

The Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Farm

by  
Irvin V. Schmidt

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J.C.Wenger - Instructor

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1. Term paper - "Mennonite Youth Society of the Conference of Mennonites of Canada" - Homer Janzen - 1949
2. Research paper - "The Saskatchewan Youth Farm"  
Laura Bergen - 1956
3. Research paper - "The Mennonite Youth Farm"  
Edwin Peters - 1961
4. "The Farm with a Two-Fold Purpose" - Pat Ettinger -  
Family Herald, May 9, 1963
5. "Unique Mennonite Project" - Patrick Ryan -  
The Western Producer, Jan. 16, 1964
6. "The Farm With Many Homes" - Mennonite Youth Farm  
Bulletin, June 30, 1964
7. "New \$750,000 Home Proposed for Mennonite Youth Farm  
at Rosthern" - D.P. Neufeld - The Canadian  
Mennonite, Nov. 24, 1964
8. Financial statements, Board meeting minutes and  
annual reports 1952-1976
9. The Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 4 pp 426, 643
10. Die Rosenorter Gemeinde in Saskatchewan in Wort and  
Bild - J.G. Rempel, 1950
11. Open Doors - S.P. Pannabecker



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I The Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization. (S.M.Y.O.)  
A. Its Beginnings.

The Mennonite Youth Farm at Rosthern, Sask. is a progeny of the Sask. Mennonite Youth Organization. The youth movement had its beginnings among General Conference Mennonites almost sixty years ago when in 1917 the question was raised whether a day or an evening of the conference program should be devoted to Sunday School and a Young People's Convention. Resolution #36 of that conference records that the response was "No". However in 1920, under pressure from the constituency, a Young People's Convention program was arranged. This facility proved adequate until 1938, when at the General Conference of Mennonites sessions held at Saskatoon, Sask. a proposal was made for a constitutional organization of the Young People's Union. This new movement moved away from identification with the Christian Endeavor movement and proposed to carry out a new ambitious and aggressive program. It strongly influenced the Canadian churches which were then rapidly increasing so that youth organizations were actively promoted.

Rev. Olin Krehbiel from the United States spent quite some time at this conference speaking with Canadians who were interested in the future of the young people in Canada. He suggested becoming involved with sending out missionairies, assisting young men to get a biblical education and helping Bible Schools such as Rosthern and Swift Current. The interest was so high that those assembled elected Rev. J.C.Schmidt, a teacher at the Rosthern Bible School, to the office of president of the Young People's work in Canada.

A number of meetings were held by the early leaders and on different occasions discussions were held with the leader of the Canadian Conference, Rev. David Toews, and a group of Canadian pastors and Christian Endeavor leaders. The result of these meetings was the inclusion of a Young People's sessions to be held in Waldheim, Sask. in July 1940. The outbreak of World War II prevented a large attendance, in fact only about a dozen people were present. Despite the poor attendance a committee was elected with Rev. J.C. Schmidt as president; Rev. Paul Schroeder as secretary and Mr. Henry W. Friesen as vice-president. The immediate goal of the Young People's executive was to give the youth a Conference-consciousness, and to realize that no one need look for "far pastures that appear greener" because we have everything that any other denomination offers and more.

#### B. Its Dream

On the Saskatchewan scene the committee met for prayer, asking God for wisdom and direction in programming. One of the first projects attempted was a Youth Retreat in June 1941. The opinion was expressed that it had been a very blessed occasion for all who attended. However, at the Canadian Conference sessions in 1941 and 1942 some criticism was expressed against the fact that the Retreat had been conducted in the English language. When the conference secretary was asked in what language Henry Friesen had preached, knowing that he had come from Russia and that his English wasn't perfect, he wittingly replied, "In Hebrew." There was also strong objection to campfire services where those gathered gave a testimony and placed a piece of



firewood on the fire. These retreats were held at the Rosthern Dominion Experimental Farm which was located about a mile south of the town of Rosthern. At the second Retreat in 1942 much was talked about how wonderful it would be to own such a farm for Retreat grounds and to further benevolent enterprises. Before the close of the Retreat in 1942, the D.V.B.S. workers had made this an object of sincere prayer.

## II The Dominion Experimental Station

### A. Its Location and Purpose.

The Department of Agriculture of the Saskatchewan Government opened the Rosthern Experimental Farm in 1909, just four years after Saskatchewan became a province in the Dominion of Canada. It was situated in the southern outskirts of Rosthern and was comprised of 640 acres of land.

The main purpose of the farm was to serve the farmers in the northern part of the province. Through the experimental station farmers could obtain a better breed of livestock and thus improve the different projects which they might have on their farms at a great reduction of expense. When the work began, they conducted experiments in field, animal and poultry husbandry. In 1934 they expanded to include horticultural experiments. They began to plant fruit trees, ornamental shrubbery, small fruits and vegetables, and careful observation was made as to the most desirable types for the climate of Northern Saskatchewan. As a result of this experimentation, a new variety of apples was introduced. Their main emphasis, however, was in animal husbandry. They had the finest Holstein cattle in the province and dairymen from far and near came to buy

breeding stock. High quality Yorkshire hogs were also raised and farmers bought gilts at \$10.00 to improve their own herds. Through this service farmers were able to produce the best bacon hogs delivered at the stockyards of Saskatoon and Prince Albert, Sask. In 1939-40 a \$4,000 piggery was built, as well as a \$3,000 greenhouse.

#### B. Reason for Selling.

Soon after these new buildings were functioning the Experimental Station office received word that it would have to close as a war economy measure. Those connected with the farm held protest meetings, but to no avail. The big question at the moment was: what would be done with the experimental station that was so far advanced in the field of agriculture? Even the landscaping of the farmyard campus was the pride of the whole community and no one could imagine all this planting having been done in vain. Two suggested alternatives for the farm were to convert it into a flying field to train pilots for war, or an internment camp.

### III The Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Farm

#### A. Its Beginnings.

It was exactly at this time that the S.M.Y.O. was conducting its summer retreats on these grounds and began to pray for God's guidance in the possibility of purchasing the Experimental Farm. Correspondence with the Federal Government at Ottawa was begun and all the questions and propositions of the S.M.Y.O. received the most courteous attention, even to the extent of accepting the comparatively small payment offer in preference to higher offers from individuals. The transaction of purchase was made with the Federal Government in the winter of 1943-44 for \$20,000, with a \$5,000 down

payment, and with the understanding that the farm be used for benevolent purposes only. Through good farm management and aggressive solicitation the debt to the Federal Government was liquidated in the fall of 1946. It is significant to recall that the farm consisted of 640 acres, plus building which the government built at a cost of \$60,000. Three pioneers who contributed their time and energies to the Youth Farm were Rev. J.C. Schmidt, H.W.Friesen and P.J.Olfert. The local historian, Rev. J.G.Rempel wrote of Rev. J.C.Schmidt, "For five years he resided at the Youth Farm where he took leadership in bringing to reality the plans of the Youth Organization. He was during this time both the Farm Manager and a much loved counsellor in the Invalid Home." Henry W. Friesen, after 32 years, is still active as the Nursing Home chaplain and camp director to-day.

B. Its Purpose.

The basic purpose of the Youth Farm was humanitarian and charitable. The profit from the farm enterprise was to be channeled into welfare institutions located on campus, as well as to support mission and education projects. The grounds were to be the location for annual summer youth retreats and a base for an ever expanding D.V.B.S. program. The institutions were to be an excellent place of service for young people, and the entire program as an opportunity for summer voluntary service for the Saskatchewan churches, especially the churches in the immediate vicinity.

C. Expansion 1944-1960

1. The Farm - The growing of grain, operating the dairy herd, piggery and poultry enterprises was a big undertaking. There was gradual expansion in each area and every year one tenth or more of the gross income was

given to missions, including the support of the various institutions on campus. The Home Mission program was initiated by the support of Ella Heppner at Lake Four, Sask., and the Jake Reimers at Pierceland, Sask. Foreign Missions received financial support for Esther Paetkau in Japan and the Ben Sawatsky's in India. The farm was also a service to the community when in 1949 a modern pasteurization plant was built and they could supply the town of Rosthern with pasteurized, homogenized and chocolate milk. The farm, for which the S.M.Y.O. paid \$20,000 in 1944 had inventory of \$252,779 by 1955 and of \$357,611 by 1965. Because the farm operation was a benevolent enterprise it qualified as a place where young men of military age from the United States could fulfill their LW Service. This program began in the late 1950's and grew from two men to a large unit of ten or more men and women in LW and VS service before it was phased out in 1970. Another project of outreach initiated by the Youth Farm and for which it provided financial support was the building of an Invalid Home at Herbert in southern Saskatchewan. A V.S.er writes as follows, "V.S. life at the Mennonite Youth Farm is varied, busy and interesting. Much Valuable experience and insight can be gained by leaving one's home community and adjusting to a different one in another country. There are openings for V.S. workers at the Mennonite Youth Farm now as the expansion program proceeds additional openings will become available to those who wish to donate time and talent to God by serving humanity."

2. Retreat Ground - The youth retreat that was held on these grounds in 1941 was only the first of many. Despite opposition in the early years, the retreats

have been an annual highlight for many a young person. It was here that many dedicated themselves to the service of Christ under such capable leadership as Missionary Marvin Dirks, Evangelist J. Esau, Rev. Paul Shelly, Rev. Wedel and song leader Walter H. Hohmann. Usually these retreats closed with a song festival or a program on the closing Sunday. The Youth Farm was also home base for a large D.V.B.S. program. Every year Henry W. Friesen would find isolated areas all over the province that were practically unchurched and then delegate young recruits in pairs to teach the Word.

3. Invalid Home - In response to the purpose that the Youth Farm serve a humanitarian and charitable need, the largest farm home was converted into an Invalid Home with approximately twelve beds. Within a few weeks of its opening in May 1944 all accommodations were filled. The whole church community, and not only the youth, now felt that they were involved because now they had visible evidence that the farm was serving every age and not just the younger generation. This new vision resulted in the church's whole hearted support when an extension was planned in 1945 to accommodate a total of fifty three patients. It was completed in 1949 and two years later extended to include a sunporch on both the first and second floor levels. The Invalid Home was fully occupied almost from the beginning, in fact in 1952 there were fifty eight patients which meant that five had to sleep in the newly constructed sunporch.

The patients were an assortment of physically and mentally handicapped people. In 1951 it became quite obvious that the facilities of this particular home were inadequate.

A number of the patients were too noisy and disturbing for the majority of the guests. In view of this and the lengthening waiting list it was decided to proceed with plans for a second home which would be for the mentally handicapped patients. At first plans were considered to build a new building to house twenty-four patients. However, when the old hospital building in Rosthern became available the plans were revised and the purchase was made in the fall of 1952. A foundation was made near the Invalid Home and in May 1953 the hospital building was moved. The summer was spent repairing, cleaning, and remodelling this building and on December 15, 1953 the first house parents took up residence. A month later the first patients were received and by March the home was full to capacity with twelve patients. It was almost immediately realized that there was again a waiting list and because it was also thought that it would be best to separate the men and the women into separate homes a decision was reached in January 1955 to plan an addition to the second home. On January 20, 1956 agreement was reached to build a two story addition to the home according to the blue prints which were drawn up by a government official. These plans were abandoned, however, when the Lutheran parsonage at Laird became available. It was purchased and moved to the Youth Farm, repaired and dedicated as the new Men's Home on November 25, 1956. The old hospital building now housed only females and became known as the Ladies Home. The Men's Home has a capacity for nine men. Most of these men are capable of being employed to some extent on the Farm. The total capacity of the three homes has now reached seventy-four.

4. Children's Home - This home was begun in 1946 following a donation of \$5,000 by Rev. I.P. Friesen of Rosthern. The purpose of the home was to care for homeless children and locally was often referred to as the "Orphanage." The new building was completed in 1947 and the first guests were a family of three children. By 1951 there were seven children and in 1953 the twelve capacity building was overfull with fourteen guests. Two children had to be housed in an adjacent home and four others had to be refused admittance. The increased demand for such a home caused the Youth Organization to pray for guidance, "Does the Lord want another children's home to be started on the farm?" Although the turn-over was high there were an average of ten children in the home for the next five years. However, due to the times and government policies the number dropped to three in 1958 and two by 1959. During the latter years many difficulties were experienced with some of the children. Some of them came from broken homes and responded very poorly to discipline and the religious atmosphere. With all these circumstances in mind it was decided in 1960 to close the home and use the building as housing for staff personnel. This was the first project to be discontinued and in retrospect there were many blessings received as a result of its existence. One of the house parents, Mr. & Mrs. Ed. Driedger, went on to become a leading couple in the care of delinquent boys at the Ailsa Craig Home in Ontario.

5. Crippled Children's Home - The Youth Organization was made aware of another area of need in the early 1950's. There was a crippled boy at the Invalid Home who did not fit in with the elderly patients. Then too, other applications were coming in requesting



accommodation for physically handicapped children who could not be adequately cared for by parents. In response to this need a new home was built near the Children's Home and a dedication service was held on May 3, 1953. Praise and thanks ascended to God for the wonderful support that was given in connection with that day, because the amount of money and furnishings that was needed was practically all supplied. There were five crippled children in residence at the time of the dedication and reached a record capacity of approximately twenty children. A typical response to the Home is an article by Pat Ettinger in the weekly newspaper "The Family Herald" May 9, 1963. This is a secular paper and the reporter writes as follows: "Nine-year-old Judy Adams has been confined to bed all her life, the victim of multiple handicaps. As the result of brain injury at birth, her mental ability will never develop beyond that of an infant, and because she was born with cerebral palsy, she will always be completely helpless. Walter and Jean Adams tried to care for their daughter at home, but the strain was too hard for the family. (At six years, Judy still had to be diapered and spoon fed every three hours.) They had to consider the other younger members of the family. Four-year-old sister Leslie and baby brother Glen needed their fair share of Mom's and Dad's attention. So Walter and Jean Adams realized they would have to place their handicapped child in a home. Not far away they found the place they were looking for - the Rosthern Mennonite Farm Home, 40 miles from Saskatoon. A completely different nursing home, it bore no resemblance to the bleak overcrowded wards of many institutions.



The cosy bedrooms in the modern bungalow where Judy and 19 other invalid children are confined to bed seem like part of large family farm home. The pastel rooms are decorated with pictures, amusing mobiles, bright balloons and plastic measuring spoons. Kindly housemothers move efficiently in the bedrooms and in the living rooms, where those children who are not confined to bed play contentedly. Outside there is a play area for the children." Many a children's Sunday School Class has made a physical need in this home their project and upon touring it have come away very thankful for healthy bodies and minds.

#### IV Reorganization

The decade of the sixties brought with it many new developments and changes. The late fifties and early sixties had been an era of new constitutions on Canadian and provincial levels. New interests were also being launched by various concern groups and there was a general re-allocation of responsibilities. It is with this in mind that the Youth Farm holding committee recommended that the S.M.Y.O. Cabinet discuss the issue of transfer of holdings and administration from S.M.Y.O. to the Christian Service Committee (C.S.C.) of the Conference of Mennonites in Saskatchewan. Some of the reactions to this proposition at the January 19, 1963 meeting of S.M.Y.O. were:

1. Is the Saskatchewan Conference vitally interested in such a transfer?
2. If such a transfer is made a contact between the farm and the youth organization should be continued.
3. Would local youth groups feel less responsible to go and serve at the Farm if it was under the Saskatchewan Conference?
4. Should the S.M.Y.O. bring the matter to the annual

Youth Conference in spring before it is discussed at the annual fall Saskatchewan Conference? This was considered the right procedure.

5. A transfer of this nature would relieve the S.M.Y.O. of a responsibility which is perhaps too big for them. Greater decisions will have to be made at the Farm and institutions grow bigger.
6. If the Farm was transferred to the Saskatchewan Conference it would give the S.M.Y.O. more time to work on things more directly connected with youth work.

At an April meeting people were appointed to represent the Youth Farm at the annual S.M.Y.O. meetings in Saskatoon and Swift Current. Further negotiations were made to transfer titles at the Canadian Conference of Mennonites in July 1963 and the Saskatchewan Conference of Mennonites in the fall of 1963. The final ratification was made at the spring 1964 S.M.Y.O. annual meeting. The following statement is made in the S.M.Y.O. report: "Negotiations concerning the transfer of administration of the Youth Farm and Invalid Home at Herbert to the Saskatchewan Conference have taken place as recommended last year. At this stage the Conference is prepared to accept this responsibility pending your decision to-day." At first the new board was one unit consisting of five local appointments and two members representing the C.S.C. of the Saskatchewan Conference. The first reference to a division of responsibilities was made at the December 8, 1965 meeting and on September 3, 1966 at a joint meeting of the C.S.C. and the Youth Farm Board of Directors a motion was passed that the Youth Farm Board of Directors be separated into two Boards, namely the Farm board and the Institutional Board. Each board is composed of three local appointees and one representative from the C.S.C.

V New Directions - 1960-1976

The decade of the sixties also brought with it the era of greater specialization, better performance and a shift from church supported institutions to government subsidies. In part this new emphasis was also due to the involvement of professional resource people on committees and in the constituency. An example would be the invaluable contribution of a civil servant of the Saskatchewan Government who could inform the boards of current trends in the care of the aged and handicapped, as well as put the board into contact with the various agencies concerned.

A. Facilities - The farming enterprise was constantly in need of new equipment. Better soil management, crops high in protein content, barn cleaners, improvements in breeding of cattle and hogs, better equipment for the pasteurization plant and many other similar concerns were topics high on the agenda of the business meetings. In the process of time the following were accomplished.

1. October 5, 1963 - Installation of modern water system, including fire hydrants.

2. February 27, 1965 - Discontinuation of the poultry operation. This decision was reached only after much discussion because it was feared that this move might initiate a trend, yet at the same time it was no longer a profitable enterprise.

3. September 1, 1965 - First record of interest in having the Youth Farm serviced with natural gas. This became a reality when on August 3, 1966 a contract was signed and installation began.

4.A New Name - The name "Youth Farm" was now obviously out of date because youth were no longer the supporting organization. A contest was announced in August, 1964 and the response was overwhelming. One hundred and five names were suggested, some very nostalgic, some quite original and others somewhat amusing. A cross section would include names like: Mennonite Ever Green Farm, Last Mile Farm, Rostmenn Acres, Agape Place, Menno Haven, Peace Valley Village, Faith and Life Guest Homes and Grace Christian Faith Farm. The name that was finally accepted was "Mennonite Nursing Home." However, it is interesting to note that twelve years later the farm enterprize still features on its letterhead "Mennonite Youth Farm."

5.Children's Camp - In May, 1965 the Mennonite Church of Rosthern inquired about the use of the farm facilities for a children's camp. As time went on a number of buildings were brought onto the campus to serve as kitchen and sleeping quarters. the Education Committee of the Saskatchewan Conference was actively involved in the camping program at Pike Lake south of Saskatoon, Sask., and at Elim Gospel Beach south of Swift Current, Sask., and as a result became involved in this new dimension of camping.

In the spring of 1968 the Rosthern camping committee came with a proposal to build an auditorium on the sight of the former horse barn. This was never acted upon but soon after this request the Education Committee agreed to share in the cost of building a number of garages which during camping time would double as housing facilities. These garages were on institution property. In early 1970 when the

question of camping on the Youth Farm grounds again became an issue the following statement was made by the Service Committee: "Provided no permanent camp facilities are erected, the committee did not oppose the use of the farm." Four months later in response to further requests for more camping facilities the following motions were made by the Nursing Home Board:

- a) that we recommend to the C.S.C. that no building be erected on the old horse barn site.
- b) that we recommend to the C.S.C. that no new farm building be built on the plot of land which contains the ball diamond, grainery and the big machine shed (an area 300 feet north and south; and 600 feet east and west).

However, Henry Friesen, as director of the Youth Farm camping program could not be discouraged. In January 1974 he approached the Farm Board about the construction of a machine shed which would include at one end a kitchen and stage. Henry Friesen suggested that the camp pay for part of the cost. The Farm Board agreed to discuss this matter with the C.S.C. In May the farm Board moved that the machine shed and granary north of the barn be dismantled and a quonset shed 60' x 100' be constructed on that site. The original intention was a dual purpose building - machine shed, camping auditorium - but by October of the same year Henry Friesen was requesting a recreation facility for camping. The board responded by offering the quonset for this purpose and using the now vacated loafing barn as a machine shed and the area immediately west of the loafing barn as a machine shop. The minutes

further record that in April 1975 Henry Friesen requested the use of the loafing barn for large meetings. The action of the board was to recommend that the loafing barn was not suitable for staging large meetings.

6. Unit House - A building just to the west of the dairy barn was home for a number of LW fellows from the United States. Although some redecorating had been done when it was first occupied by the unit, it was drawn to the farm boards attention in April 1966 that this building had no bathing or toilet facilities. In May it was agreed to install bathroom facilities, thus making life for the unit fellows somewhat more tolerable.

7. New Nursing Home - According to the minutes available the construction of a new nursing home began sometime in late 1961. It was at a board meeting when the discussion centered around increased assistance from the government for the enlargement of the Crippled Children's Home that two representatives from the Department of Social Welfare who were present, Mr. Chalmer and Mr. Steininger, responded by saying, "We want to help you to stay in business, - call on us again when you think we can help." They also assured the board that the government would provide a construction grant of 20% for a new home. A basic unit of 120 beds had been suggested. A year later the vision of a new home was again on the agenda and questions like these were raised?

(a) should it have a men's and a women's wing?

(b) should we have a central kitchen and laundry?

- (c) should there be facilities for recreation and occupational therapy?
- (d) should it be a one story building?
- (e) what are the advantages and disadvantages of a larger institution as compared to cottage style?\_\_\_\_\_

After this meeting an architect was hired to draw some plans and at the June 1963 meeting the plans were open for inspection and an estimate of between \$400,000 and \$500,000 was given as the cost to build the 120 bed unit. The government would contribute a grant of \$100,000 and make available a loan for 72% of the total cost -to be repaid over 35 years at \$15,000 a year. This would mean that the local constituency would have to contribute 8% or \$40,000. At first there was some controversy about location as some thought it should be in Saskatoon rather than at Rosthern. In their 1964 annual report the Board of Directors drew to the attention of the delegate body the pros and cons of both locations and in the end an earlier decision of March 1964 was ratified to build at the Youth Farm. A detailed finance plan was presented with a new figure for the estimated cost at \$750,000. At the Sask. Conference held at Swift Current in October 1964 the New Nursing Home was discussed and D.P. Neufeld, reporting on these sessions, writes in "The Canadian Mennonite" - Unique in the plan are the facilities for physical therapy and recreation, as well as having a chapel seating 200 people.

Peters said that presently the greatest fatality among patients is during the first three weeks of their stay in the home, because it is then that the patient gives up and has no will to live.



He pleaded with the Conference to understand the significance of giving patients a reason for living. The Conference caught the vision as it became clear by the many comments and questions.

However, by the spring of 1965 there was growing unrest re the building of the nursing home so a special session of the Saskatchewan Conference was called for April 21, 1965. A lengthy discussion was held and in the end a recommendation presented by the C.S.C. was almost unanimously accepted. It stated as follows: In view of the varied concerns and feelings, the C.S.C. recommends that a commission be appointed by the Executive of the conference of Mennonites in Saskatchewan and the C.S.C. to study the whole field of nursing care needs in our Provincial Conference, and come with definite recommendations to the fall sessions of our conference; and that the questions of a New Nursing Home now be tabled till after the commissions report. At the same time another motion was passed authorizing the Board of Directors to continue to solicit funds for the new Nursing Home.

Henry T. Klaassen, Joe Neufeld and Waldemar Regier were appointed to the study commission and they prepared a very comprehensive report for the October 1965 conference. Two questionnaires were sent out, one to the churches and one to the institutions involved with nursing care. As a result of this presentation the recommendation to build was passed and one year later on November 2, 1966 the Board of Directors was ready



with plans so that they could call for tenders. Projected dates at the meeting were: Call tenders by Feb. 1967, tenders in by March 15, 1967 and work to begin in April 1967. As usual there were delays and the tenders were not opened till July 13, 1967, at which time Shoquist Construction of Saskatoon was awarded the contract at a bid of \$494,563.

The ground breaking took place on the afternoon of July 23, 1967. Participating in the event were: Edwin Peters as chairman, Bernie Retzlaff with the invocation, Irvin Schmidt giving some background information, Otto Driedger performing the act of ground breaking and John Janzen and Verner Friesen leading in prayers of dedication. The next morning the construction crew moved in and sixteen months later on November 17, 1968 the official opening was conducted. Officials present on this occasion were: C.P. MacDonald, Minister of the Dept. of Welfare; Dave Boldt, Minister of Highways; Alex Dillabough, President of the Saskatchewan Association of Housing and Nursing Homes; and Peter Fisher, Mayor of the town of Rosthern. The minutes of March 5, 1970 record that the total cost of the new Nursing Home was \$620,000 and that a \$124,000 grant was received from the government.

8. Highway #11 - A new highway connecting the two cities of Saskatoon and Prince Albert was tentatively planned to go directly in front of the projected new nursing home site. The Board of Directors was concerned about noise and danger and sent the following request to the Minister of Social Welfare, - "that newly proposed #11 Highway be planned to by-pass Rosthern on the west of town rather than east of the C.N. tracks where it

would be too near the newly proposed Nursing Home at the Youth Farm." However, in September of 1967 consent was granted to let highway be constructed according to original plans.

- B. Concern about Purpose of Farm - It was always maintained that one of the purposes of the farm enterprise was to provide meaningful employment for the mentally retarded men. In his report to the annual conference in 1964 the administrator, Edwin Peters, drew to the attention of the delegates the following: "We need to come to grips with a few basic questions. What role really does the farm serve to the other institutions? The retarded men are used in cleaning out the gutters in the cow barns as well as cleaning out the pig pens. These men do not know how to keep themselves clean. Some of the fellows come in looking as if they fell down in the gutter.

We doubt whether this type of employment is really therapy but rather a continually giving of the "dirty" work because they are lacking in mental ability to object very strongly. The public find it difficult to accept these fellows and it in no way helps if they present themselves in church or other places of public meeting smelling like the pig barn or cow barn.

In the summer months we push hard from early spring until winter freeze up to get all the work done. There have been times that we did not permit some of our guests to go home for visits. Is it correct to prevent our guests from going home to visit parents and relatives during haying or harvest because we need their services at these times? Is the farm here for the good of the guests? or are the guests here because we cannot operate the farm without them?"

As a result of this and other discussions a program was begun in early 1966 to transport trainable men to Saskatoon on a daily basis to learn a trade in a sheltered workshop. In the summer of 1967 the campus became the activity center for a Teen-Age Camp as the search for purpose continued. Later that fall members of the C.S.C. visited various churches to discuss with the membership what they visualized the purpose of the farm operation should be, and whether it should be continued or terminated. No definite findings are recorded in the minutes but a temporary objective was suggested in August 1968 when the C.S.C. informed the Youth Farm that they owed a debt to the Institutions. They further suggested that, "a donation of \$20,000 to the Institutions would mean that the debt would be nullified." A similar purpose involving money was suggested in November 1969 by Rosthern Junior College who were requesting a donation for their new arena. The response of the Board of Directors is expressed in the motion: "that since our financial position is precarious we are not in a position to make any contributions to the R.J.C. arena project."

A new area of purpose was the possibility of having parolees from prison work at the Youth Farm. According to the minutes of August 1970 the manager, Henry Epp, was willing to offer a job to help these men rehabilitate themselves into the labor force. However, his accidental death a few days later brought a temporary halt to this venture. One of his last statements was, "if the Youth Farm served no purpose than to protect the environment of the Nursing Home it would be serving an effective purpose." To this statement the following were added by the Board of Directors:

1. Providing at a very reasonable rate housing for two widows and their families.

2. Providing employment for serveral men who would probably not have employment were it not for our efforts at attempting to assist them.
3. Providing an additional opportunity of involvement for the retarded men on campus.
4. Providing facilities for the Camping Program.
5. Provide an annual donation to the Provincial Camping Program.

We would request that the C.S.C. give us their complete support in encouraging the Conference to allow the farming operations to continue with their blessing.

However, the subject of purpose continued to be on the agenda. In December the motion was passed to delete #5 (above) and in April 1971 Edwin Peters, Nursing Home Administrator, made the following observation under the title "Concerns for the Mennonite Youth Farm."

"As I see it the Conference did not take too kindly to the situation of the Mennonite Youth Farm. There seemed to be no sympathy towards our employing unfortunate individuals or any regard for other items of purpose. I can only conclude from the various and hand reports that I have from the Conference that the farm must make it economically or else it is doomed."

At the same meeting Henry Friesen made the following suggestions: Since the Sask. Conference support for the farm seems to be diminishing I suggest that:

1. All livestock be sold, except for the calves.
2. Rent the land on a trial basis for a year.
3. Building use; cow barn for calves and riding stable, loafing barn as an auditorium for camps and conferences.

Although the minutes of May 7, 1971 record a motion that Henry Friesen's suggestion be deleted from the minutes, they were almost prophetic. In November of that year a recommendation was passed to discontinue the hog operation and on Feb. 8, 1972 it was reported that the hogs had been sold and the proceeds were used toward repayment of a Farm Improvement Loan. It was also agreed at the same meeting to ask Ed. Roth, chairman of the Board of Directors to investigate the possibilities of having the Federated Co-operatives utilize the Farm for their experimental program with feed crop fertilizers. This possibility was further pursued in June 1972 when two representatives of the Federated Co-operatives Ltd., presented a formal working arrangement between themselves and the Saskatchewan Conference of Mennonites. The only further reference to this offer is that it was discussed but no action was taken to accept.

The next two years saw the farming program continue without any major decisions. There were continual problems with farm employment and in July 1974 a letter was sent to all the churches informing them of the decision to sell the dairy herd and equipment on August 14, 1974. The sale grossed approximately \$68,000 and now the question arose, "how should this money be dispersed?" The Conference had some suggestions, the Institutions had others and the Farm Board recommended to the C.S.C. that \$60,000 plus accrued interest be designated for R.J.C. and S.C.B.I. because they were serving youth and the dairy had originally been a youth enterprise. The final decision was made by the delegates of the Sask. Conference.

Two other suggestions that would give purpose to the farm were:

1. A community center be built on the premises. The

center would be for elderly people which could be provided with services such as nursing care, meals, recreation, confectionary, drugs, etc.

2. That farm profits of \$20,000 be made available to the Sask. Conference with \$10,000 designated for the M-2 program with prisoners.

C. Financial Support - The Youth Farm and its Institutions were founded through the financial support of the churches. The program of solicitation was very active during the first two decades of its history and Henry Friesen practically became an institution of the collecting process. However, by 1961 the minutes record that maintenance fees for patients be increased to cover maintenance costs and that the government through its Old Age Social Security Assistance Program would provide money on a needs test basis. Earlier this need had been met by collecting from the churches and from the profit of the farm. Henry Friesen was to continue collecting, but more and more of this money was used for capital improvements. The first mention of grievances about the soliciting for funds is recorded in the minutes of November 12, 1962. The era of collecting certainly was temporarily halted when the Board chairman wrote to Henry Friesen: "At our last board meeting we reviewed the financial status of the various institutions under the supervision of the Board. We plan to continue watching this very closely. At present we appear to be holding our own. We are also keenly aware of the many demands made upon our congregations and the urgent needs in the area of Missions and Relief. We therefore feel that we should discontinue all solicitations for donations at the present time. Unsolicited gifts, of course, are still welcome. You will be notified if this aspect of your work should be resumed."

Signed - Herbert D. Peters. Today the Nursing Home is self supporting and the Farm operation is showing a healthy profit.



D. Staff - The Youth Farm was intended to be a place where people could give humanitarian service. Those who worked on the farm were aware that a large percentage of the profits went to support home and foreign missions, and those who worked in the institutions were often volunteers or earning a very minimal salary. Most of those employed were from the local community with the occasional person coming from one of the Saskatchewan Mennonite churches further away. However, in 1960 a young man from Kansas was recommended for the position of administrator and in July 1961 Edwin Peters and his family came to the Youth Farm to take up residence. Edwin had attended Seminary at Elkhart and also received some training in pastoral counseling and care of the mentally ill at the University of Michigan.

It was drawn to the attention of the Board of Directors in October, 1961 that one of the employees was not able to relate in a positive way with the mentally retarded men who were working on the farm. This presented the Board with the problem of how to deal with asking an employee to leave. It was decided to write a letter stating that the said employee had problems and that he should look for other employment. In May 1964 he still had not left because he thought this was his place of service. He finally left in Feb. 1966 after many years of agonizing both on the part of the employee and the Board of Directors. In April 1966 the Board agreed to assist the said employee by contributing \$2,300 for a down payment on a house he wanted to buy in Saskatoon.

Another issue that grew with the years was Liability Insurance. It was first on the agenda in Nov. 1962 after a number of accidents on the farm warranted a need for coverage. In 1968 the question of insurance was on almost every agenda as the Board struggled with the premium costs and benefits that various Insurance

Companies offered. Beginning in 1969 they also were faced with the 40-hour week and minimum wages. All these concepts would have been foreign language twenty years earlier, especially at a church-oriented institution. Even the possibility of unionization became an option but thus far the staff does not belong to a union.

A word of recognition must be given to the LW unit which existed at the Farm from the late 1950's and was terminated in 1970. Their contribution in terms of man-hours given, farming ability and spiritual sharing cannot be adequately evaluated. They will be fondly remembered by many who had the privilege of being associated with them.

Not so pleasant was a development in the late 1960's when a segment of the local constituency became very displeased with the managers performance. It reached a peak when a petition was signed with a list of grievances attached, most of which had to do with farming practices. The Sask. Conference was called in to meditate and the end result was that the Board of Directors did not comply with the petition and asked Edwin Peters to consider withdrawing his resignation. The minutes of May 2, 1967 record that he was willing to do this and when the Institutions were separated from the Farm operation, Edwin Peters became the administrator of the Nursing Homes.

There was always a need for a qualified nursing staff, which according to Government regulations must include a registered nurse and some certified nursing assistants. A constant shortage prompted the Board of Directors in 1968 to provide a scholarship for anyone needing financial assistance to train as a certified nursing assistant.



E. Spiritual Emphasis - It has always been the concern of those involved with the Youth Farm either as those employed or as the Board of Directors that there be a Christian environment. Meetings were always begun with a devotional period among the staff and weekly Bible studies. There was also a concern for the welfare of the patients in the institutions and since its beginning as an Invalid Home and now as a Nursing Home pastoral counseling has always been a priority. The concept of a chaplaincy program in conjunction with other local institutions was often on the agenda, but to date this has not become a reality. In the last number of years this role has been fulfilled by Henry Friesen. For a short period of time Paul Boschman, former missionary to Japan, was employed in this area, and on another occasion a local lay minister, Leonard Ens, served in this capacity.

In recent years the Nursing Home has become an active center for a Saturday-Nite Youth Program where young people from the surrounding area assemble to see Christian films, hear musical groups or preaching evangelists. Most of the staff are also actively involved in the Rosthern Mennonite Church program. Sometimes, however, the pressure to attend all these activities becomes quite great and in Oct. 1966 the Board of Directors suggested to the management that attendance at devotions be on a voluntary basis.

Spiritual emphasis in another dimension was instituted in August 1965 when the Farm and Institution staff, their families were invited to a Barbecue Supper. This has become an annual event and is a wonderful opportunity for Christian sharing.

## VI Conclusion

In 1971 the Christian Service Committee prepared a brief with recommendations on the Farm Operations at the Menno-nite Youth Farm.

I would like to quote a few statements from their brief as a conclusion. It recognized the contributions as follows:

We thank God that the Farm has provided food to supply the needs of the Rosthern and central Saskatchewan communities.

We thank God that the Farm provided a home and Christian surroundings for persons dependent on us.

We thank God that the Farm provided a place of work and training for handicapped persons.

We thank God that the Farm has been an expression of personal dedication and service for many young people.

We thank God that the Farm and Nursing Home have been a visible, tangible symbol of our values and our faith.

We thank God for the way the Farm and the Nursing Home brought meaning, purpose and fulfillment to persons who served there.

We thank God for the occasion to express our stewardship of the soil and natural resources.