



Profiles

of Mennonite Faith

Peter H. Wedel – *Pioneer Missionary to the Cameroons*

Peter H. Wedel, son of Cornelius P. and Helena (Wiebe) Wedel, was raised in the rural Mennonite community of Goessel, Kansas. Born April 19, 1865 in Alexanderwohl, Russia, he immigrated with his parents at the age of 9 years to Kansas. His father joined the Mennonite Brethren in 1880, becoming the first minister of the Mennonite Brethren group meeting in that southwest portion of Marion County. Three years later, after struggling with the claims of the gospel, Peter accepted the Lord and was baptized in May of 1883 at the age of 18.

After Wedel's elementary schooling and preparation in the Vorbildungsschule, he taught rural schools for several years. Seeing "marked ability" and giftedness in this young man, some education-minded brethren financed Wedel's education at the Baptist Seminary

in Rochester, New York, where other Mennonite young men had been trained. During the summer months, Wedel did evangelistic work in the churches, and every place he preached, the Lord blessed with revival.

One such place was the Ebenfeld community of Marion County, Kansas. In the spring of 1893 Peter Wedel conducted revival meetings in the Ebenfeld Mennonite Brethren Church for five weeks, preaching the gospel "clearly and powerfully" according to Zionsbote correspondent J.J. Penner. On 14 May 1893, 57 persons were baptized by brethren Johann Foth and D.D. Claassen, following "a striking message" delivered by Wedel. A month later, on 25 June 1893, another 26 persons were baptized. Peter H. Wedel was the instrument used by God for revival, so that this season of spiritual joy and



Peter H. and Martha Wedel

victory came to be called “Miracle of Grace at Ebenfeld.”

When Wedel completed his training at Rochester, there were those who felt that he was the one to establish the long-desired Mennonite Brethren institution of higher learning for preachers and church workers, but he felt directed to the mission field in Africa. On 27 June 1895 he was married to Martha Liebig, the daughter of August Liebig, a German Baptist minister who had assisted the young Mennonite Brethren movement in Russia before moving to America. Martha also felt called to mission work, and the same year, in September, he and his new bride ventured out to the Cameroons, Africa under the Baptist conference, as the Mennonite Brethren as yet had not organized a formal foreign missions program. Immersing himself in the Duala language, he was placed in charge of the educational program of the mission. “A born teacher,” he had much enthusiasm for the work, preparing young Christians to teach and preach.

During the second year on the field, it became obvious to the Wedel couple that they were living in “the land of death,” as numbers of whites succumbed to fevers. Following the birth of their first child, a son, the

situation became critical, and Martha’s life, according to the doctor, could only be saved by immediate departure from the Cameroons. Peter elected to remain. “The separation from his beloved Martha, who had become a part of his own life, was the most difficult of experiences.” After a short respite in the mountains of the Cameroons, Wedel returned to his mission work.

On 6 February 1897 he was seized with violent chills and fever, part of the attack of the Black Water Fever. He longed to continue to serve but he also longed to see his loved ones. With obvious physical weakness, he boarded the steamer, “Lothar Bohlen,” on July 22nd 1897, to return home, but experienced a second attack of the fever. Despite faithful care on board ship, he died on 3 August, at the age of only 32 years. He was buried at sea.

Humanly speaking, his life ended too soon. but Wedel exemplified the truth of the first Psalm. Wedel brought forth fruit for God’s kingdom in his appointed season. “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Psalm 1:3.



Profiles

of Mennonite Faith: No. 43, Summer 2009.

Written by: Peggy Goertzen, Hillsboro, KS

Copyright by the Mennonite Brethren Church Historical Commission.

E-mail: ajdueck@mbconf.ca • www.mbhistory.org