

REV. WALDY KLASSEN - Mennonite Prince of Peace

INTERVIEWED:

April 17, 1975

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Rev. Klassen came to Richmond in September 1962 at the request of the Provincial Missions Committee of the Conference of Mennonite Churches of B. C.

John and Irene Sawatzky had started a Sunday School programme in 1958 in the Steveston Community Hall and the A.B. Dixon School until 1961 when the School Board changed its policy of allowing religious groups to use its facilities. The family along with volunteers from the Mountain View Mennonite Church and the First United Mennonite Church worked at this project together.

The building was started in the fall of 1961 and completed by March 1962. The dedication took place Palm Sunday 1962. The families using the facilities asked a school teacher in the congregation to take the Services while the Mission Committee was negotiating with Rev. Klassen to see if he would go there as Minister.

The fellowship had not named the church. There were four families only in 1962 but other families were coming in from the Vancouver area to help with the teaching. The fellowship was thought of as a Conference Mission's Outreach in Richmond. A name was sought but not chosen until the winter of 1964. Name was chosen from the concepts of peace of the Mennonite Church. The congregation was formally organized in November 1964 and became a member church of the Conference of United Churches of British Columbia. (Details given of choice of name).

Construction

Located at 1010 - No. 1 Road, south of Williams. Lot approximately 1 acre - 1967 added small additional piece for

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later addition to building. Large ditch in front of building.

### Description - first phase

32 x 70 feet running north - south. Approach is to front of educational wing. Outside is wood frame with flat roof of tar and gravel. Windows are rectangular with clear glass at top and opaque glass at bottom. Foundation on floating concrete pad.

### Interior

Heating originally hot-air gas furnace with ducts in floor (later put in electric heat in new addition). Contained 6 Sunday School rooms with a vestibule, kitchen and washrooms and furnace room and small auditorium of 30 x 14 feet. Numbers had increased from original 4 families to about 30 - 40 children from the community meeting in the Sunday School. Seating was supplied by chairs as room was used as a multi-purpose room. Started Crafts and Hobbies groups meeting weekdays.

### Cost

Land and building approximately \$16,000 including 70 chairs. Labour contributed voluntarily. One foreman and some professionals.

### Financing

The two Vancouver congregations who assisted in the forming of the church assisted also with the payment of the mortgage for a few years until the congregation could assume the payments. Original Loan was received from a Building & Loan fund from the Canadian Conference of a 3-year interest-free loan followed by a low-interest mortgage.

### Housing for Minister

No house built but the Minister rented a home nearby and then later bought a house of their own (Forsythe Crescent).

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### Groups

Not enough Youth to form a group at the beginning. There was a Bible Study group and later a Woman's Group.

### Background of Congregation

Founders were of German-Dutch Mennonite origin. Initially the congregation was all of European (German-Dutch-Russian) background. Sunday School contained a variety of community ethnic groups. Very few Orientals except as children. Original core group were from Richmond, but now have members coming from Ladner, Delta and White Rock.

### Changes

In 1969 saw the construction of a larger auditorium. Sod turning in August 1969 and the completion was made in the Spring of 1970.

Addition went on to north end of education wing, running east-west.

Again was built on concrete slab - of 60 x 80 feet. Flat roof, tar & gravel, with a higher ceiling. Heating is totally electric. The hardwood floor is marked for games. The exterior is cinder block construction forming a pattern. The windows are of narrow tall design in series of 3, also of clear and opaque glass.

### Cost

In spite of Building & Loan Committees doubts that an addition could be put up for \$25,000 (\$5,000 from congregation + \$20,000 loan requested) it was built with voluntary labour for less than \$20,000.

### Architect

Student in last year, Dennis Friesen, drew up plans.

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### Financing

Again at 3-year interest-free loan, but later term was raised to 1% lower than the going interest rates.

### Ministry

Rev. Klassen left in 1969 to study in Indiana at the Biblical Seminary until 1971. Congregation asked a young couple who had just graduated from the Canadian Mennonite College in Winnipeg to serve as Pastor - Abe & Mary Penner.

The church has no affiliation in the same Conference in Richmond, but there are a few in B. C. The Mennonite General Conference is divided into 3 sub-conferences: Local (or Provincial) Conference, the Regional (or Canadian) Conference, and National (or North American) Conference. Each congregation requests membership in the Conferences - they are not automatically members. Each Mennonite Church is "congregational" and a high value is placed on autonomy. However part of their commitment to each Conference is an agreement to accept the Conference's statement of faith and financial programme.

Within each church there are individual organizational patterns. The Prince of Peace Church had the pattern of Clergyman, Church Council and Board of Deacons (see note at end on change in 1975 in constitution).

### Growth

By the time the new addition was put up the Youth groups had grown more than any other group. There are 36 formal members with approximately 50 altogether, plus about 50 in Sunday School. Average attendance is between 70 - 80.

### Role of Women

As the Mennonite Church is "congregational" the role can vary. There are currently 2 women ordained ministers in the Conference, in the States since a couple of years ago. Women here in Richmond have played an important administrative part since the beginning.

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### Special Events

Several couples from the church have become involved with overseas assignments with the Mennonite Church. Service Arm - in Haiti and Taiwan. The return visit of one couple was a celebration.

The church has celebrated its 10th Anniversary.

It has participated in the Inter-Faith services held in Richmond.

Mr. Klassen is no longer the full-time minister, but is assigned to the Canadian M-2 Job Therapy programme for Correctional Inmates. The move was made after deliberation when the congregation had been evaluating the responsibility of each member for a few years. He gave his resignation in December 1974 and left April 1, 1975. The congregation developed a system of Team Ministry. A committee was struck to examine re-organizing the structure within the church. The life and programme of the church was placed into 6 areas of responsibility and 6 people were sought to act as Directors:

1. Director of Administrative Ministries
2. " Christian Education
3. " Personal Growth & Counselling
4. " Outreach & Service
5. " Worship
6. " Congregational Life

Mr. Klassen is but one of these and the programme is on a 1-year trial basis. The Directors were selected on the basis of the gifts that had previously been shown and on voluntary offering if the congregation was agreeable. (One of the 6 is a woman).

M. NOBLE