressions of "modernism." By the early 1920s, these tensions surfaced in a generational struggle to define the future of the church. That struggle ultimately led to the closing of Goshen College for the 1923-1924 academic year, the revocation of credentials for numerous pastors, and the exodus of many (Old) Mennonites to the General Conference Mennonite Church or out of the Mennonite world altogether.

Anna Showalter, a recent Goshen College graduate, opens this issue of *MQR* with a detailed narrative of the Young People's Conference movement during its short-lived existence from 1919-1923. Mobilized for relief work immediately following the end of World War I, a cadre of young Mennonites began to express openly their frustration with the lack of vision and organizational ineptitude that they perceived among church leaders. To the consternation of their elders, several of the most vocal critics began to organize conferences, which, among other things, called for broader representation in church governance, better organization for relief work, a more visible and active peace witness, and greater involvement of young people in the life of the church. The group encountered strong opposition; and, by 1923, the Young People's Conferences came to an end. Yet even though the movement seemed to fail in the short term, the initiative marked the emergence of moderate leaders like Harold S. Bender who were more willing to work within the cultural and theological framework of the established church. By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the church had incorporated, in

one form or another, nearly all of the reforms championed by the Young People's Conference movement. The question facing the church in the 1920s—how a new generation of leaders would renew and refocus an inherited tradition—is especially relevant for our own day when indifference poses at least as a great a challenge to the future well-being of the church as youthful appeals to a competing vision of faithfulness.

Beginning in 1609, the Waterlander Mennonite church in Amsterdam entered into a long relationship with an émigré congregation founded by the English Separatist, John Smyth. The geographical focus of that relationship was a cluster of apartments, workshops, and meeting spaces known as the Bakehouse. Historians **Keith Sprunger** and **Mary Sprunger**, both experts in the history of Dutch Mennonites, focus on the ownership history of Bakehouse and the complex relationships that emerged between English immigrants and the Waterlander congregation who offered them spiritual and economic support. Their essay provides a fascinating insight into the close ties of identity with place and the creative tensions that inevitably result from cross-cultural encounters.

Duane Stoltzfus, professor of communication at Goshen College, returns to the tumultuous years of World War I to revisit the story of four young Hutterite men conscripted into the U.S. army in the spring of 1917. Accounts of the martyrdom of Joseph and Michael Hofer, who died in Fort Leavenworth as a result of inhumane treatment, have circulated ever since their deaths. But Stoltzfus has uncovered several significant new collections of letters, held by descendents of the interned men, that shed fresh light on their dramatic story. His retelling of the narrative, drawing heavily on the words of those most directly affected, is timely especially in light of the current public debate regarding the treatment of prisoners of war.

Finally, we conclude with a revisionist exploration of Mennonite spirituality. In the 1980s, Theron Schlabach, a well-known historian of American Mennonites, identified a transformation in nineteenth-century Mennonite theology from a strong emphasis on suffering to a new focus on humility. That shift, he proposed, could be attributed to the growing (and lamentable) influence of Pietism on Mennonite spirituality. In this issue of *MQR* **Andrew Martin** challenges Schlabach's thesis, arguing that humility was a central theme in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology long before the nineteenth century—indeed, Martin traces it back to sixteenth-century Anabaptists who were drawing, in turn, on the monastic tradition and late medieval mysticism. The humility motif, he argues, was therefore not a result of Pietist influence; and it was not a mark of spiritual declension. Martin's essay invites further consideration of Mennonite spirituality framed within a broader historical perspective.

– John D. Roth