

# East Reserve 125

## Hanover Steinbach 1874-1999 “Celebrating Our Heritage”

A brief historical sketch of Hanover Steinbach 1874 to 1999 in commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the settlement of the East Reserve, August 1, 1874.

By Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



## BEST WISHES

Best Wishes from the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Board of Directors: Orlando Hiebert, President, Lynette Plett, Corporate Secretary, Ralph Friesen, Royden Loewen, Lois Loepky, Paul Loewen, Randy Kehler, Delbert Plett, Jake Doerksen, Henry Fast, Hilton Friesen, Ken Rempel, and John Dyck, HSHS Research Director. We hope that you enjoy this booklet and that you may wish to retain it as a memento of the 125th anniversary of the East Reserve, Hanover Steinbach.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society publishes *Preservings*, a news-magazine semi-annually in December and June of each year. *Preservings* contains articles, photographs and stories of interest to our community. The subscription/membership fee is \$20.00 payable in U.S. funds for those outside of Canada. Anyone interested in subscribing to *Preservings* may write to the HSHS, Box 1960, Steinbach, Canada, R0A 2A0.

The HSHS also publishes the "East Reserve Historical Series" of which Volumes One, Two and Three have been published. These volumes contain various indepth historical articles.

I acknowledge the members of the readers committee who have read the manuscript and shared their comments and suggestions: Ralph Friesen, writer, Winnipeg; John Peters, Assistant Superintendent, Hanover School Division; Jake Doerksen, board member, Ile des Chenes; Randy Kehler, board member, and Irene Kroeker, teacher. Special thanks are due Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg, who provided line editing of the final work. All matters of interpretation and presentation of fact, in the end, are my responsibility alone.

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# Celebrating Our Heritage

## 125 East Reserve Hanover Steinbach 1874-1999

August 1, 1999 is the 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area, a Mennonite settlement on the prairies. "Old" Swiss Mennonites from Pennsylvania had settled in southern Ontario in 1786 but 1874 marked the beginning of the Mennonite experience in western Canada.

A casual visitor driving through along Highway 12 or 59 and observing the well tended fields of grain, canola, corn and potatoes, and the pleasant hamlets and villages, as well as the strikingly prosperous City of Steinbach, might well wonder, who are these people and what made them unique?

The rigors of the pioneering experience, so totally foreign to those who have known only the comforts of modern affluence, seem to intrigue modern North Americans more and more with each passing year. The exposition of these

heroic times and the saga of the noble and courageous people who settled the Hanover Steinbach area in 1874, building a community with bare bleeding hands, brick by brick and acre by acre of thriving farmland, is slowly being retrieved from the journals, letters and other records which they have left for posterity.

The abundance of historical material and writing now coming forth makes the availability of an interpretative analytical history possible. This booklet will provide an introduction and overview of the story of these people. It is the first historical work to consider the Hanover Steinbach settlement as a distinctive cultural and geographical community. It will also serve as a keepsake and memento of this important milestone in our history, the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Hanover Steinbach.

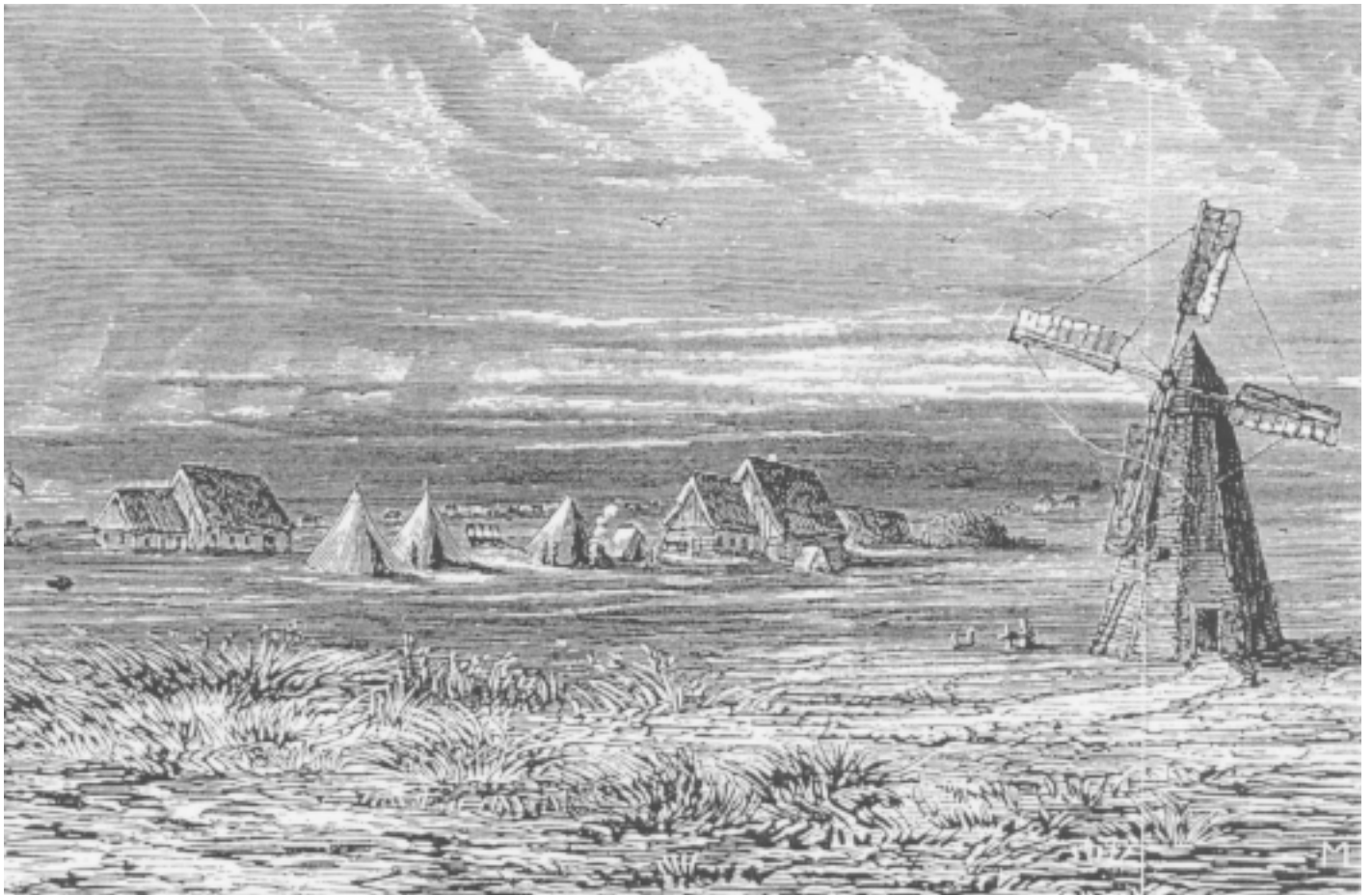
History like life itself is at best an inexact

science. It is my hope that this booklet will in some way be the precursor to a more detailed analytical history which our community so desperately needs.

The current residents of Hanover Steinbach and the many thousands who have moved on to other places should feel a sense of pride at the accomplishments of their ancestors. Hopefully many will take the time to participate and to contribute to the various 125 anniversary events taking place throughout 1999.

Let us join together to  
"Celebrate our Heritage."

Delbert F. Plett Q.C.



*The village of Eigenhof, East Reserve 1877 as drawn by Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada during the Vice Regal visit August 22, 1877, view to the north. The scene is the earliest real life depiction of the East Reserve. In the foreground, right, is the windmill erected in 1876. Along the village street are the homes of Gerhard Schroeder, later Reeve (right), and Jakob Wieler (left). The profile of the village of Chortitz can be seen in the rear between the houses. The "Willkommen" arch and flag displayed during the Vice-regal visit and the tents of Lord Dufferin and his entourage are situated just south of the Eigenhof village street, top left had side of sketch. Mennonite Historian, March 1998 and Preservings, No. 12, page 37.*

# The Mennonites, 1525

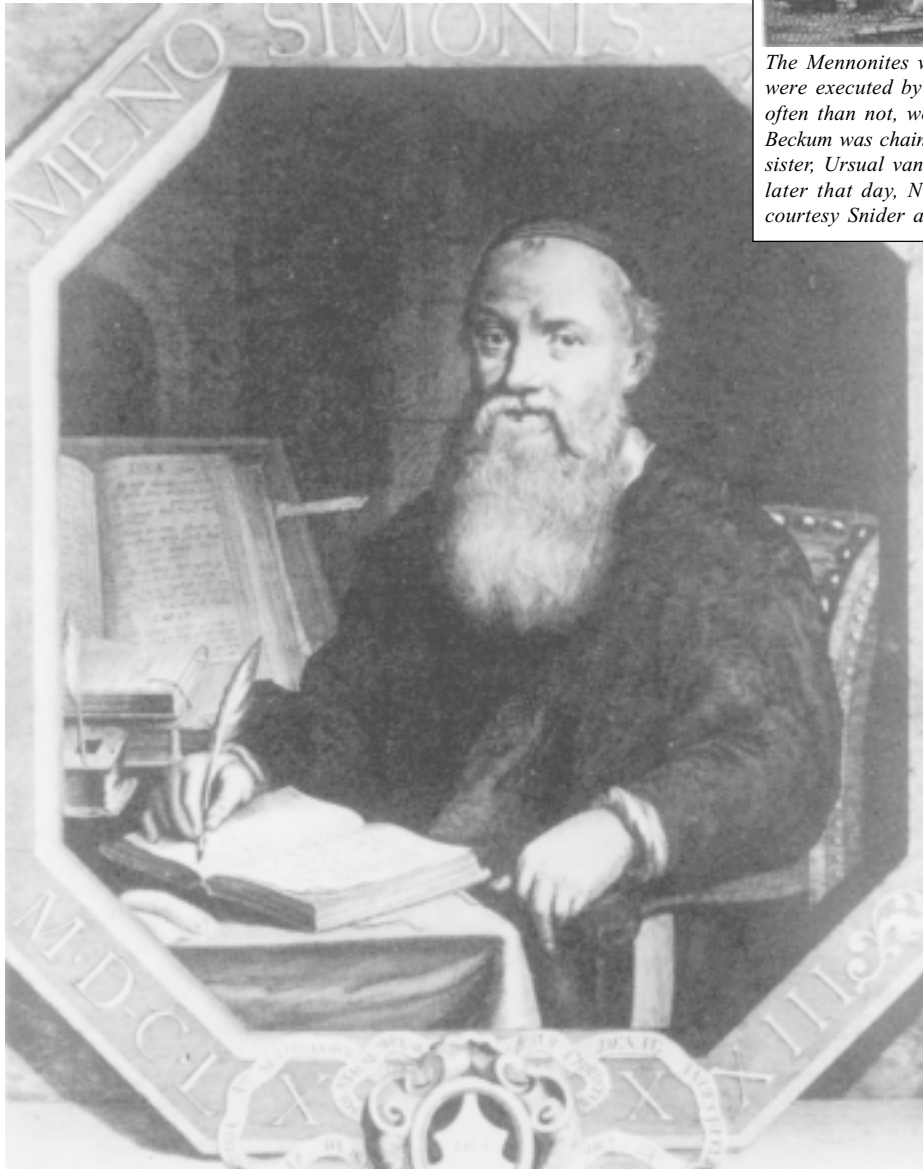
The story of the settlement of the East Reserve goes back to the 16th century in northern Europe. The ancestors of the Hanover Steinbach pioneers were Anabaptists, a religious community originating in the Reformation in 1525 in Switzerland, Belgium, Holland and northern Germany. The Anabaptists believed that all of life should be articulated by the teachings of Christ and an ethos of love and community. They rejected war and believed in adult baptism, the church as a voluntary community of believers.

One of the early leaders was Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Catholic priest in Witmarsum, Netherlands. He worked tirelessly to gather the scattered flock throughout northern Europe and soon his followers came to be known as "Mennists" and "Mennonites".

Many thousands of Mennonites suffered martyrdom, others fled from the Netherlands, Belgium and northern Germany to the City of Danzig, Prussia (today Gdansk, Poland) and various Polish principalities to escape persecution. For two centuries, the Vistula delta became the home of the ancestors of the East Reserve pioneers. They drained the marshes and became established in villages such as Rosenort,



*The Mennonites were persecuted for their faith. An estimated 4,000 were executed by hanging, burning, quartering and drowning. More often than not, women bore the brunt of the persecution. Maria van Beckum was chained to the stake just before her execution by fire. Her sister, Ursual van Beckum, was lead away, to be burned at the stake later that day, November 13, 1544. Etching by Jan Luyken. Photo courtesy Snider and Hecht, Profiles of Anabaptist Women, page xvi.*



*Menno Simons (1496-1561) painting by Jakob Burghart. Menno Simons was a Catholic priest in Witmarsum, Netherlands. He preached, wrote pamphlets, and carried on many successful debates defending the Anabaptist faith. For much of his life he was hunted by the Inquisition with a price on his head. Menno's motto, "For other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid which is Jesus Christ" 1 Corinthians 3:11. Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 24.*

Blumenort, Tiegenhagen and Bärwalde.

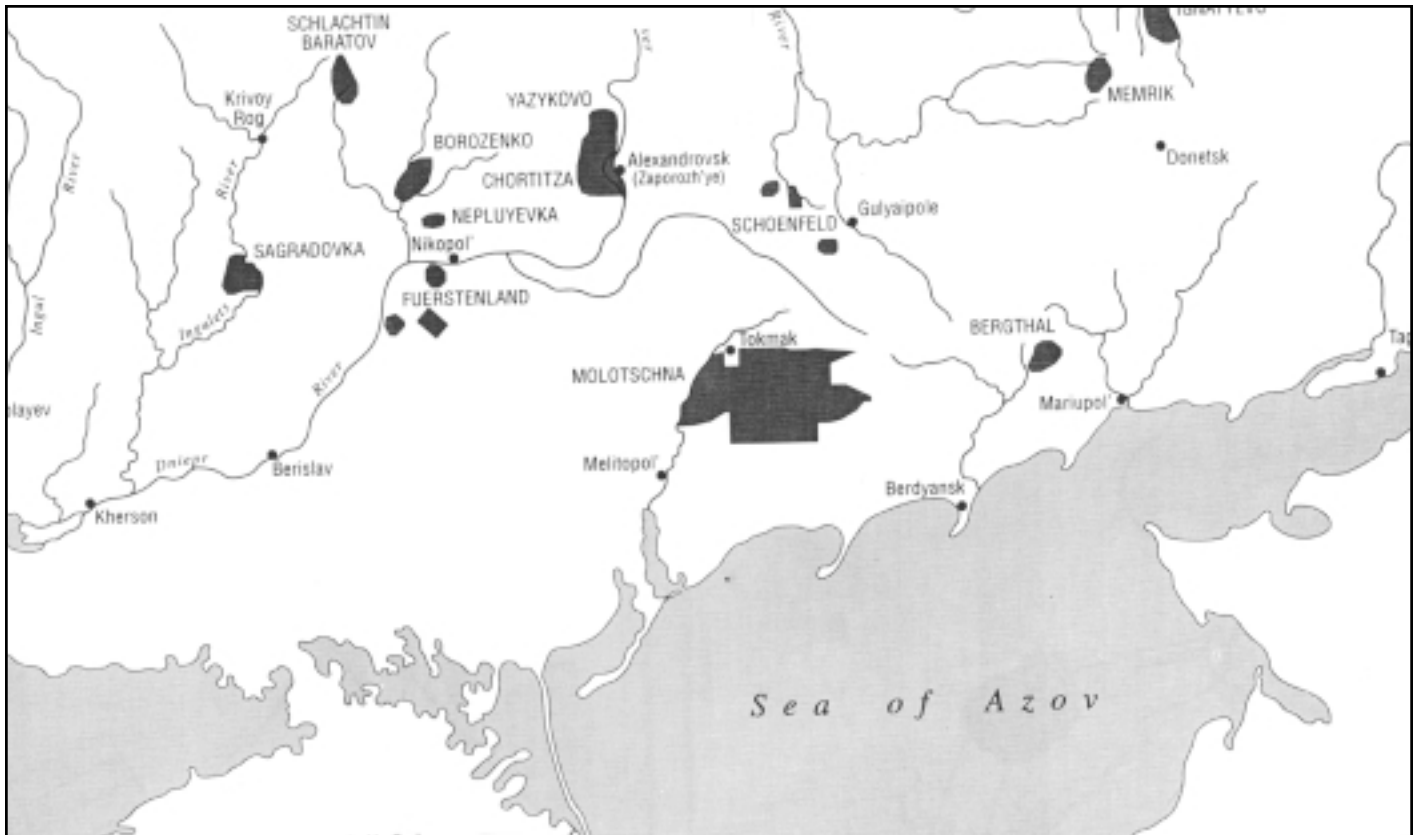
In 1788 and 1789, 400 families left for southern Russia (today Ukraine) and established the Chortitza Colony on the west bank of the Dneiper River across from the city of Alexandrowsk, today Zaporozhe. Chortitza was named for the famed Island of Chortitza, earlier the home of Ukrainian Cossacks and before that a place of worship for ancient Greek and Norse traders. The name 'Chortitza' came from the ancient word 'Hortz' or God, roughly translated meaning, 'thanks be to God'. Since Chortitza was the first Mennonite settlement it was called the "Old Colony".

During 1803 and 1804 another 400 families left Prussia and founded the Molotschna Colony, situated on the Molotschna or 'milk' river, 100 kilometres southeast of the Chortitza Colony. The colonies quickly became model farming settlements for all of Imperial Russia.

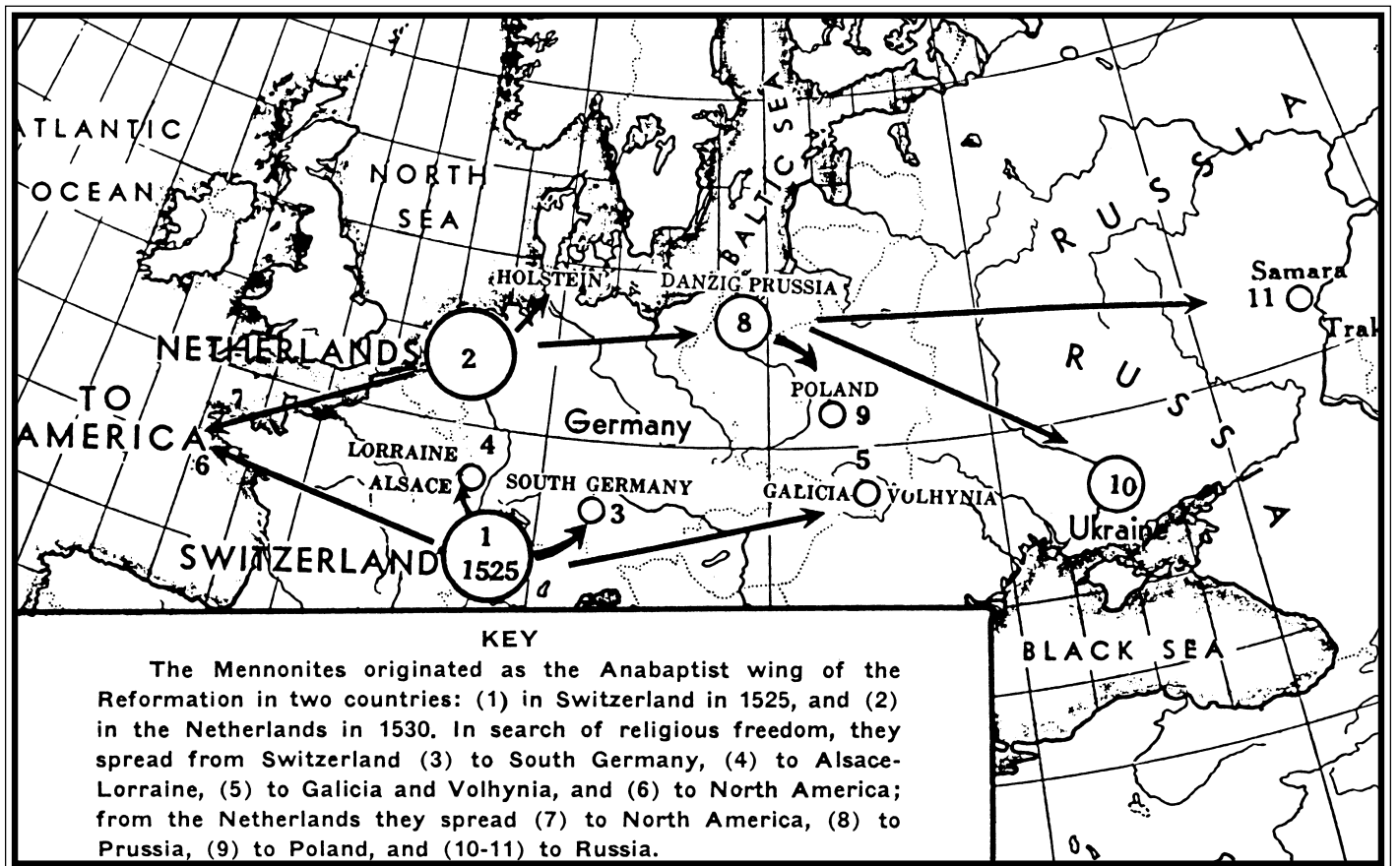
By 1870 the Russian government was instituting a Russification program including universal military service, school and local government reform. Understandably these measures caused great concern to those Mennonites still practicing their traditional faith.

Between 1874 and 1876, 18,000 Mennonites--one-third of the total--emigrated from Russia, 8,000 to Manitoba, 5,000 to Kansas, 2000 each to Minnesota and the Dakotas, and 1000 to Nebraska. For several years Mennonites constituted over half the population of Manitoba.





Mennonite settlements in Southern Ukraine, Imperial Russia. Courtesy of Huebert and Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (2 ed.), page 15.



Origin and spread of the Mennonites, courtesy of Mennonite Life/History and Events, page 148.

# Bergthaler

The East Reserve was settled in 1874 by two Mennonite denominations or Gemeinden, the Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde. They were conservatives who continued to practice the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith of their forebears as it had evolved over the preceding two centuries in Prussia and Russia.

The Bergthaler Colony was founded in 1836 by 136 young families mainly from the Chortitza "old" Colony, but including a few from the Molotschna. The settlers were well-provisioned as each family was allowed five wagon loads of goods, in addition to cattle and horses. Many were sponsored by well-to-do parents who had the foresight to establish their children on land of their own, to which only one in four Russian Mennonites could aspire.

The settlement of Bergthaler was located 20 miles northwest of Mariupol and approximately 50 miles northeast of Berdyansk, both seaports on the Sea of Azov. The land consisted of 26,000

acres. Between 1836 and 1853, five villages--Bergthaler, Heuboden, Schönthal, Schönfeld and Friedrichsthal--were laid out along the Bodena River and its various tributaries.

The land was relatively level, treeless and grass covered interspersed with occasional deep valleys. A small mountainous formation three kilometres north of the village of Bergthaler was known as the Kamennaya Mogila, literally "stone graves". The name "Bergthaler" was suggested by the Chortitza District Mayor ("Oberschulz") Bartsch as it described the physical setting, with the miniature mountain range to the north, and the Bodena valley in which Bergthaler, the first village, was laid out--Wm. Schroeder, *The Bergthaler Colony*, pages 9-28.

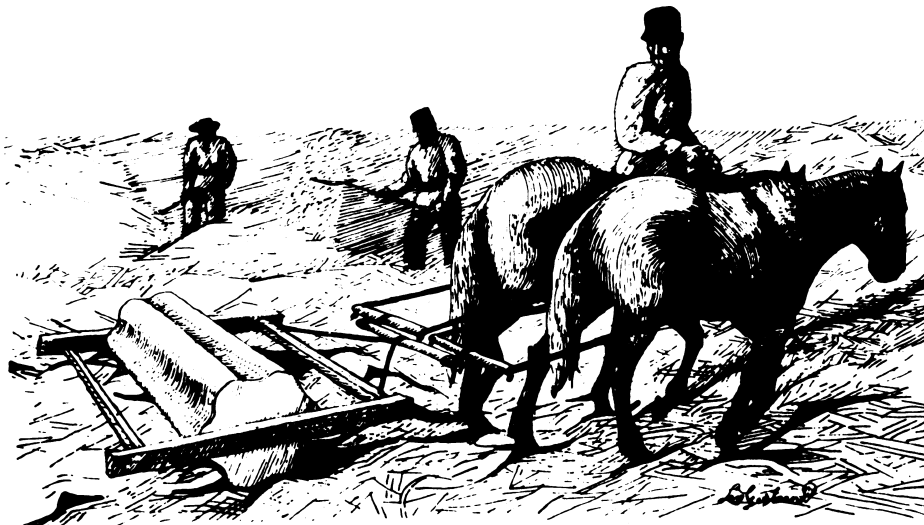
By 1857 the population had grown to 367 families of whom 149 (40%) were landowners and 218 were landless ("Anwohner") consisting of labourers, craftsmen and seniors. These sta-



*Driving across the Russian steppe ("staple") - sketch by Steinbach author and publisher Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Volume One, page 197. The flared wagon box and three horse team known as a trioka were a common sight in southern Russia.*

tistics compared favourably with Chortitza and the Molotschna where 42% and 44%, respectively, were landowners. Bergthaler had a higher percentage of pasture and hay land indicating some emphasis in sheep, dairy and beef, as opposed to the wheat cash crop economy which prevailed in the older colonies.

By 1874 when the decision to emigrate was made, the population of Bergthaler had grown to 525 families. Under the leadership of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) (*Preservings*, No. 5, pages 1-5), almost the entire Bergthaler population, 3000 souls, relocated to Manitoba in 1874-6, settling in the East Reserve. The Aeltester was the senior minister or Bishop of the Mennonite congregation or Gemeinde.



*Threshing in Russia 1815, using threshing stones. Photo courtesy of Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 27.*



*A 1905 photograph of the village of Bergthaler, Bergthaler Colony, Imperial Russia. Photo courtesy of MLA, North Newton, Kansas/Schroeder, The Bergthaler Colony, page 19.*

# Kleine Gemeinde

The second denomination, the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), originated in 1812 as a reform movement in the Molotschna Colony. The founder was Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), a young minister in Neunhuben, near Danzig, Prussia. In 1804 Reimer led a group of 30 families to Russia, settling in the village of Petershagen. Kleine Gemeinde, translated literally, meant “small congregation” or church community.

Although only a small minority of three percent in the Molotschna, the KG quickly became known for its practice of the New Testament teachings of nonresistance, community of sharing and the publication of the first Anabaptist inspirational books. KG farmers developed a reputation as being among the best in the Molotschna.

During the mid-1860s the majority of the KG moved out of the Molotschna to new settlements in Annafeld, Crimea, at Markuslandt, east of the Old Colony, and Borosenko, northwest of Nikopol. In 1866 the KG divided into two congregations which eventually became known as the Heubodner Gemeinde under Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) and the larger Blumenhoff Gemeinde under Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), both centered in Borosenko.

A third group of 4000 Mennonites, known as “Old Colonists” because they originated from the Chortitza Colony, arrived in Manitoba in 1875-76 and settled in the Winkler area. They were organized into a Gemeinde or church community by Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Rosengart, West Reserve, in 1880.

Many families in all three denominations had pioneered in new settlements in Imperial Russia in the previous decades, thus making them ideal

settlers to open up the Canadian west.

The settlers of the East Reserve in 1874 were sensitive, wholesome human beings, literate, middle class and articulated by a spiritual ethos which was valid, redemptive and soteriologic, with an indigenous historical tradition dating back

to the Hanseatic League which dominated commerce in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea in medieval times and earlier. They were possessed of their own unique culture and languages, the Low German Plaut-Dietsch and the ancient Danziger High German dialects.



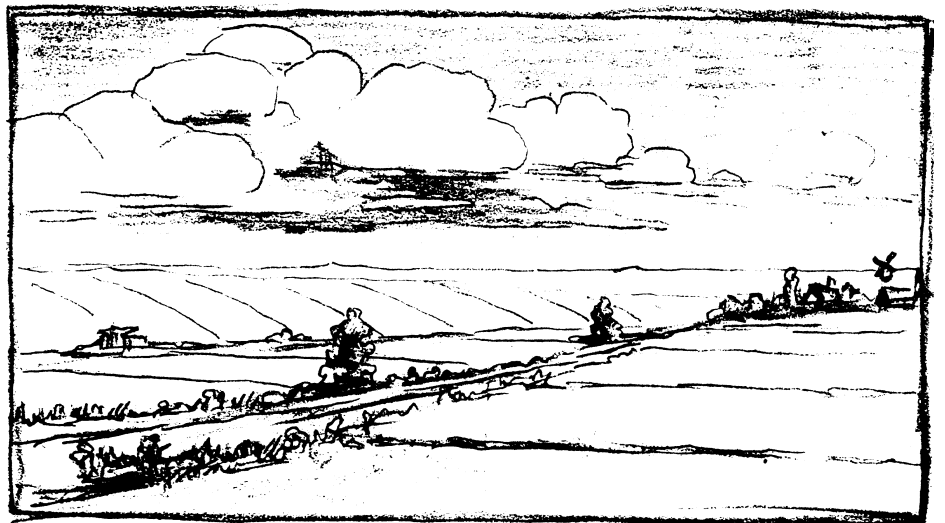
*The Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872) Wirtschaft in Rückenau, Molotschna, Imperial Russia. By the time this photo was taken, the hay barn (“Querscheune”) built across the rear of the premises had already been torn away. It was here that the Russian Czar visited the Barkman home in 1825 and ate a meal. Martin J. Barkman’s son Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75) was the spiritual leader of the pioneers of Steinbach in 1874. Jakob M. Barkman drowned in the Red River the following spring while on a mission of mercy to obtain supplies for his community. Photo courtesy of M. B. Fast, Reisebericht, page 68/John Friesen, Menn. Through the Centuries, page unpaginated.*



*1850s - Jakob Hildebrandt’s Wirtschaft, on the beautiful Chortitz Island. A typical Mennonite village farm in Russia known as a Wirtschaft. Sketch by Cornelius Hildebrandt, “Lebenserinnerung” in Harvey Dyck, Diaries of Jakob D. Epp.*



*1845 portrait of Helena von Riesen (1822-97), Shidlitz, West Prussia, a year before she married Cornelius Jansen. Helena was a first cousin to many members of the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Reinhild Kauenhouen Janzen, Mennonite Furniture Tradition, page 121/ Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 72.*



*A steppe landscape, sketch by Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Volume One, page 466. The Chortitza “Old” Colony was quite rolling interspersed by river valleys and creeks. By comparison, the Molotschna was relatively level.*



# East Reserve, 1874

The Canadian Government needed people to settle in the Province of Manitoba established in 1870. Hearing about the situation, and being aware of the prowess of the Mennonites in establishing pioneer settlements under adverse conditions, the federal government sent William Hespeler (1830-1921) to Russia to persuade them to come to Canada. A critical part of the inducement was a letter dated July 23, 1873, guaranteeing religious freedom, military exemption, and control of their own schools.

Between 1874 and 1876, 3800 Mennonites settled on an eight township block of land reserved for them by the Canadian government (184,320 acres). It was sometimes referred to as the "Rat River" settlement, the original point of access to the Reserve being by way of the landing site at the confluence of the Rat and Red Rivers.

A year later another block of land of seventeen townships was reserved for Mennonites in the Altona Winkler area. The original settlement then came to be referred to as the "East Reserve" and the newer settlement on the west side of the Red River, the "West Reserve".

The landscape of the Hanover Steinbach area appeared desolate in places as frequent prairie

fires burnt out the bluffs of native aspen, maples and oak. The land in the northern townships was fertile heavy clay and loam, but large sections were underwater each year until late in spring. The southern townships consisted of sandy and stony ridges interspersed with sloughs and swamps.

The expanse of land where the settlers would establish their new homes was once the exclusive domain of the Ojibway Indians and the buffalo. Even years later the descendants of the 1874 pioneers would occasionally unearth buffalo skulls, Indian arrow heads and crude tools, such as the stone hammers found on the home-stead quarter of Blumenhof pioneer Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), NE24-7-6-E.

To the north of the East Reserve lay the Seine River and the small Metis hamlet of Point des Chenes and to the west was the Red River. Along the east side were the fledgling farms of six or so Irish, Scottish and English families recently arrived from Ontario. Thirty miles to the northwest, at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers lay the small but bustling settlement of Fort Garry (now Winnipeg), with a population of 3500.

# The Delegation, 1873

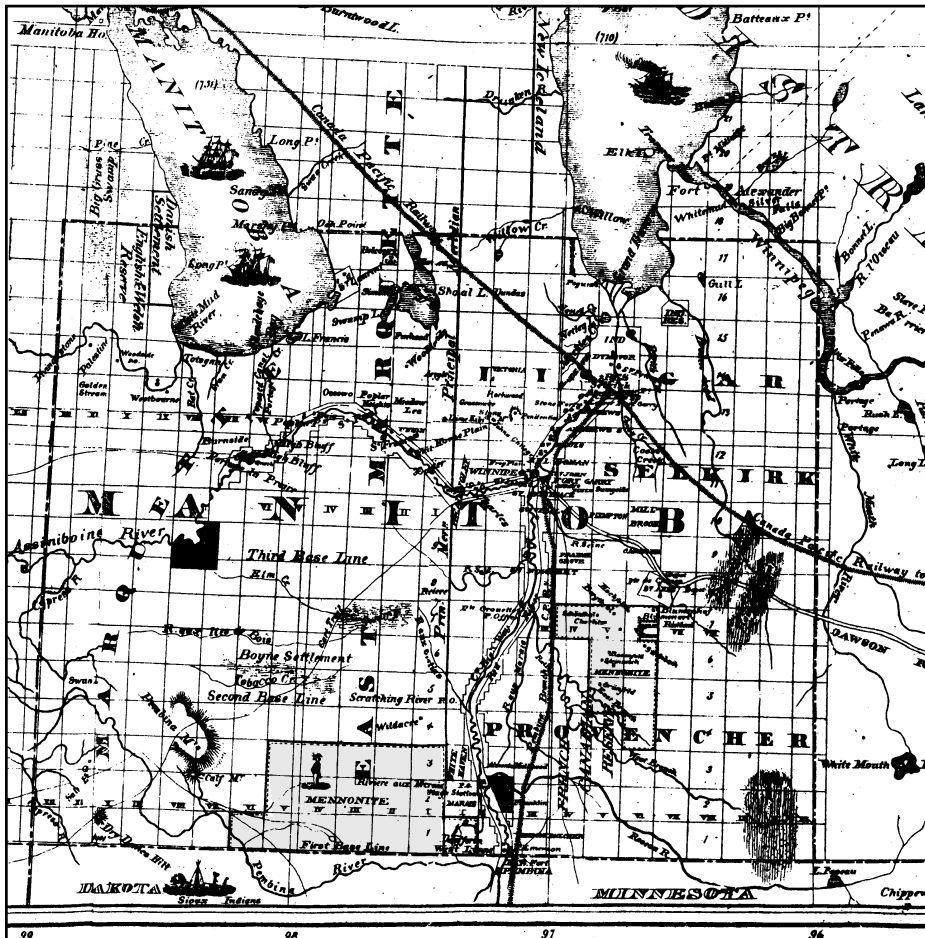
By the beginning of 1873 many Mennonites had come to the realization that emigration was their only viable alternative if they were to preserve their culture and religious freedom. The conservatives in the various settlements chose twelve delegates to North America to investigate the land and civil liberties being offered by the agents of the Canadian and American governments.

The Bergthaler and KG each elected two men to join the delegation being sent to scout out the land. Both denominations provided their representatives with a clear written mandate to evaluate the religious freedoms and economic opportunities they sought.

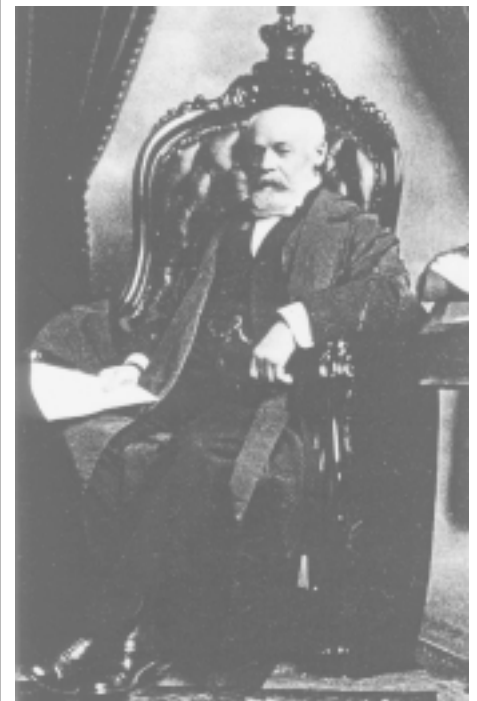
The two KG congregations each elected a delegate: the Blumenhoff Gemeinde under Peter P. Toews elected his older brother Cornelius (1836-1908), Grünfeld, while the smaller Heuboden Gemeinde under Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen elected David Klassen (1813-1900).

The Bergthaler elected Rev. Heinrich Wiebe (1839-97), brother of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, and Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), as their delegates. These two men were joined by estate owner Cornelius Buhr who accompanied the delegation at his own expense.

The Bergthaler delegates departed on February 20, 1873, travelling on the newly constructed Tagenrog to Kharkov railway, through Hamburg,



Map of Manitoba, the postage stamp Province. The map shows the main Mennonite settlements in Manitoba, the East Reserve and at Scratching River 1874 and West Reserve 1875: Klippenstein, Mennonites in Manitoba, page 28.



William Hespeler (1830-1921) came to Canada from Baden, Germany in 1852. He served as Dominion government immigration agent from 1870 traveling twice to Russia to induce the Mennonites to come to Canada. Obituary Winnipeg Free Press, April 19, 1921 republished in Kaita, editor, Niverville: A History, page 21.





*Jakob Y. Shantz (1822-1909), a wealthy businessman and Mennonite from Berlin (renamed London), Ontario. Schantz visited Manitoba in November of 1872 and encouraged his fellow Mennonites to settle there. Schantz became an active supporter of the Mennonite immigration and together with Hespeler accompanied the 12 delegates on their land inspection tour in June 1873. In June 1874 Schantz erected four sheds which were used for shelter by the immigrants. Photo courtesy of Sam Steiner, Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jakob Y. Shantz, page 58.*



*Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), Grünfeld, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, was the delegate elected by the Blumenhoff branch of the Kleine Gemeinde. He was an articulate and literate man who corresponded regularly with his brother Peter Toews, the Aeltester of the congregation. Photo courtesy of Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 31.*



*Twelve Russian Mennonite delegates had their pictures taken at the Dominion Lands Office in Winnipeg as they were heading out to scout out the land reserves in Manitoba. June 1873. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Archives/ Klippenstein, Mennonites in Manitoba, page 10.*

and then by sea to Liverpool and Halifax.

The KG delegates joined the representatives of the Hutterian Brethren, Paul and Lorenz Tschetter, travelling by way of Odessa, train to Berlin, and ship from Hamburg to New York.

The twelve delegates met in Moorhead, Minnesota, from where they toured Manitoba as a group. Although the papers of delegate Toews

were later burned in a house fire, the diary of Paul Tschetter provides a daily log of this portion of their travels. On June 17, 1873, William Hespeler took them to Government House for a meeting with Lieutenant Governor Morris and Premier H. J. Clark.

On June 18, 1873, they left on tour of the proposed Mennonite Reserve. They spent the night at the small Metis settlement of Point des Chenes (Ste. Annes), over the protests of the residents there. The next day they traversed the East Reserve and were impressed by its fertile soils. They passed by a residence where the woman spoke excellent German and took the opportunity to inquire about local weather, soil and crop conditions.

A near tragedy befell the delegates on July 1, when the remaining five delegates and William Hespeler were attacked and put under siege by a group of Metis in White Horse Plains. They were rescued by a troop of 30 cavalry sent out from Winnipeg.

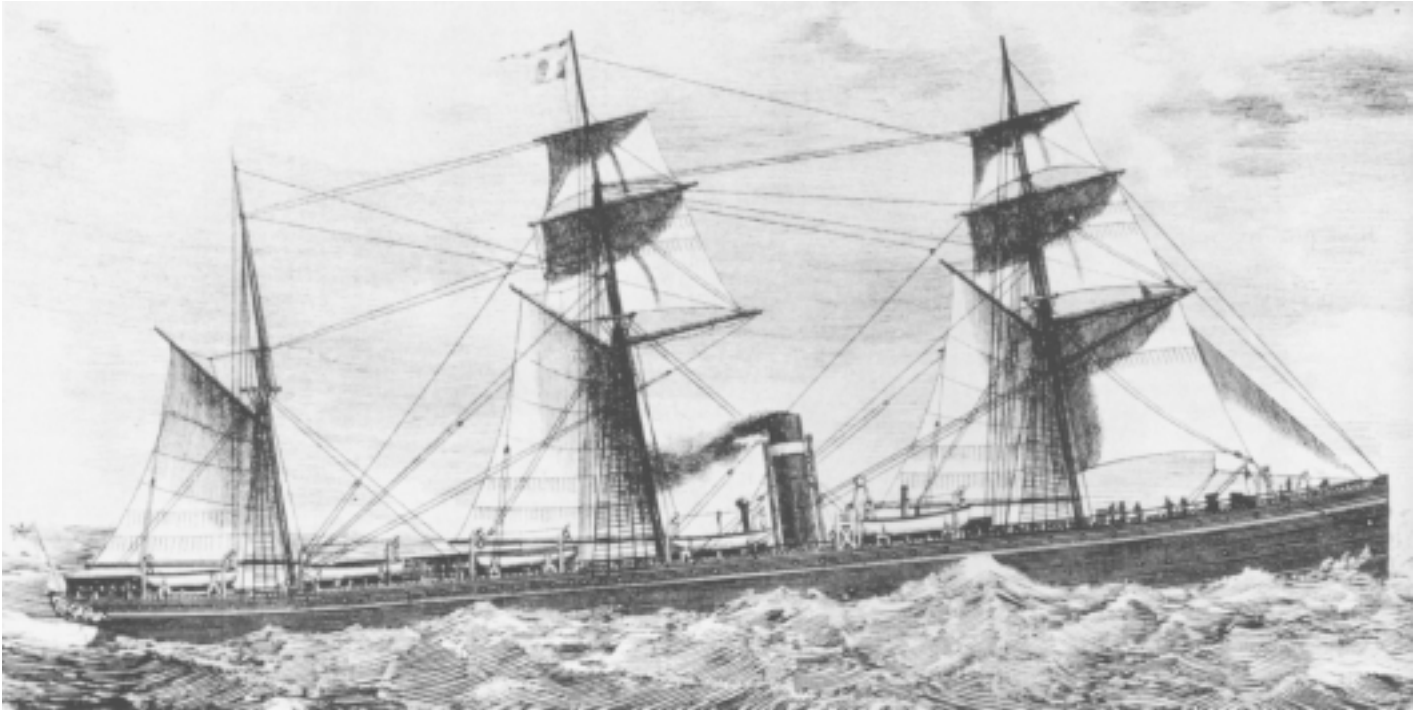
On July 1, 1873, while in Fargo, Cornelius Toews wrote his brother Peter in Russia, "We have spent three weeks in the Province of Manitoba attending to the business concerns here. Consequently we are now proceeding to Ottawa, the capital of Canada, with the purpose of obtaining a complete conviction with respect to our principal concern. In fact, we have the expectation that there is nothing more satisfactory to our questions to be obtained anywhere than exactly here."

The KG and Bergthal delegates were impressed with the land, but even more, with the civil and religious liberties offered in response to their written requirements. They proceeded to Ottawa where they received a letter of guarantee dated July 23, 1874, that was later enacted by the Canadian cabinet as an Order-in-Council. On July 31, the four delegates boarded ship returning to Europe.

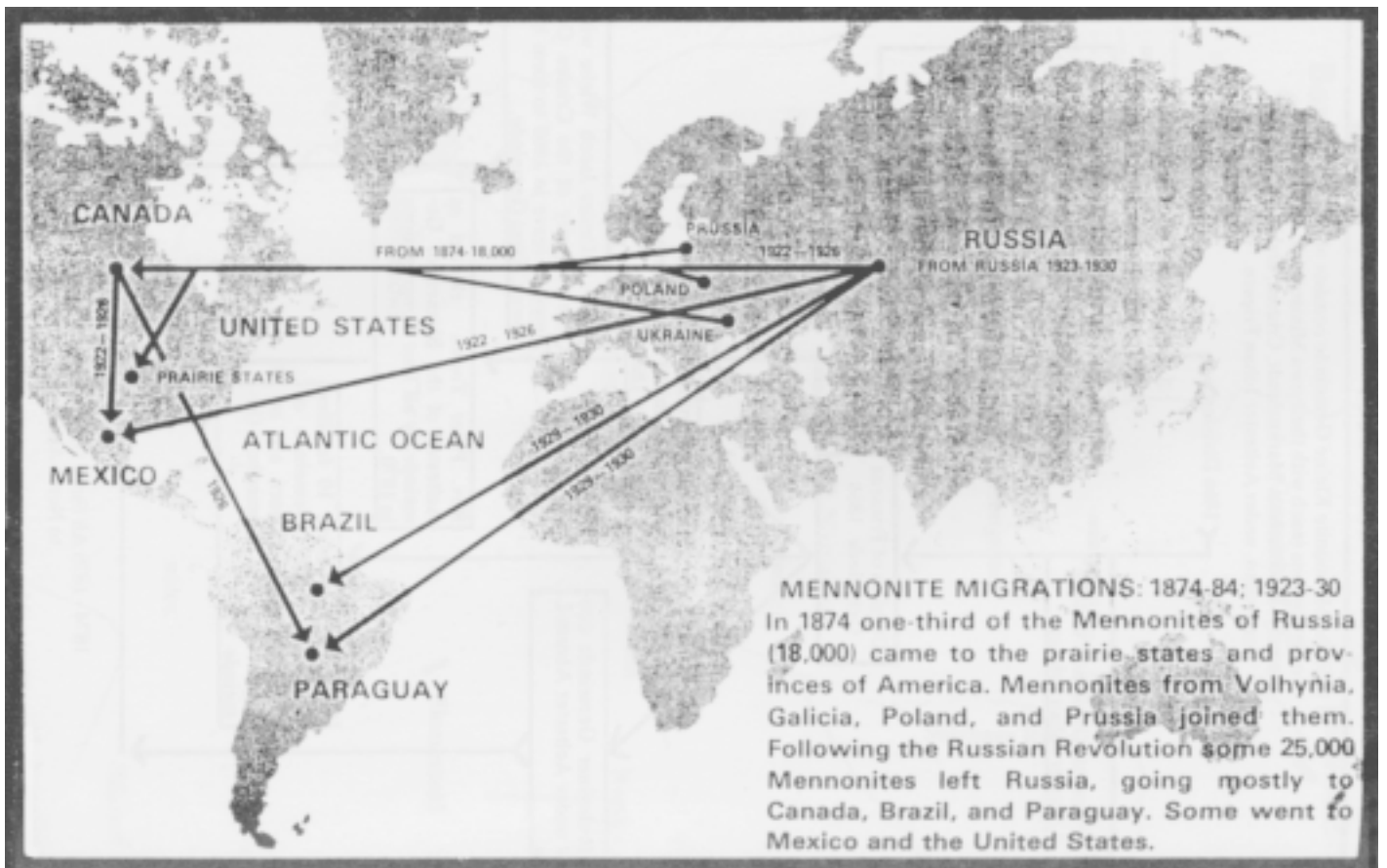


*Helena von Riesen (1822-97) wife of Cornelius Jansen, Counsel to the German Government who was exiled by the Imperial Czar in 1873 for his passionate advocacy of emigration from Russia. In 1873 Helena responded to a letter from KG Aeltester Peter Toews suggesting that the KG settle in Manitoba and not in the United States as her husband was advocating. Pioneers and Pilgrims, pages 17-18/ Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 20.*

# The Emigration, 1874-76



The S. S. Samatian crossing the Atlantic. This ship carried a load of Mennonite immigrants arriving in Quebec City on July 6, 1875 and again on June 30, 1877. Photo courtesy of Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 12.



Mennonite Migrations 1874-78 and 1923-30. Courtesy of Mennonite Life/History and Events, page 148.





The "International" docked at Lower Fort Gary on August 1, 1874, presently known as "The Forks". This was the first ship load of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Canada, members of the KG and ten Old Colony families. Standing at the stern of the ship, on the upper deck is David Klassen and his wife, nee Aganetha S. Brandt. Mr. Klassen was a tall man over six feet tall, while his wife was barely five feet, a typical Brandt. This is an original reproduction of the photograph which appears on the masthead of *Preservings*. Photo courtesy of Peter S. Koop, *Steinbach/Pres.*, No. 10, Part Two, page 32.

The spring of 1874 was a time of feverish activity for the Mennonite emigrants. They had to dispose of their properties, usually for a half to a third of their normal value. Passports had to be obtained, sometimes by bribery. Finally they were ready to leave their homes in Imperial Russia. They embarked on an epic journey of six weeks taking them across two continents, two seas and the Atlantic Ocean.

On May 30, 1874, friends and neighbours in Borosenko took the first group of KG immigrants, including delegate Cornelius P. Toews, to the seaport of Nikopol on the Dneiper River. Here they embarked on a ship which took them

down river and along the coast of the Black Sea to Odessa. In Odessa they took a train that travelled through Woluzug on the Austrian border, to Mislowitz on the Prussian border, and continued on through Berlin, where many of the travellers took time to visit the botanical gardens before they continued on to Hamburg.

The Bergthal emigrants took a different route. On Sunday, June 16, 1874, a long row of wagons carrying the first group of emigrants, departed for the Nikolajevska Station to the east where they boarded a train starting their seven week journey. They travelled through Tagenrog, Kharkov, Smolensk, Vilnius, Danzig, Berlin, and Hamburg. Bergthal historian, William Schroeder has captioned the journey: "They would travel on eleven different trains, on five ships and twice on wagons. On a large contingent of emigrants such as this, several children were born in route and many died."

From Hamburg all the emigrants took ship for Hull, England. From Hull they crossed England by train to Liverpool. In Liverpool the nearly blind Johann Schroeder (1807-84), Bergthal, had the misfortune of falling into the ocean as they were boarding their ship, the S.S. Nova Scotian. Fortunately he was carrying a bag of roasted bread ("reischje") which acted as a buoy until he could be rescued.

In Liverpool the immigrants also underwent a medical inspection and those with certain diseases such as trachoma were refused their immigration papers. The family of Johann Klassen (b. 1838) had the misfortune to be detained here as one of their children had scarlet fever. Heinrich Ratzlaff described the scene: "Oh, the pain! Cousin Klassen begged the doctor, he should allow them to proceed with the group. No, shouted the doctor, and ordered them to return to the smaller boat. With tears they had to depart from us." Two of the Klassens' children died in Liverpool.

Finally the immigrants could board their ves-

sels and cross the Atlantic Ocean. Many later described the excitement of passing among ice bergs and through fog until finally they saw the coast of Newfoundland. They travelled up the St. Lawrence River and disembarked in Quebec City. From Quebec City they took a train to Toronto. The Canadian Mennonites interceded with the government and persuaded the immigrants to avoid the treacherous Lake Superior Dawson trail route.

From Toronto, some of the KG immigrants went through Chicago, to Duluth. Some of the Bergthaler immigrants crossed Lake Superior by ship. One group arriving in 1876 had the misfortune of being stuck in the ice on Lake Huron for 15 days. From Duluth they travelled by train to Moorhead. From Moorhead they travelled by riverboat down the winding Red River to Winnipeg.



Arrival in Manitoba, August 1, 1874. Photo courtesy of Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, Volume One*, page 182.



The Mennonites landed at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers, recently dedicated as a historical site in care of the "Mennonite Landing Site Committee." With the help of Metis workers, Jakob Y. Schantz built four crude immigration houses in the northwest corner of Section 17-7-4E in June 1874. Photo courtesy of Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 17.

# The Settlement, 1874-76

The first contingent of 65 Mennonite families arrived in Manitoba on July 31, 1874. Their leaders were David Klassen and Cornelius P. Toews. The group was made up of 55 Kleine Gemeinde and 10 Old Colony families. They spent the first day, August 1, in Winnipeg purchasing supplies spending \$20,000 to the delight of local merchants. The next day, the ship took the settlers back to the landing site at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers where they disembarked.

Within two weeks the first contingents of Bergthaler arrived, 158 families in total. They arrived in two groups: the first with 100 families was under the leadership of Rev. Cornelius Friesen, and, the second, consisting of 58 families, was under the leadership of Rev. Heinrich Wiebe.

Klaas W. Reimer (1861-1944), a lad of 13 when he stepped onto Manitoba soil with the Steinbach group on September 15, the last party to arrive that fall, later described the experience: "We pitched our tent on the bank and stayed overnight. It rained almost all night. My brother Abraham and I found shelter with a half-breed Indian, for we were almost all wet."

As groups of immigrants arrived, they were transported to the immigration houses on SW20-7-4E, two miles south of present-day Niverville. The immigration sheds had been constructed earlier that summer by Jakob Schantz (1822-1909), a Mennonite from Ontario. The immigrants stayed here for several days or weeks while they formed groups to select homesteads and sites for close to sixty villages.

The Bergthaler consisted of some 500 fami-

lies totalling 3,000 people. The Bergthaler/Chortitzer settled in the western, southern and central areas of the East Reserve.

The Blumenhoff KG came to Manitoba with 130 families, while the remaining 40 families of the Heubodner KG went to Jansen, Nebraska. Thirty families of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde followed delegate David Klassen to settle along the Scratching River near Morris, establishing the villages of Rosenort and Rosenhof. The remaining 100 families stayed in the East Reserve with delegate Cornelius P. Toews and established a group of villages and a church district centred around Grünfeld, now Kleefeld, and church districts and clusters of villages around Blumenort and Steinbach in the eastern part of the Reserve.

The settlers set about to reestablish their villages and farms in the new land. According to the R. M. of Hanover assessment roll of 1881, 39 *Strassendorf* villages has been established. In 1960 geographer John Warkentin identified as many as 59 villages in 1891. They ranged in size from small four corner hamlets to larger 24 family villages such as Blumenort and Hochfeld, three miles west. Some villages consisted of settlers who had also lived in the same village in the old country.

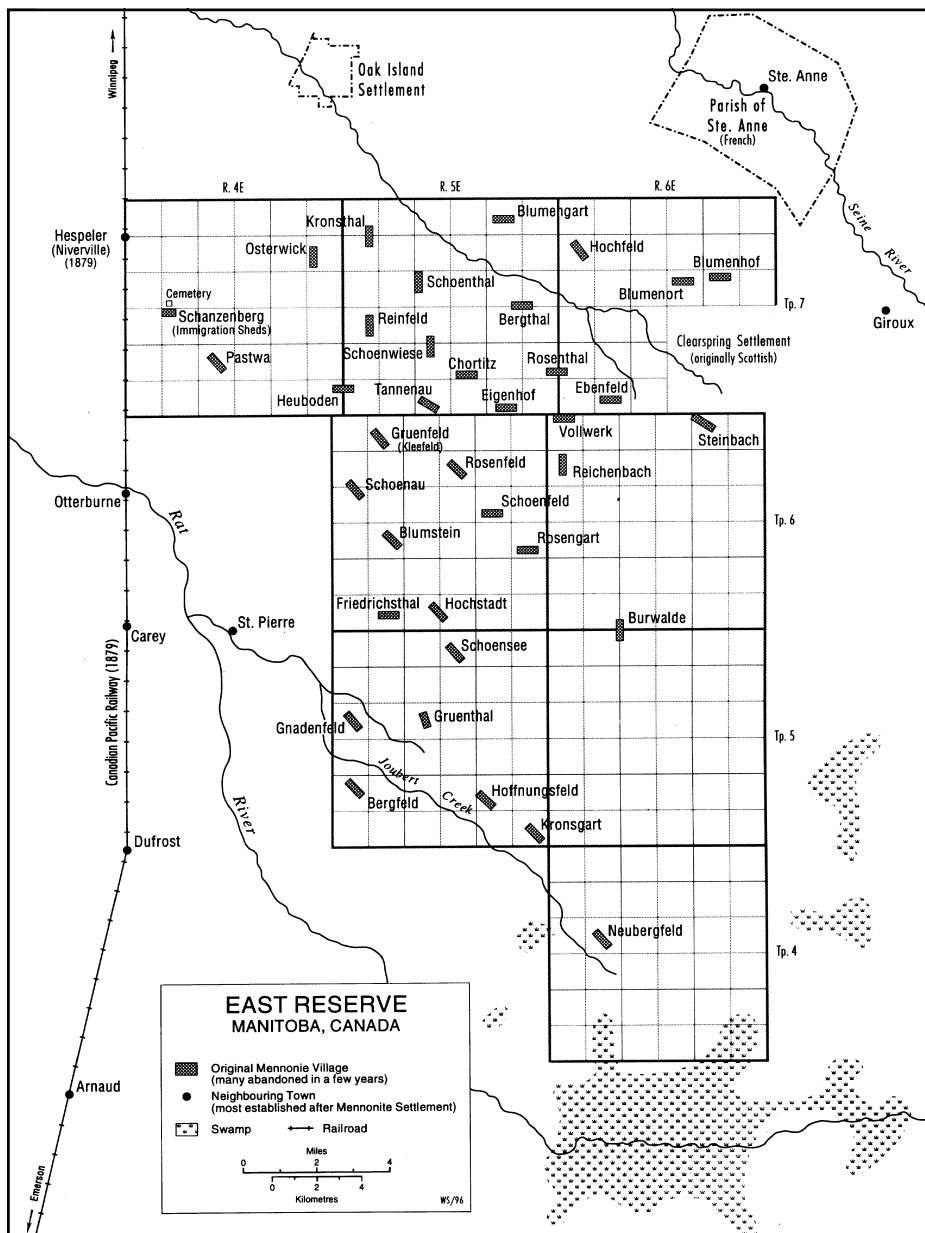
In some cases the village was named after the village of origin in Russia of one or more of the villagers. Steinbach, for example, was named after Steinbach, Borosenko in Imperial Russia, the home of seven of the 18 founding families of Steinbach, Manitoba. Although Steinbach was not a traditional Mennonite village name, it was typical of many names which often described some natural features of an area. Steinbach meaning "stony brook" clearly referred to the chain of large semi-buried boulders along the banks of the Bazavluk River in Borosenko, Imperial Russia.

Nature based names such as Grünthal ("green valley"), Blumenort ("flower place") and Schönfeld ("pleasant field") were popular and reflected the agrarian lifestyle and culture of the pioneers.

The settlers quickly constructed temporary dwellings as shelter from the fast approaching winter which they already knew would be much harsher than in Russia. Klaas W. Reimer, a 13-year-old boy at the time, described the experience in Steinbach: "A large tree stood here besides which we pitched our tent and secured it to the tree. We hung the ham and the clock on the tree and then construction was begun. Here my father with his sick wife and eight children stood between earth and sky. Winter was at the door...."

Once the first crude shelters had been prepared, many of the settlers set out for Winnipeg to purchase the most necessary supplies, oxen and cattle. Their hard currency was seen as a windfall by the local merchants but they were amazed at the tough bargaining of the new immigrants.

The Mennonites were used to building their houses and stables with kilned brick but took



The East Reserve circa 1890. Map courtesy of Huebert and Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (2d), page 73.





A typical landscape from the 1880s. A photo of the yard on SE12-7-6E in the Clearsprings settlement where Gerhard F. Giesbrechts later lived and built a new house in 1917. The farm was originally owned by the Thomsons and then by the Andersons, from whom Giesbrechts bought it. Photo courtesy of Anna Penner (Mrs. Ben D.), Steinbach, Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 73.



1897. Jakob B. Koop and Mrs. Koop, nee Helena Nickel, with their family and two workers pose in front of their farmyard in Neuanlage, later Twin creek. Children l. to r. Cornelius, Peter, Jakob and Johann. Mother is holding baby daughter Helena. This rare photograph displays the family's burgeoning success. The photograph was taken in 1897 by a travelling photographer, predating the 1899 KG Diener Konferenz which prohibited photography. It caused a stir in the Gemeinde and Jakob B. Koop was chastised before the brotherhood, the "Dunaschdach." Consequently Jakob kept the photographs in his chest ("Kjist") and they were not taken out until 1926. Photo courtesy of Peter S. Koop, Steinbach/Pres. No. 10, Part Two, page 31.

advantage of an abundance of wood for construction which they harvested in the forests to the east and south of the East Reserve. By 1876, Steinbach entrepreneur Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916) had set up a sawmill and was churning out a supply of board lumber for building construction. The walls of these early housebarns were covered with cedar shakes which the Mennonites manufactured themselves, giving the villages a rustic, weathered look.



Johann G. Loepky (1831-1912) and Susanna Toews (1835-1900) from Bergthal, Imperial Russia, arrived in Manitoba in 1875. They lived in the village of Strassberg, filing for a homestead on SW6-7-4E. The Loepky descendants are prominent in the Strassberg and Niverville area. Photo courtesy of Otto Loepky, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, page 5.



Circa 1859. A typical Bergthaler couple, Franz Thiessen (1833-1901) and Elisabeth Hamm Sawatzky Thiessen (1826-95) with son Franz. They emigrated from Schönfeld, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, to Manitoba where they may have settled in Neuenburch or Reichenbach, East Reserve, before moving on to Schönau, near Altona in the West Reserve. Their son Jakob Thiessen (1861-1953) had a daughter Agatha (1885-1978) who married Peter P. Friesen (1878-1969), so-called Dr. Friesen of Grunthal. Photo courtesy of Oak Tree (Steinbach, 1995)/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 32.

# Adversity, 1874-76

The settlers immediately faced various natural calamities. While they were still on the river boats coming down the Red River from Moorhead, they noted the swarms of mosquitoes which some compared to Pharaoh's plagues in Egypt.

Several people died while the immigrants were enroute. Margaretha, daughter of Johann K. Esau (1867-1946) and Maria Goossen (1868-1954), had been seriously injured when she was accidentally pulled off a train by a conductor in Europe. Margaretha died on August 3, 1874, while the immigration party was coming down the Red River. Several boys swimming in the river at the landing site noticed a plank float by and retrieved it. The plank was used by Rev. Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Grünfeld to make her coffin. Peter, the baby boy of Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht (1849-1917) and Elisabeth Harms (1855-74), died on August 9, 1874 and was also buried at the landing site.

One of the immediate needs of the immigrants was a supply of fresh water. An attempt at digging a well ended in near disaster when the walls of the well caved in, burying Peter Reimer (1846-1927) and Hiebert, his co-worker. Fortunately they were saved by Redekopp, another co-worker.

While many families were still at the Schantz immigration sheds they were threatened by a prairie fire which roared through the night, lighting up the sky for miles around. The settlers saved themselves by plowing a fire guard around the camp. Early journals speak of days when the air was filled with smoke from these prairie fires.

A number of people died while quartered at the immigration sheds. Some 30 burials took place here, including Heinrich, baby of teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87) and Susanna E. Loewen (1842-1918), Grünfeld.

The first hay harvested was eaten by the grasshoppers and the hay harvested later was frozen and of little nutritional value. Many of the dearly bought cattle and oxen succumbed because of the bitter cold and primitive shelter. Steinbach pioneer Heinrich Fast (1826-90) later recalled that "...the usually extremely shy wolves raced along the main street of Steinbach and acted as if the languishing cattle already belonged to them."

During the first winter the settlers experienced the fury of raging snow storms. On December 13, 1876, Heinrich Wiebe (1851-76), Blumenort, froze to death when a prairie blizzard suddenly struck a group of men coming

home from the forests to the east. Teacher Abraham P. Isaac (1852-1938), Schönau, only barely escaped the same blizzard by huddling in the snow in his warm Russian fur coat or *Peltz*. David S. Doerksen (1845-1928), Schönhorst, enjoyed telling his grandchildren about the time he and four other men walked to Tannenau to buy horses, when they were beset by a sudden March blizzard. They saved themselves by huddling in their fur *Peltzes* and tramping around in the snow to keep warm.

In 1875 the first crop raised by the Mennonites was devoured by a plague of grasshoppers. This loss brought many settlers to the limit of their resources and many would have lost everything had they not been helped by the "Brot Schult" ("bread debt"), a loan of \$100,000 arranged by the Canadian Government and co-signed by the Swiss Mennonites who had settled in Ontario in 1786. Another \$50,000 was provided by the Ontario Mennonites partly as a loan and partly as a gift. Records of the Bergthl Waisenamt indicate that Johann Braun, Rev. Heinrich Wiebe and Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe purchased flour and potatoes from "Schulz and Penner" in 1876: May 20 - 2005 bushels of potatoes, June 20 - 530 bags of flour, July 30 - 300 bags of flour, and August 10 - 1289 bags of



*The shepherd watches the village cattle in the village pasture as depicted by an artist in the entourage of Lord Dufferin during the Vice-regal visit of 1877. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 42.*





*Johann S. Friesen (1853-1937), Steinbach pioneer and Abram P. Isaac (1852-1938) Schönau, near modern day Kleefeld. Isaac narrowly escaped death in the vicious prairie blizzard of 1876 by huddling in the snow in his warm Russian fur peltz. Friesen kept donkeys and was known as "Asel" Friesen. Photo courtesy of Roger Penner, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Pres., No. 12, page 69.*

flour.  
 During 1875 a dozen KG families from the Scratching River and the East Reserve undertook a secondary emigration to Nebraska and Kansas, while some Bergthaler families moved to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, where relatives and friends were reporting much more favourable conditions.

In 1876 the settlers noticed the grass cov-



*David S. Doerksen (1845-1928), Schönhorst, told the story of how he almost froze to death when he and a group of men on an expedition to Tannenau were struck by a surprise blizzard. Photo courtesy of Frank B. Doerksen, Grunthal, Manitoba/Pres., No. 12, page 61.*



*Circa 1860. Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900) and Helena S. Friesen (1855-1911) and children Helena and Heinrich emigrated to Manitoba from Rosenfeld, Borosenko, Imperial Russia. The Heinrich B. Friesen family settled in Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874 but left for Jansen, Nebraska in February of 1875 by ox team in the middle of a raging blizzard. Helena was a sister to Steinbach entrepreneur Abraham S. Friesen. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Louis Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba/Pres., No 12, page 67.*

ered with grasshopper larvae and feared their new crop would again be devoured.

Many were tempted to join the exodus of those moving south. These included the children of matriarch Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), Blumenort, among the leading farmers and entrepreneurs in Blumenort and Steinbach. But the settlers were conservative people and the majority remained firm in their vision. At a family council in 1876 Elisabeth made a passionate speech, stating her conviction that God had led her family to Manitoba and that they should persevere. Her words car-

ried the day, and her family remained, soon to prosper.

Through all the adversity the settlers never lost their earthy sense of Low German humour. Stories are legend of how later immigrants would yell orders at their oxen or horses as they had done in Russia, "Howach, " to pull harder. But in Manitoba, the first draught animals they bought were trained in English. To the horses and oxen "Howach" sounded like "Ho, ho", and at the command they invariably stopped, much to the chagrin of the newcomers.

# The Strassendorf

The *Strassendorf* was a street village, originating in Northern Europe during medieval times. By the time the Mennonites came to Manitoba it had evolved into a highly sophisticated form of communal land holding and village governance. Each family owned a lot or farmyard along the street and additional parcels of farmland located nearby, as well as a share in the common lands such as pasture. Although each villager applied for an individual homestead title, the land was held in common by the village society which reallocated it according to a well established system in which each villager received a variety of land, "some of the good and bad, the near and

far." In some villages these arrangements were formalized by a "Village Agreement" and sometimes even registered against everyone's title.

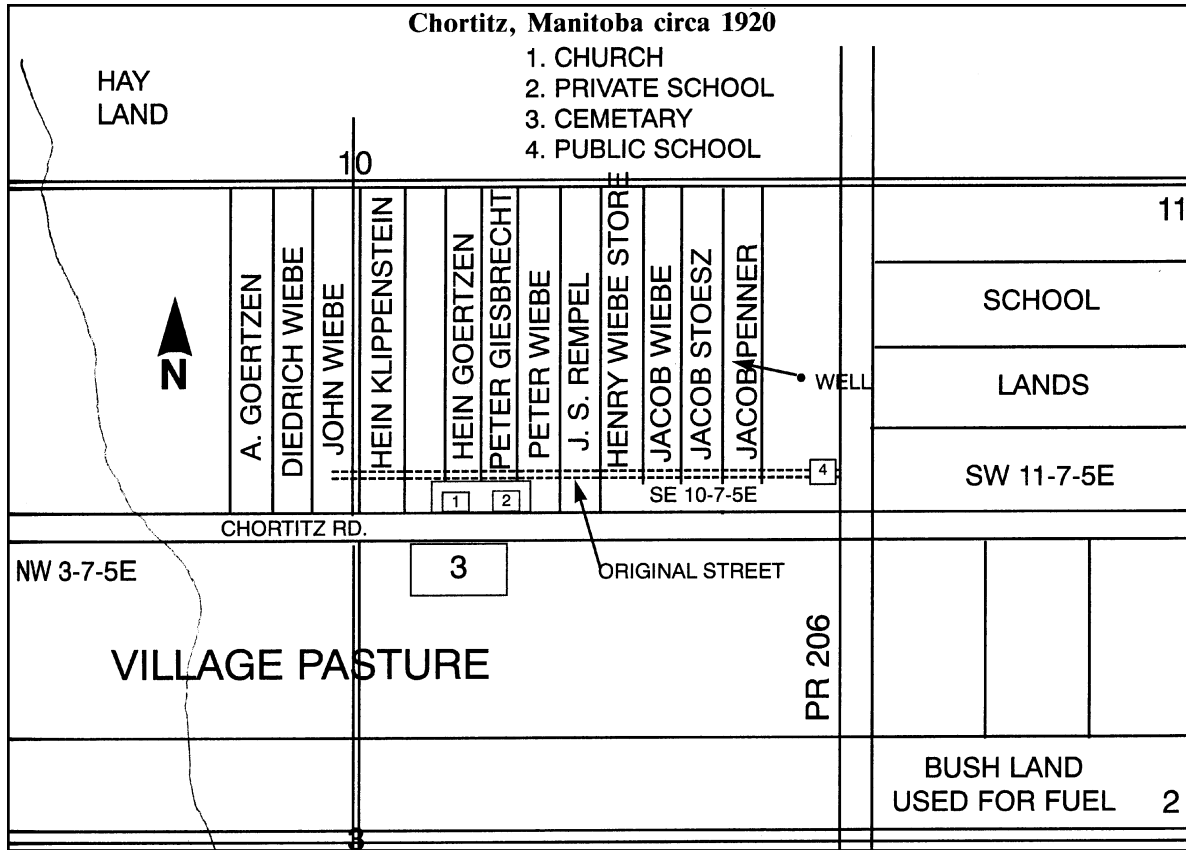
The "Brot Schult Registers" of the Bergthaler Gemeinde, which recorded the aid given to each family by way of loans and credits, indicate that they originally intended to settle in 25 villages with 15 to 20 families in each, consistent with the former practice in Russia: see Irene Kroeker, "Brot Schult Registers" in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, pages 40-44. The East Reserve, however, did not have large blocks of fertile steppe or prairie as the settlers had experienced in Russia. In fact, most village sites were limited to one

or two sections, because much of the land needed drainage or was interspersed by sandy gravel ridges and sloughs. As a result most of the larger village complexes listed in the "Brot Schult Registers" were broken down into smaller villages of six to 12 families each, a size more suitable to the physical circumstances of the land.

The smaller villages were also more suited to the primitive Manitoba economy where the farmers could not continue with a cash crop wheat-growing economy as they had been used to in Russia. The settlers had to make a difficult transition to a more basic "subsistence" agriculture based on mixed farming with emphasis on

livestock, poultry and dairy products.

The transformation of the larger "old-world" villages into smaller "new world" units was accelerated by a secondary migration of Bergthaler to the West Reserve beginning in 1878. By 1881 half of the Bergthaler, some 1600 to 1800 people had relocated settling in what later became known as the Altona-Gretna area. This completely decimated some villages and provided land for expansion in others. Ironically it was this difficult adjustment period which would lay the foundation for the future prosperity of the entire region.



The village of Chortitz 1920 (later Randolph) as drawn by Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond. Courtesy of Pres., No. 6, page 2.



Alt-Bergfeld, 1900. Photographs of the pioneer villages are rare, partially because conservative Mennonites did not condone the taking of pictures. Here is a priceless shot of the village of Alt-Bergfeld. View towards the west from the east end of the village. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 43 and Historical Sketches, page 9.



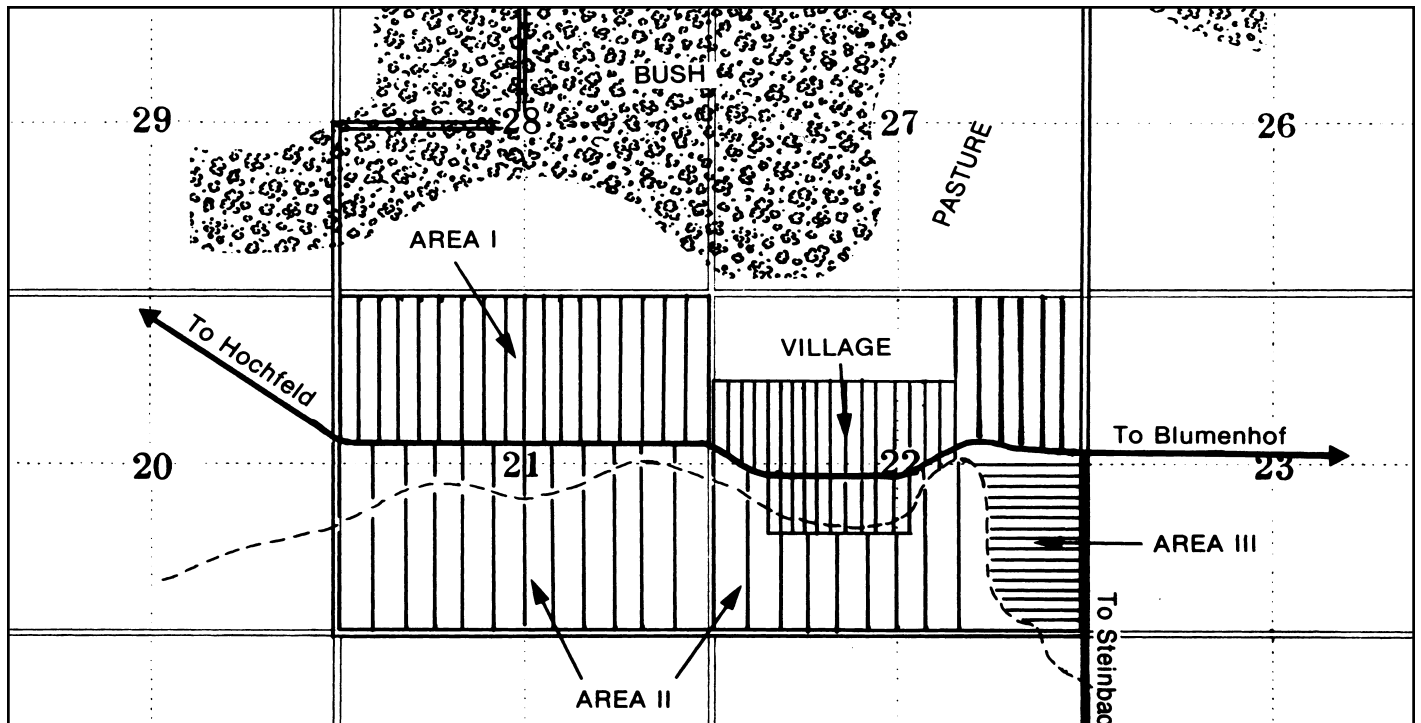


A priceless shot of the village of Steinbach, circa 1900. The photo is taken from just north of the modern day intersection of Brandt Road (P.T.H. 12 and Main Street, view to the southeast. In the foreground, left hand side can be seen the premises of Klaas B. Friesen, Johann G. Barkman, Wm. F. Giesbrecht and the traditional housebarn of Heinrich R. Brandt, in that order. Pres. No. 8, Part Two, pages 8-9, and Pres., No. 12, page 79.



Funeral of Cornelius Friesen, 1923, Grunthal. The photograph shows Church Avenue, the original village Main Street running north and south. The mourners are on their way to the pioneer cemetery at the north end of the street. The Wirtschaften originally were on the west side of the street and Anwohner on the east side. The Chortitzer Church built in 1886 stands in the centre of the photo. In accordance with tradition Mennonite public buildings were built parallel to the street. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 33.

### Blumenort Village Plan 1874-1910.



Map of the original Blumenort village on section 22-7-6E as compiled by E. K. Frances around 1950. and published in Blumenort, page 66. The Strassendorf villages were laid out according to ancient traditions which the Mennonites had practiced since the Medieval times. The land was divided into cultivation, garden plots and meadow according to its best use. The villagers were allotted a portion of each so that all shared the good and bad. A few village plans have been preserved by maps drawn by the original pioneers and/or recreated by descendants. The Blumenort map illustrates the layout of the various plots of land, or "kagels." A more complete drawing of the Steinbach village plan by John C. Reimer is found in Reflections, page 68.

# Buildings 1874-90

The Mennonite immigrants who came to Manitoba in 1874 to 1876 were experienced at pioneering, many having opened up new settlements in Imperial Russia in the decades prior. They were used to erecting cheap temporary accommodation for themselves and their livestock while more permanent dwellings were being planned and building materials accumulated.

In Russia the Mennonites became familiar with the “Semlinja”, a sod hut usually called a “semlin.” It was the most common structure among the pioneers and easy to built--a hole



*The Semlin. This semlin was built as a demonstration for the Steinbach Musuem by musuem founder John C. Reimer. Photo courtesy of Blumenort, page 45.*



*The “Sarai” was a form of shed where one placed the rafters on the ground which were then cross-braced and covered with bundles of reeds. “Sarai” was a word of Turkish-Russian origin. Photo courtesy of David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 31.*



*Jakob L. Plett house barn on NE25-7-6E built in the old Blumenhof village and moved onto his homestead in 1890. The building plan followed the traditional pattern and utilized homemade cedar shakes as sheathing material. The hay shed at the rear is reminiscent of the “Quere Scheune” hay shed built diagonally across the rear of many larger Wirtschaften in Russia. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 134.*



*The log house was an intermediate stage between the hastily constructed sod huts and log shanties and the traditional wood-framed housebarns. Although this house-barn was only built circa 1884 it is representative of this type of construction on the East Reserve. It was built by Jakob Dueck, Rosengart. Standing in front of the building are, l. to r.: Jacob N. Dueck, Diedrich N. Dueck, Jakob Dueck (b. 1846), grandson Jacob Ginter (son of Jacob Ginter and Anna Dueck), and Maria (Neufeldt) Dueck (b. 1846). This house still stands on SW18-6-6E. Photo taken facing northwest, circa 1895. Courtesy of Mrs. Elizabeth Friesen/Linda Buhler.*

was dug three feet into the ground, and roof and walls made of sods.

The "Sarai" was another simple structure which the Mennonites learned to build in the

"old" country. It consisted of walls made of logs leaning against each other, teepee style, covered with thatch.

In Prussia the "Vorlaubhaus" or arcaded house-

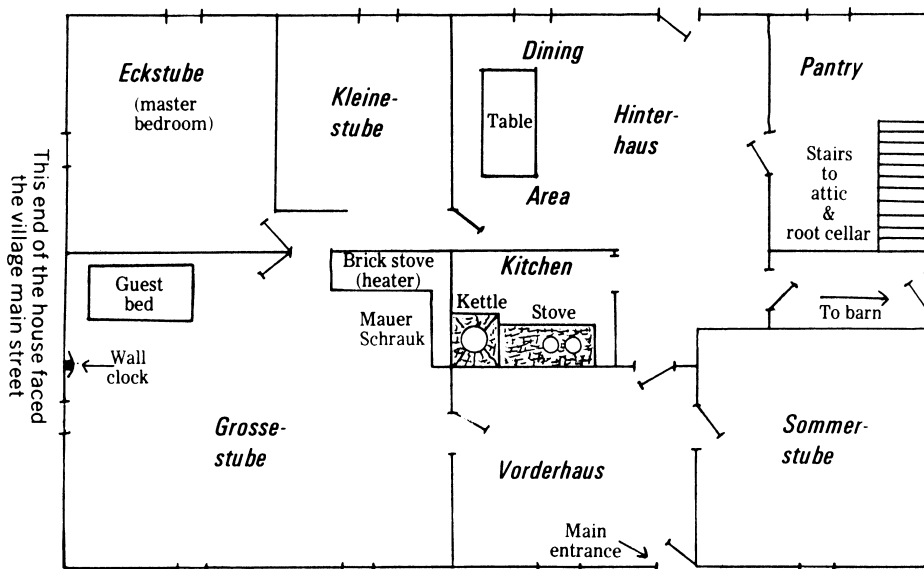
barn had become a standard style of construction. In Russia the Mennonites reverted to the Frisian/Lower Saxon longhouse or housebarn as the exclusive form of construction. The advantage of joining the house and barn was to eliminate the need to go outside during inclement weather and to reduce opportunities for theft.

In Russia the Mennonites used kilned bricks as their standard building material. In Manitoba there was an endless supply of wood and this became the main construction material. During the first several years some log cabins as well as wood block buildings were built.

In 1874 a number of Mennonites, including three farmers in Blumenort, already built wood-frame structures covered with boards and homemade cedar shakes as siding. By the following year the wood-frame house-barn had become standard throughout the East Reserve. A building boom occurred in the mid-1880s as residents built new wood-frame house-barns, many of which served into the 20th century.



Early typical house-barn owned by Jakob F. Peters, son of Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), Vollwerk. Photo courtesy of 75 Gedenkfeier, page 161, and Oberschulz, page 79.



The Mennonite pioneers built their buildings to last. It was customary on completion of the building in the building supervisor to carve his initials and date of completion onto one of the upright beams. The initials on the Jakob Wieler housebarn in Eigenhof read "B.M." and the date is "1877". The photograph shows the huge axe-hewn beams and wooden pegs typically used in early construction. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 32.



A housebarn in Alt-Bergfeld built in 1904. The prosperous Wirtschaft belonged to the Peter T. Falk family. This structure already shows some innovation and adaptation to North American conveniences and construction methods. The housebarn was no longer under one roof line and actually consisted of separate house and barn joined in the middle by the milk house and/or summer kitchen. This had become a common style of construction on the East Reserve by the 1890s. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 55.



# Religion

Shortly after the settlement in 1874, the larger Bergthaler denomination became known as the "Chortitzer Gemeinde" in the East Reserve. The name Chortitza was pronounced by the old timers with an "Gh" sound--almost silent "h". The name itself symbolised the traditional times when a genuine and enduring spirituality and Christian discipleship shaped the lives of the founding peoples of the East Reserve.

The spirituality of orthodox and conservative Mennonites was based on the restitution of the Apostolic church as rediscovered in Reformation times by Menno Simons (1496-1561), Dirk Phillips (1504-68), and other seminal leaders. This vision of a renewed Christian community based on the New Testament church or Gemeinde was manifested within the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Gemeinde and the KG by an earnest discipleship and the ethos of love and community.

KG theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Tiege, articulated various aspects of this faith in his 1833 treatise "Faith and Reason" which Dr. Robert Friedmann later described as one of the most profound statements in Mennonite literature.

The lifestyle of farming was considered appropriate and conducive towards "...simplicity in Christ..." "Brotherly love," was to make believers "like a great family and no one wished a privilege for themselves at the expense of another." Those who yielded their lives would be filled "with a new wisdom and knowledge of Christ Jesus." Christians "...should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after great wealth or position of high distinction in this world....certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Matt. 16:26"--Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason," in *Golden Years*, pages 214-248.

Such a spirituality articulated a faith permeating the everyday life of believers, a faith made complete by its universal implementation and practice within and outside the Gemeinde, the community of God's people. Existential spirituality of this nature was different from the more verbal and individualistic Calvinist triumphalism found in the religious cultures and languages of American Revivalism and later Evangelicalism.

The Bergthaler and KG were conservative people not given to flights of fancy in their reli-

gious disposition. Their theology was practical, enduring and as relevant today as it was in the 19th century. The sermons of KG and Bergthaler/Chortitzer ministers are studded with jewels of Biblical wisdom and the spirit of pure "Gelassenheit" or submission, and reveal a sound exegesis and inspired faith.

Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit the settlers remained true to the faith once received which was sometimes ridiculed and scorned by various religious fanatics. The pioneers were not swept away by each new religious fad and whimsy which swept east across the steppes of Russia from Germany or north across the Canadian border from the southern United States.

The term "Gemeinde", although difficult to translate, was a German word meaning community as well as church congregation. It described the belief of traditional Mennonites in a church community modelled on the Apostolic church, not merely as a conventicle of worship but also as a socio-economic union known as "community of sharing".



*An artist's impression of a worship service of the Mennonites in southern Manitoba. Sketch by a member of Lord Dufferin's entourage during the Vice-Regal visit of 1877. Courtesy of Reflections, page 204.*



# Church History, 1874-1910

Bergthaler Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) came to Manitoba in 1875 settling in the centrally located village of Chortitz. His first task was to oversee the establishment of schools and various social institutions in the new land. He was extremely busy with pastoral duties such as baptism, marriages as well as church leadership.

In 1876 Gerhard Wiebe travelled to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, to ordain Gerhard Neufeld as the Aeltester there. During the same year Wiebe suffered the tragic death of his wife and three children, who died within the space of four months. In March 1881, he travelled to Berlin, Ontario, regarding church matters.

By 1881 half of the Bergthaler had relocated and settled in the West Reserve. It was decided to elect and ordain a separate Aeltester for the new community. Johann Funk (1836-1917) was elected in December, 1881, and ordained in 1882.

Gerhard Wiebe resigned from his Aeltestership in 1882 and was replaced by Assistant-Aeltester David Stoesz (1842-1903), Bergthal, who served until his death. Factions soon emerged in the new congregation in the West Reserve. Funk favoured greater assimilation and acceptance of American Revivalist religious culture. This was opposed by the majority of his parishioners and in 1892 they elected their own Aeltester, Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929), Sommerfeld, establishing the "Sommerfelder Gemeinde". By this time the Bergthalers in the East Reserve were known as "Chortitzer".

In 1903 Peter Toews (1846-1915), Bergfeld,

became Aeltester of the Chortitzer. In 1915 he was replaced by Johann K. Dueck (1866-1923), Schönsee, who served until his death in 1923. In 1925 Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968) of Osterwick became Aeltester but the post fell vacant when he emigrated to Paraguay with a large part of his Gemeinde in 1927. In 1931 Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970) was elected Aeltester and served until 1961.

KG Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) came to Manitoba in 1875 and settled in Grünfeld. Toews threw himself into the immense task of completing the organization of schools, Waisenamt, Brandordnung, etc. His letter books and journals document a busy schedule of church meetings, correspondence, and pastoral leadership, not to mention the demands of his own growing family.

Toews was also a man with a growing burden and concern for his congregation. In 1881 Toews and his uncle Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) travelled to Kansas to investigate the church of Johannes Holdeman (1832-1900), an American Evangelist originally from Ohio. The men returned with diametrically opposing views. Senior minister Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Grünfeld, became the leading opponent of any union with Holdeman.

But Toews was persuaded that his church was fatally flawed. In 1882 he resigned his office as Aeltester to be rebaptised by Holdeman. Eventually one-half of the KG in Rosenort and the East Reserve followed their leader. The Holdeman Mennonite denomination was initially quite open to assimilation and the adoption of Revivalist religious culture and language.



*Peter P. Toews (1841-1922). Artistic rendering from an old photograph. Pres., No. 5, page 2.*

The KG was shattered, but reorganized and continued. In 1882 Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen from Nebraska, came to conduct ministerial elections. In January of 1883 Friesen returned and Jakob M. Kroeker (1836-1913) was elected as Aeltester of the Manitoba KG including the Scratching River congregation as well as the East Reserve.

Kroeker was originally elected as a minister of the Heubodner Gemeinde in Russia and his election as Aeltester signalled a return to a more traditional KG church polity and personal piety. Kroeker served as Aeltester until 1895 when Abraham L. Dueck (1841-99), Grünfeld, was elected Aeltester for the East Reserve. Dueck was another man with unquestioned loyalty to traditional teachings. In 1901 his nephew Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), Steinbach, was elected Aeltester and served for the next 18 years.

The church dynamics on the East Reserve were further changed with the organization of a Brüderthaler congregation in Steinbach in 1897. The founders included the families of Cornelius T. Barkman, Johann Klassen, Heinrich Rempel and Benjamin Janz. The first minister was Abraham F. Friesen (1857-1935), from Jansen, Nebraska. The Brüderthaler, later known as the E.M.B. were articulated to a large degree by the religious culture and language of American Revivalism.

There were distinct cultural differences between Chortitzer and KG, the origins of which went back to the time of the first emigration from Prussia in 1788. The KG was unique being the only denomination in Russia in the 19th century to forbid smoking. Among the Chortitzer the humorous saying arose "that the Kleingemeinde smoked under the binder, but the Chortitzer smoked on top of the binder." The KG might be more pious in an ascetic sense, but the Chortitzer were more inclusive in their communitarian ethos.



*Gravestone of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz. The Chortitzer worship house built in 1897 stands in the background reflecting his vision of a community centered around Christian faith. Gerhard Wiebe was the Moses of the Bergthaler people leading them to their new home. Wiebe also deserves to be recognized as a father of Manitoba. He refused an offer of nobility and landed estates from the Russian Czar to lead his people to Manitoba. Had he not been resolute in his faith the Mennonite migration to Manitoba would not have come to pass. Photo courtesy of Orlando Hiebert, Tourond/Pres., No. 6, page 5.*

# Government and Social Institutions

In Imperial Russia Mennonites were allowed almost complete autonomy in governing their own affairs. Their system of government was comparable to a state within a state, sometimes referred to as the "Mennonite Commonwealth".

The Mennonites arrived in Manitoba complete with social and cultural institutions such as schools, a mutual fire insurance system, a widows and orphans directorate, and even a system of regional government.

In Russia each village was governed by a



Gerhard Kliewer (1836-96), Schantzenberg, served as the first Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover from 1880 to 1883. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 163/Pres., No. 11, page 92.



Jakob F. Peters (1845-1922) and his wife Maria Buhr (1849-1919), Vollwerk (Mitchell). Jakob F. Peters served as Reeve from 1894 to 1896. He was the son of Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-84), instrumental in leading the Bergthaler people to Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett, Landmark/Pres., No. 11, page 68.



Johann S. Rempel (1853-1929) family 1898, Chortitz. Johann S. Rempel served as Secretary-Treasurer for the R. M. of Hanover from 1902 to 1904 and again from 1913 to 1916. The Rempel children l. to r; rear: Johann, Maria, Margaretha, Katharina. Front: Mrs. Margaretha Rempel, Helena, Elisabeth, Johann S. Rempel, Cornelius and Peter. Photo courtesy of Rev. Cornie Rempel, Randolph/Pres., No. 7, page 31.



Cornelius T. Friesen Family 1911, Osterwick. Cornelius T. Friesen (1860-1922) was elected as manager of the Chortitz Waisenamt in 1905 and served in this office until his death in 1922. His first wife died in 1907 and in 1909 he married Gertrude Dueck, widow of Heinrich D. Wiebe, son of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900). L. to r.: back row, Gertruda D. Wiebe, Elisabeth D. Wiebe, Peter D. Wiebe, Martin C. Friesen and Heinrich C. Friesen; Middle row: Johann D. Wiebe, Jakob D. Wiebe and Jakob C. Friesen (still living today in Colony Bergthal, Paraguay); Front row: Helena D. Wiebe, Mrs. Gertrude Dyck Wiebe Friesen, Abram D. Wiebe, Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen and David C. Friesen. Son Martin C. Friesen married his step-sister Elisabeth Wiebe on July 18, 1911 which was the occasion for this photograph of the Wiebe and Friesen families. Martin C. Friesen later became the father of the Menno Colony, Paraguay. Photo courtesy of Mrs. David C. Friesen/Katherine Wiebe/Pres., No. 11, page 35.



Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910) and Margaretha Penner Schroeder (1839-1926) in 1888 Ebenfeld. Children l. to r. Peter (1879-1900), Abram, Anna, Mrs. Peter Dueck, George and Aron. Gerhard Schroeder served as Reeve from 1901 to 1907. Photo courtesy of Peter N. Friesen, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, page 49.

council elected by the property owners. All the villages in a colony elected a regional mayor or "Oberschulz" and a "Beisitzer" or deputy mayor. These officials were responsible for regional government, known as the Gebietsamt, somewhat like a Canadian Municipality but with much wider powers.

Jakob Peters (1813-84) was the Oberschulz of the Bergthal Colony and had been very active in the emigration, serving as one of the delegates in 1873. When he arrived in Manitoba in 1876 he continued as Oberschulz of the East Reserve.

The two most important projects undertaken by the Gebietsamt were the Winnipeg road and the Otterburne drain. The following article appeared in the Manitoba Free Press on July 1, 1878: "A BIG JOB. The Mennonites have recently completed one great work, having constructed a road through the St. Norbert swamp (now Grande Point area), eight miles in length, to their own reserve. The total length of the road is sixteen miles, and through the swamp it is

graded four feet high, and broad enough for two teams to pass easily. The road is solidly built, with timber and brush foundation, and 380 teams and 500 men were engaged for six days on it--their only remuneration being the securing of a good outlet to market."

In 1880 the Manitoba Municipal Act was passed and the Rural Municipality of Hanover was formed, named after the British royal family, the House of Hanover. Since many of the Mennonites had genetic roots in Hanover and Lower Saxony, Germany, and Friesland in Holland, the name was considered appropriate.

The R. M. of Hanover now took over the functions of the Gebietsamt. The first Reeve was Gerhard Kliewer (1836-96), Schantzenfeld, and the first Secretary was Peter Klippenstein (1819-85), Chortitz.

The Mennonites also brought with them the *Brandordnung*, a mutual fire insurance system, and the *Waisenamt*, a directorate governing estates and the financial affairs of orphans and

widows. The Waisenamt also functioned as a primitive form of credit union investing their money and making loans to others in the community. The Waisenamt and Brandordnung had roots in 17th century Prussia.

The first manager of the Bergthaler Brandordnung in Manitoba was Jakob Stoesz (1834-92), Blumstein, and the first manager of the Waisenamt was Cornelius B. Friesen (1833-1909), Osterwick. The first manager of the KG Brandordnung was Peter W. Toews (1831-1922), Blumenort, and the first manager of the Waisenamt was Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), Rosenfeld.



Johann F. Braun (1857-1925) and Helena Braun, Grünthal, served as Reeve from 1907 to 1916 and again from 1919 to 1921. Courtesy of Pres., No. 8, Part One, page 44.



Peter K. Toews (1865-1936) and Mrs. Toews (nee Anna Sawatzky), farmed in Bergthal, three miles north of Mitchell. Peter's father (Peter Toews, 1839-1914) served as the Reeve of the R. M. of Hanover for 15 years between 1883 and 1900, being the second longest serving Reeve. The Toews family was one of several Chortitzer families adopting Bernardo's orphan boys. Photo courtesy of grandson Jakob Toews/Pres., No. 10, Part One. page 69.



# Lord Dufferin's Visit, 1877

One of the most significant events of the early settlement period in the East Reserve was the vice-regal visit of Lord Dufferin in 1877, only four years after its founding. Excitement and anticipation respecting the visit had been mounting for some time. August 21 was declared a holiday.

Frederick Tempel Blackwood (1826-1902) was appointed Governor-General of Canada in 1872. The Governor and his family left Ottawa on July 31. After other official duties, they started on their tour of the East Reserve on August 20. The entourage included the Governor-General, Lady Dufferin, their 12 year-old daughter Nellie, Provincial Lieutenant Governor Morris, The Honourable James McKay MLA, a 320 pound Metis, and a number of guides and drivers.

They followed the Winnipeg Road which entered the East Reserve at point near Kronsthal where an arch of evergreens had been erected bearing the inscription, "Mennoniten Reserve".

Near the arch the Vice-regal party was met by four young mounted Mennonites who rode before the caravan as an honour guard. The riders had watched with keen anticipation as they finally sighted Lord Dufferin's party approaching. They challenged members of the entourage to various short races. They were horrified later to discover that one of the riders was the Governor-General himself.

At 12:30 a.m. the entourage arrived at the reception centre on a small ridge near Eigenhof, between the present-day Chortitz (Randolph) and Vollwerk (Mitchell). Ten villages could be seen from this vantage point. An arch made of evergreen branches bore the word "Willkommen" in red letters on a white background. An elegant arbour or shaded platform, constructed of evergreen branches, was deco-



Frederick Temple Blackwood, Lord Dufferin (1826-1902), courtesy of Wm. Schroeder, Bergthal Mennonites, page 96.



The Countess of Dufferin, née Harriot Hamilton (1839-1936). (Photo courtesy Manitoba Archives.)

rated with garlands of flowers. and bunches of corn mixed with poppies.

Three attractive young Mennonite girls with laced handkerchiefs on their heads served lemonade to the guests. In front of the arbour stood some 1000 Mennonites, the men on one side displaying specimens of wheat, flax and corn, and the women on the other side, with samples of their garden produce.

After the guests were seated, the audience

formed a large circle around them. The Oberschulz Jacob Peters read an official welcome signed by both Bishops Wiebe, for the Bergthaler, and Toews for the Kleine Gemeinde, as well as senior ministers and community leaders. The address was translated by William Hespeler, the government immigration agent.

The Governor-General replied with a moving speech, closing with the fateful words, "...beneath the flag whose folds now wave above us, you will find protection, peace, civil and religious liberty, constitutional freedom and equal laws."

The students of Grünfeld (Kleefeld) teacher Peter L. Dueck then sang a song especially written for the occasion by Aeltester Peter P. Toews. Several young girls presented bouquets to the four ladies in the party.

While the Mennonite leaders retired with Lord Dufferin to his tent to enjoy tea around the camp fire, Lady Dufferin interacted casually with some of the Mennonite women. Lord Dufferin's daughter Nellie played with some adorable little babies. Along the way to the Governor-General's tent, the villagers invited the visitors into their homes. Young Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941), later flour mill owner in Steinbach, had the privilege of carrying the Governor-General's riding boots to his tent.

In a speech in Winnipeg on September 29, 1877, the Governor-General summarized his impressions of what he had seen on the East Reserve: "...I passed village after village, homestead after homestead furnished with all the conveniences and incidents of European comfort and a scientific agriculture; while on the other side of the road were cornfields ready for harvest, and pastures populous with herds of cattle stretching away to the horizon. Even on this continent, the particular theatre of rapid change and progress, there has nowhere, I imagine, taken place so marvellous a transformation."



Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941) and wife Helena Penner (1861-1917). Johann I. Penner was privileged to carry the Governor-General's riding boots to his tent. Photo courtesy of K. J. B. Reimer, "Historical sketches," in Steinbach Post, May 18, 1965, page 1/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 49. Johann I. Friesen later became the manager and shareholder of Steinbach Flour Mills. His grandson Frank F. Reimer was the founder of "Reimer Express".

# Agriculture

In sociological terms the situation of the Mennonites in Russia was somewhat unique as they were neither peasants nor landed gentry. By the 17th and 18th centuries there were free holding farmers (*Landwirthen*) in Prussia, who produced commodities for the commercial market. Commodity production within this context implied a household production unit as opposed to a strictly commercial enterprise or mere subsistence level farming.

Such a household economy was “highly self-sufficient in labour and consumption, but one that must produce for the market place in order to secure the means to reproduce its mode of production”: Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, pages 17-18. Since the Mennonites had been invited to settle in Manitoba in order to establish commercial farming on the prairies, the concept of farm commercialization and the development of the household economy is important to understanding their agricultural paradigm.

In 1830 the opening of the Dardenelles by Turkey gave the Mennonite colonists settled along the northern perimeter of the Black Sea easy access to world wheat markets. They slowly restructured for this cash wheat growing economy and the area now known as the eastern Ukraine became a sophisticated grain farming region, the “bread basket of Europe”.

When the Mennonites came to Manitoba they had to downgrade their farming methods to a subsistence level operation. Instead of wheat production, they had to restructure their farming strategies to subsistence farming methods focused on a mixture of dairy, beef, hogs, poultry, and market gardening. The produce was marketed in nearby Winnipeg which in a few short years had become a booming city.

Imperial Russia had emancipated its serfs in 1861 resulting in a seemingly inexhaustible labour supply, available to the Mennonite farmers. In a primitive frontier territory such as Manitoba labour was practically unavailable; any man worth his salt could take out his own homestead and farm for himself.

The settlers responded by mechanizing to a much greater degree than their expatriates had back in Russia. Most farmers started out by

purchasing a team of oxen which were durable and hardy in the primitive conditions. By 1883 they had made the transition to horses for their draught power. It was said “A good horse is a blessing of God.”

The first mowers came into use in 1878 but the sheaves still had to be bound by hand. One of these was owned by former estate owner Johann Warkentin (1817-86), Blumenhof. By 1882 the true self-binder using twine was available.

Most villages had a threshing outfit or two, originally driven by a horse powered motor. Abraham S. Friesen, Steinbach, purchased the first upright steam engine in the East Reserve in 1877. In 1878, Wilhelm Vogt, in company with others, purchased a steam engine and threshing machine in Chortitz. In the same year, Peter W. Toews and son in Blumenort purchased a

Watrous steam engine and threshing machine.

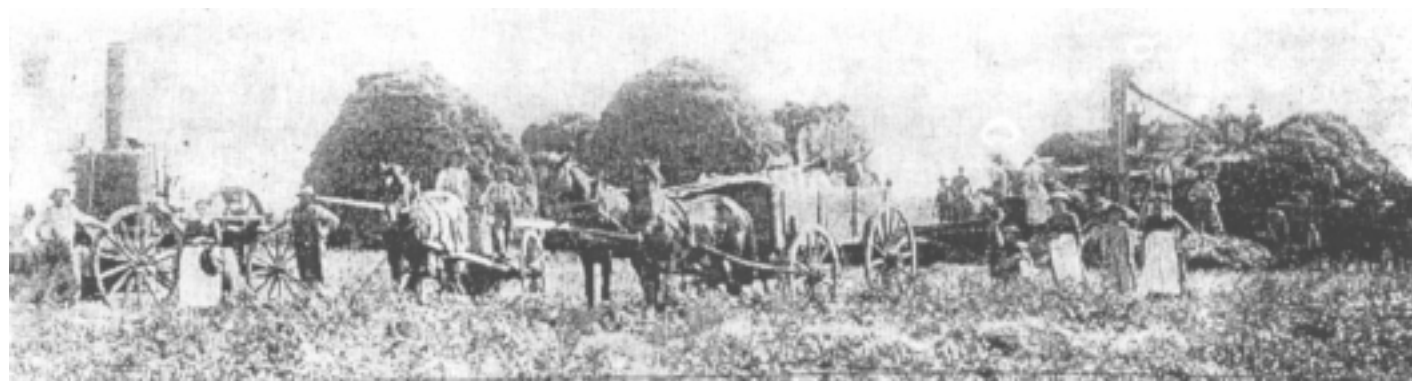
According to municipal assessment records, by 1883 most farmers in the region owned a grass mower, a steel plow, harrows, a fanning mill, hay rake, several wagons and sleighs.

By 1889 Abraham S. Friesen in Steinbach had already purchased the first self-propelled steam engine and over the next decade these steel monsters became a common sight in the East Reserve.

By 1890 commercial grain production had become viable in the East Reserve and farms with 50 and 60 acres in cultivation were common. This was followed by increases in grain prices from \$0.35 per bushel wheat to \$0.66 per bushel by the turn of the century. By 1898 acreages had doubled and farms with 100 acres or more in cultivation were not uncommon.



A “Prips Kjaetle” an upright steam engine mounted on a wagon which could be moved from village to village. These units were found in the East Reserve by 1878. This “Prips Kjaetle” owned by Cornelius F. Broesky, Schönenberg, was an antique by the time this photograph was taken. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 53.



A threshing scene in the village of Steinbach in 1897. It is C. B. Loewen’s outfit powered by a “Prips Kjaetle”. Here the reader can see the women band cutters on the machine platform and the men building the straw-stack. Mr. C. B. Loewen is in front of the steamer, sons C. T. and Isaac are on the water cart. The ladies standing against the threshing machine are Mrs. Loewen and daughters. Photo and caption courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, “Historical Sketches.” Very likely the women have just finished bringing faspas to the field for the working hands. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 47.





*Plett and Reimer outfit threshing at Jakob P. Penners' in Greenland, 1908. The steam engine is a 15/30 Watrus. Peter P. Reimer, co-owner and later KG Aeltester is standing on the engine, fireman John P. Reimer, is standing behind him. In 1915 Plett and Reimer acquired a second steam engine, a Case 25/75 and operated with two machines for three years. Photo courtesy of Steinbach Post/Blumenort, page 145.*



*Displaying pioneer winter garb. Peter A Plett in front of Abram L. Plett's winter kitchen and well house, circa, 1920. Photo courtesy Peter A. Plett.*



*George W. Friesen with three oxen and a shoe drill, seeding in the Greenland area 1911. Oxen were the most common form of draught power and transportation during 1874 and 1875. Oxen were more dependable in the primitive Manitoba environment. The Mennonite loved good horses and by 1881 most farmers had completed the transition to horses. Photo courtesy of D. F. Penner, Landmark/Reflections, page 184.*



*John C. Reimer demonstrates an antique reel-type mower of the type probably used in the early 1880s. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 52.*





1928 Peter W. "Schmet" Toews (1866-1935) and third wife Mary, nee Koehn, at their home in Swalwell, Alberta. With them is daughter Anna, Mrs. Norman Goosen, now 72 years old and living in Linden, Alberta. Part of the genius of agriculture in the East Reserve was the ability of so many individuals to move back and forth between business and farming. "Schmet" Toews was one of these. He started as a blacksmith in Steinbach in 1892, soon had a half section of land in Friedensfeld and a dairy farm. For many years he brought in hundreds of wild broncos to Steinbach, broke them and sold them to local farmers. After a short, but successful time in Steinbach he sold out his various enterprises and moved to Swalwell, Alberta - photo courtesy of Harry Toews, Winnipeg, Manitoba.



A family visiting Jakob L. Pletts in Blumenhof by horse and cutter. Photo courtesy of Simon Isaac, Steinbach/Blumenort, page 78.



Jacob Enns and his horses in 1911 Blumengard. Rev. Heinrich Friesen is seated with his grandchildren Abe and Agatha Enns in his lap. Photo courtesy of Irene Kroeker, Historical Sketches, page 81.



Plowing at the widow Katharina Wohlgemuth (1854-1944) NW26-7-6E, with four horse team, circa 1925. To the right is the telephone line from Steinbach to Blumenort. Photo courtesy of Isaac W. Wohlgemuth. Blumenort/Plett Picture Book, page 77.

# Business and Commerce



*Erdmann Penner (1826-1907) BGB B176 played an important role in the early development of the East Reserve. He was responsible for bringing over the gold which the Bergthaler had received for the sale of their properties in Imperial Russia. He started the first store at Tannenau in 1876 and moved it to Niverville a few years later. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 192.*

The original East Reserve was a unit of political, social and economic strength centered in the Chortitz, Schönfeld, Tannenau triangle. Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) head of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Gemeinde, lived in Chortitz, and Oberschulz Jakob Peters, his counterpart in the civil administration of the settlement lived two miles east in Vollwerk. Cornelius B. Friesen, head of the powerful Waisenamt lived four miles west in Osterwick.

In 1876 the first real crop was harvested by the settlers resulting in a need for milling facilities. The same fall the first mill was built in Schönwiese, a mile northwest of Chortitz. It was a small steam driven mill owned by Peter Wiens and Johann Braun. A windmill was also built in 1876 in Grünfeld (later Kleefeld) by former delegate Cornelius P. Toews. In 1877 two windmills were moved from the Red River to the East Reserve. One of the windmills was located at Tannenau and owned by Johann Janzen, and the other at Eigenhof, owned by Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910), later the Municipal Reeve. In the spring of 1877 Abraham S. Friesen also started construction of the Dutch-style windmill in Steinbach.

Several stores were opened in the East Reserve in 1876 (*60 Jarhige Jubiligium*, pages 23 and 28). These stores seem to have been involved in the Bergthaler church program to distribute potatoes and flour to the needy.

In 1876 Erdmann Penner (1826-1907), Bergthaler business tycoon, opened his store in the East Reserve in Tannenau. In Schönfeld, four miles south of Chortitz, the well-to-do Gröning family operated a store for many years. In Hochfeld it was the Johann Krause family that operated a store. According to Bergthaler insurance records 1874-83, the following all had substantial merchandise insured: Jakob Sawtzki, Bergfeld, Johann Krause, Hochfeld, Abraham Groening, Schantzenberg, cancelled 1883, Peter Lepky, Schönhorst cancelled 1881, Johann Neufeld Sr., Schönthal, and Erdmann Penner, Tannenau, insured and later moved to Niverville.



*Western Canada's first grain elevator built in Niverville in 1879 by William Hespeler. The structure was constructed of timbers brought by river boat from Moorhead, Minnesota. The 25,000 bushel elevator was situated a few hundred feet from Kaiser Street, now Main Street. The elevator served Niverville for 40 years. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 351.*

This early promise of an East Reserve capital developing in the "Schönfeld, Chortitz, Tannenau, triangle" was frustrated by the secondary emigration of half of the Bergthalers to the West Reserve. The movement started as early in 1878 and ended in 1881. It included younger aggressive Bergthaler entrepreneurs such as Erdmann Penner who relocated the headquarters of his retail and grain trading empire to Gretna.

The result was a business vacuum in the East Reserve as some villages such as Tannenau, were almost totally vacated. It was also a window of opportunity soon filled by a cadre of aggressive entrepreneurs in Steinbach which had already emerged as the central village of the KG. The KG had been only a small minority in the Molotschna and was quite comfortable in dealing with other Mennonites and various cultural groups such as the Anglo-Saxons and French.

Although poorly situated in the southeastern periphery of the settled portion of



*Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916), outstanding Steinbach entrepreneur. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 82.*

the East Reserve, Steinbach was central to the other two KG church districts of Grünfeld (Kleefeld) and Blumenort, providing an initial customer base. Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) started his retail store in 1877. Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917) built the first steam flour mill in 1880 and Abraham S. Friesen, started a host of enterprises, including a saw mill (1876) and Dutch wind mill in 1878.

In 1878 a railway connecting St. Paul, Minnesota and Winnipeg, was completed along the west boundary of the East Reserve. Niverville was laid out by William Hespeler as a railway town and was intended to be a service centre for the entire East Reserve. In 1879 Hespeler also built the first grain elevator in Western Canada to handle the local grain production. Because Niverville was separated by sloughs from much of the East Reserve, Hespeler's vision did not become a reality. But Niverville did become a service centre for Township 7, Range 4E providing a valuable trade and communication outlet.

In the early 1890s a feedmill was built in Grünthal by Johann F. Braun (1857-1925) and in 1911 this was replaced with a fully modern 50 barrel mill.

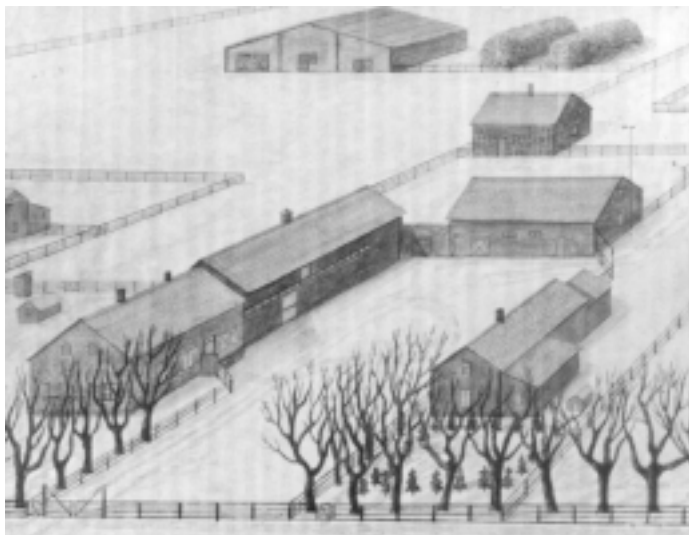
By 1889 a shift had begun from butter to cheese production when Klaas W. Reimer (1861-1944), son of merchant Klaas R., built the first cheese factory in Steinbach, followed by similar enterprises in Blumenort and Grünfeld (Kleefeld). By 1900 eight cheese factories were in production in the East Reserve, paying up to a third more than they received for butter with half the work. The cheese factories were shut down during World War One, when the price of fluid milk in the Winnipeg market rose so as to make them uneconomical.

By 1882 Steinbach had a population of 28 families, a total of 128 souls.

In 1886 Heinrich W. Reimer (1864-1941) built a new store in Steinbach, competing with his father Klaas R. Reimer. After a major addition in 1914, the H. W. Reimer store was the largest of its kind in rural Manitoba.

Steinbach was a competitive but hospitable environment for business and during the 1880s local entrepreneurs were joined by others including farmer Cornelius Loewen (1827-93), blacksmith Peter W. Toews (1867-1933), book seller Johann W. Dueck (1865-1932), former delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908) from Grünfeld (Kleefeld), farmer Abram P. "Brandt" Reimer (1862-1933), flour mill accountant Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941) and his brother machinery dealer Abraham I. Friesen (1862-1938) from Blumenort.

By 1900 Steinbach had established itself as the leading service and business centre of the East Reserve.



*The Klaas R. Reimer farmyard where Steinbach Place and the Steinbach Credit Union Ltd are situated today. It shows the original housebarn built in 1875 as well as the larger more substantial housebarn, the barn for which was built in 1877 and the house in 1881. The large warehouse in the back was added in 1884. The warehouse was insured for \$2500. The newer housebarn stood until 1936 when it was destroyed by fire. Sketch by son Bernhard W. Reimer (1879-1934). Courtesy of Royden K. Loewen, Historical Sketches, page 307/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 7.*



*The Steinbach windmill built in 1877 by Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916). It was constructed on his yard next to where Friesen Machine now stands on Friesen Avenue. It was sold in 1879 and moved to Rosenort. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 54. The windmill built at the Steinbach Village Museum in 1977 was modeled on the A. S. Friesen windmill.*



*Steinbach's second flour mill built in 1892 and destroyed by fire on October 18, 1920. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 55/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 43. There is no known photograph of the first mill built by Peter K. Barkman in 1880.*



# Education

The Mennonites brought with them a tradition of private school education considered essential to the practice of their religious faith. In

1873 they negotiated a special charter with the Dominion Government which included the right or freedom of educate their own children. The

function of education for the Mennonites was the inculcation of Christian doctrine and values using the Bible, catechism, and Fibel (a primary reader), as basic text material.

Initially each village made its own arrangements for school facilities and staff. Each school was under the direct control of the village assembly or *Schultebut*. The villagers made the initial decisions as to the school facilities, the hiring of the teacher and remuneration. Many villages were fortunate to have someone who had already served as a teacher in the "old" country. In Blumenort, Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), an intelligent and articulate man, became the first teacher in the fall of 1874. He was a career teacher and served in this capacity for twenty-five years. The first woman teacher was Maria Friesen (1844-1925), later Mrs. Radinzel, who had already taught in Russia.

In other villages someone took on the position for the first winter on the basis that a permanent teacher would be available by the following year. In Steinbach, the minister Jakob Barkman and (son-in-law) merchant Klaas R. Reimer undertook to teach the children alternatively in their semlins, naturally without remuneration of any kind. The first school building, 14 feet by 20 feet, with an attached residence, 12 feet by 14 feet, was built in Steinbach in 1875. The first teacher in 1875 to 1876 was Abraham T. Friesen (1852-1909), nephew of Elder Peter P. Toews.

Historian John C. Reimer has offered the following description: "The first teacher in Bergfeld was Heinrich Harder whose wages consisted solely of firewood for his own use. The second teacher Jakob Hiebert, possibly 1875-1876, had attended a secondary school in Russia and received . . . \$6.00 per month cash and each of the village farmers plowed one acre for



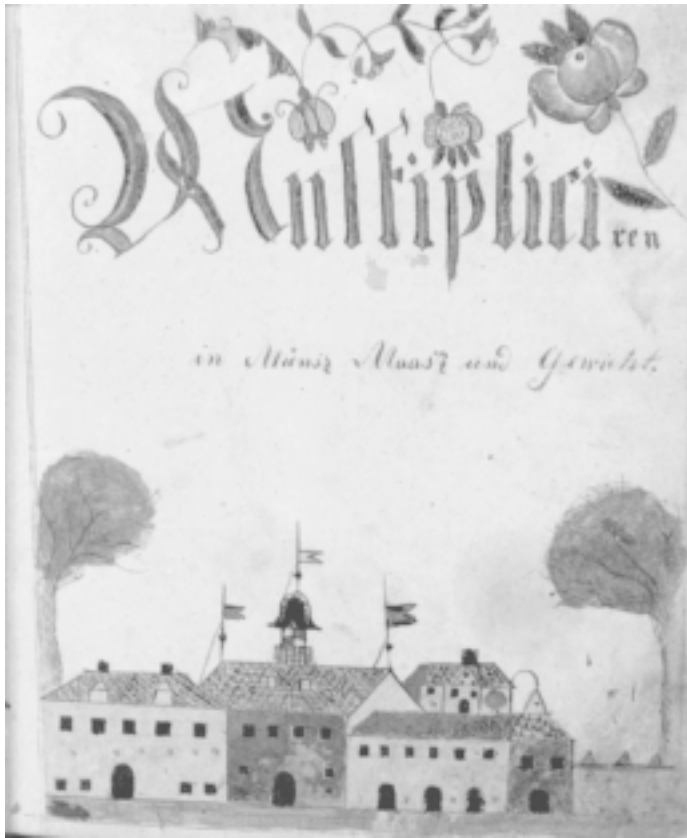
1904 Abraham T. Friesen (1854-1908) and Cornelius Harms Friesen (1853-1938) with daughter Lena. Abraham T. Friesen served as the first school teacher for Steinbach in 1875-76. He was the great-uncle of City of Steinbach Councillor H. K. Friesen. Photo courtesy of John Braun, Calgary/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 26.



Title page of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82) *Rechenbuch*. Doerksen served as a teacher in Fischau and compiled his own "Rechnenbuch" starting in 1844 at age 19 and completed the final chapters in 1849. "The *Rechnenbuch* is not simply a mathematics text but a fine example of a man's artistic and creative genius. Its covers are detailed with multi-hued Fraktur and various mathematical theories are expressed in verse form. Title pages/section headings are detailed with intricate calligraphy and art work." The arithmetic book was divided into sections as follows: Pages 1-28 Math theory and tables, pages 29-34 addition, pages 35-40 subtraction, etc. Courtesy of Garth Doerksen, Winkler/Pres., No. 6, page 28.



Dietrich S. Friesen (1849-1901), the first teacher in Grünfeld (Kleeefeld) in 1874-75. He was born in Ohrloff, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 25.



Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904) was a school teacher in the village of Bergthal, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia. In 1846, when he was only 15-years-of-age, he commenced compiling his "Rechenbuch" which he completed in 1849. At the beginning of each section he prepared a title page illustrated with some of the finest Fraktur art extant. This above sample is the title page for the "Multiplication Section" showing a walled city known as a "Kremlin". Could it possibly be the nearby seaport of Mariupol? In 1875 Peter Klippenstein came to Manitoba and settled in Bergthal, north of Mitchell. In 1881 the family moved to Neu-Bergthal near Altona. See Jake Peters, *Mennonite Private Schools*, pages 17-18. The "Rechenbuch" is presently in the possession of great-grandson Rev. Edwin Klippenstein, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Abraham Rempel. *Arithmetic Book*. Bergthal, Russia, 1858. Hand-drawn, lettered, and colored; 8½" X 6¾". Courtesy Mrs. A. Loewen/E. Abrahams *Frakturemalen*, page 122.

him and gave him one and one-half bags of oats and a similar amount of barley." David Stoesz, Bergthal, who later replaced Gerhard Wiebe as Aeltester, reported on October 28, 1875, that he and his wife accompanied by Bernhard Klippenstein on another sleigh, drove on a sleigh to pick up the teacher Heinrich Wiens [b. 1815] and his family."

Both the KG and, to an extent, the Bergthaler, provided ongoing training to their teachers with a system of mutual examinations and teachers conferences. The educational systems of both the Bergthaler and KG were under the direct authority of the Bishop and ministerial council.

By 1876 the school system in the East Reserve was well established with 35 schools serving a population of 4000. In 1879 the Provincial Government offered them some financial assistance but required a certification of teachers by a board consisting of Wm. Hespeler and Abram P. Isaac, Schönau, and Jakob Friesen, Tannenau, representing the KG and Bergthaler, respectively. The 35 Mennonite schools constituted one-third of the Protestant schools operating in Manitoba. The 632 Mennonite students were

17.5 per cent of the 3,614 total in the Province.

The registration requirements of the Department of Education, however, were seen by the Bergthaler (Chortitzer) as an attempt to diminish the integrity of their religious and educational freedoms--based on similar attempts made by Russian authorities a decade earlier. As a result the Chortitzer de-registered their schools.

The KG communities of Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Steinbach, Blumenort and Rosenort, were amenable to these measures and continued with district schools. The different response of the KG is explained by the fact that they came from the Molotschna Colony where their teachers and students had participated fully in a school system shared by up to 10 different Gemeinden.



Abraham Rempel (1845- ) and Helen Kehler (1850- ). Rempel was a teacher in the Bergthal Colony in Russia. In 1875 the family came to Manitoba and settled in Schönwiese, East Reserve. In 1880 they were the first family to settle in the new village of Altona in the West Reserve. Photo courtesy of great-grandson L. Klippenstein/Epp, *Altona*, page 19.

# The Literary Tradition

The conservative Mennonites had a strong literary tradition going back to the Reformation. Print culture was only the most visible part of a much wider and more systemic regime of reading and writing articulated by the requirement that all adherents be capable of understanding and interpreting the Bible for themselves.

An outpouring of such writing occurred during the time of persecution in the Low Countries during the 16th century, often by martyrs as they languished in jails awaiting torture and execution. Many of these writings were gathered and published by Thielmann van Braht in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a significant work in the canon of Mennonite devotional literature. The *Martyrs' Mirror*, in turn, became a model for the reading and writing culture which it represented. Recent scholarship has underscored the fact that some of the important Anabaptist writing in this period was by women.

The writing and reading culture was particularly evident among the leadership of conservative Mennonites such as Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) of the Bergthaler and Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) of the KG. The 393 pages of letters received and written by Toews in 1874-75 "tell of a leader at the nerve centre of the emigration." The book by Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History*, (Chortitz, 1900), "illustrates the very cen-

tral role of the church to put the emigration into perspective."

It was common for traditional Mennonites to maintain journals, although relatively few are extant. There were different kinds of journals: the "daybook", a daily log of events, weather and activities; "account book", a record of farm sales, purchases, wages and yields; "family book" (Familienbuch), a genealogy usually going back to Prussia; and, the historical anthology, a collection of historical writings, serving as a private reference library at a time when the ownership of a Bible and a few books was an achievement.

Journals had an essential function among freeholding middle-class farmers. They provided the only available record of past crops, seeding or frost dates and other events, articulating the life cycle of 19th century agrarian life.

The "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau, later Grünfeld, for example, was the most fully developed example of the genre. It included poems and biographies of venerable Prussian leaders, contemporary writings, a number of Reimer's own writings, and a selection of poetry.

The diaries of Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer, Steinbach, Borosenko, and later Blumenort, Manitoba, are among the most significant records of social and cultural life among landowning Russian Mennonites in the 19th century. Reimer had an amazing ear for the nuances of daily life, providing in the process a detailed record of the activities of his vivacious wife, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, midwife, nurse and matriarch, making her the most extensively described woman of her community.

The journal of Cornelius Loewen provided an example of an account book, as his wife, nee Helena Bartel (1833-76), "recorded the weekly butter sales in her neat handwriting, whilst her husband documented the labourers and maids he hired, the goods and services he purchased, and the loans he arranged and payments made".

Responsibility for journal keeping was assumed by women within decades of the 1874 migration to North America, for reasons not yet fully understood. The earliest extant journal of a KG woman was that of Margaretha Plett Krocker (1842-1920), Steinbach, Manitoba, covering the years 1892 to 1908, an extremely well written and valuable record. Maria Koop Plett (1868-1918), Blumenhof, sister-in-law to Margaretha,



Judit Klassen Neufeld (1869-1952) her husband Peter B. Neufeld and family: l. to r. rear: Anna, Maria and Susanna; middle: Jakob and John; seated: Judit Klassen Neufeld and Peter B. Neufeld, with son Henry standing between them and son Abe in front. Photo courtesy of Maria Neufeld, Niverville, Manitoba.

*O großer Gott du,  
 mach dein Kind geliebter Vater,  
 heute am 1. Jan. 1844.  
 bleibe für mich in deiner Hand,  
 in deiner Hand die mich erzieht,  
 und alle Stunden in deiner Hand  
 führen mich zu dir, mein Gott,  
 Amen für mich voll erfüllend.*

*Abraham*

*Winnipeg am neuen Jahr*  
 1844

Ten-year-old Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1906). Rosenort. Moltschna, started a "Prayer Book", a compilation of prayers for various occasions. The words of this prayer recorded for New Year's 1844 are: "O great God Thou, hear your child's prayer this day." (page 14) The prayerbook illustrates the extent to which his parents Ohm Klaas and Karolina Friesen went to inculcate Christian values in their children. Courtesy of MLA, North Newton, Kansas.

was another KG woman who maintained a diary covering the years 1906 until her death in 1918. Another important journal by Anna Doerksen Barkman (1854-1937), covered the emigration from Russia as well as the pioneer years.

Among the Bergthaler/Chortitzer the known journals of Aeltester David Stoesz (1842-1903), Bergthal and Rev. Heinrich Friesen (1842-1921), Hochfeld, have been published. Other journals by Rev. Heinrich Doerksen, Schönthal (1855-1933), Municipal Secretary Johann S. Rempel (1853-1929), Chortitz, teacher Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), Alt-Bergfeld, Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938), Chortitz/Niverville, and Waisenman Cornelius T. Friesen (1860-1929), Osterwick, are well known and primary sources of great significance.

Maria Stoesz Klassen (1823-97), Ebenfeld, a sister to Aeltester David Stoesz, kept the earliest known journal among East Reserve women. Her daughter Judit Klassen Neufeld (1869-1952) followed in her footsteps, maintaining a journal for many years, her first known diary commencing in 1911 and continuing through to 1948.

Historian Royden Loewen has written, "...we study these diaries with the knowledge that many other farm immigrant groups did not keep diaries. Social historians for other groups have often expressed envy to me that we as Mennonites have the documents of the everyday." Loewen has concluded the following: "The diaries are not personally intense, but they are tributes to the strength of community ties and kinship links....[and] reflect[ed] their authors' thinking as they chose the things to record and sought a sense of order in a frequently difficult time of life."



# Correspondence

One of the most vivid sources of information of the pioneer period in the East Reserve are the letters exchanged among friends and relatives in the various Mennonite settlements in Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, Russia, and later Saskatchewan and Alberta.

In a letter of December 7, 1874, Anna Klassen Goossen, Grünfeld, young widow of KG minister Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72), wrote to members of her family still in Russia. The purpose of her letter was to ask for information about several of her children who had been placed with foster parents and remained in Russia an additional year. One can almost feel the pain in her heart when she asks, "is my dear Mariechen still alive? Is she well and healthy?"

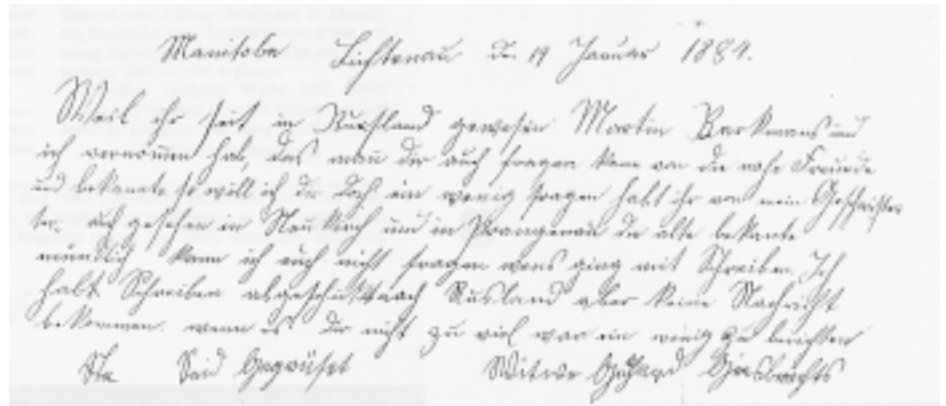
Some 50 letters were written by Maria Kornelsen Enns (1844-1913), Rosenthal, Jansen, Nebraska, to her parents and siblings living in Lichtenau, near Steinbach, Manitoba. In a letter of January 19, 1880, Maria described an interesting dream about her brother Gerhard E. Kornelsen, teacher in Steinbach, Manitoba:

"Last night, I dreamt that we had walked to Steinbach; but the village had undergone so many changes, that we hardly found our way to you Kornelsens; but we finally arrived. Wm. Giesbrecht went in just ahead of me, and I asked him if you, my dear brother, still lived? He said, 'Yes, now still yes'. When I came in, you lay in an American style bed and were covered with a white sheet. The dear sister-in-law sat by the bed; but you were hardly recognizable. You appeared so distressed and pitiful; and on your lap, you had little Aganetha, who had already grown much. The dear sister Friesen sat at the bed, head in her lap weeping profusely, nor did she look up. I pushed my way forward to the bed and asked you, beloved brother, if you were very sick. Then you spoke with a loud voice, yet subdued, saying, 'Yes, I shall die soon, which I am glad to do, but I cannot yet.' At this, I awoke, and the tears ran down my cheeks. I could scarcely say a word": *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 84-92.

The dream speaks of the pain of separation from siblings and friends which frequently resulted from the emigration and provides a poignant example of letters by women pioneers.

The letter correspondence of Agatha Thiessen Giesbrecht (1825-1912), Steinbach, illustrates the extensive kinship networks developed and maintained by matriarchs in the pioneer era.

The letters written from the East Reserve contained information about life and culture here. Some of the pioneers such as teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87) and his minister brothers Jakob (1839-93) and Abraham (1841-99), Grünfeld



1884 letter by Steinbach matriarch Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht (1825-1912) to Martin M. Barkman (1821-94), Jansen, Nebraska, inquiring about his recent trip to Russia. Aganetha maintained an extensive letter correspondence with relatives and friends in Russia, Nebraska and Kansas. Courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, Steinbach/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, oage 20.

(Kleefeld), had as many as a dozen letter books filled with copies of correspondence to Russia, Kansas, Nebraska, and elsewhere. The letter collection of Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94), Lichtenau, reveals that he carried on an active correspondence with former students, friends and relatives in Russia, Nebraska and Kansas.

grandfather Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935) who moved to Satanta, Kansas, in 1915. His siblings, fellow ministers, and other relatives, wrote many letters describing life back home which have been preserved and provide much information about the Hanover Steinbach area from 1916 to 1934.

Undoubtedly there were similar letter exchanges between the Chortitzer community in the East Reserve and sister Bergthaler settlements in Altona, Manitoba, Rosthern, Saskatchewan, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and Meno Colony, Paraguay, after 1926.

By 1878 a new variety of correspondence developed through newspapers such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, providing a medium whereby letter writers could communicate with an entire network of relatives and friends in America and/or Russia. Sources such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the *Steinbach Post* have not yet been fully tapped for the rich treasure of information they contain.

Historian Royden Loewen has compared the letters written by men and women from this period as follows: "Men did write more about church affairs than did women, and women wrote more about children. Both, however, reported regularly on farm activities, the weather and the state of crops and animals. Only in their perceptions of the family farm did men and women differ. Men tended to speak of size, number of acres put to wheat, size of dairy herd, and configuration of buildings; women spoke more about the yield and health

of crops. Men reported more often on cereal grains and cattle herds, while women described the gardens and nature of fall slaughters": *Family, Church and Market*, page 105.



Anna Barkman Doerksen (1854-1937) compiled a record of her life's experiences which were translated and published by grandson Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 1.

Unfortunately, we often have only the letters written to the East Reserve which described life in the community from which they were written. One collection of letters from the Hanover area which is extant is that of my great-

# Print Culture

The KG was the pioneer in print culture among Mennonites in Russia publishing as it did the first books. *Die Spiegel Der Geierigkeit* (Mirror of Greed) published in 1827, was a work by Dutch Aeltester Pieter Pieters, a perennial favourite. The KG published a total of seven titles in Russia, with another four published by land reformer Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-89).

The first publication in the East Reserve came in 1891 when former KG Aeltester Peter P. Toews, Grünfeld, published Heinrich Balzer's treatise "Faith and Reason" already referred earlier.

Subsequent publications included those of KG Aeltesten Abraham L. Friesen, Jansen, Nebraska, and Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), Blumenort. Chortitzer Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe wrote his memoirs *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung* (Causes and History of the Emigration) published by son Dietrich in 1900, undoubtedly the most important book in the East Reserve. A number of devotional booklets were published and also written by local community leaders such as Jakob R. Dueck, Peter B. Goossen, Rev. Wilhelm Giesbrecht, Klaas F. Penner, Heinrich Rempel and Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer.

The *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* published by former Grünfelder (Kleefeld) Peter P. Isaac in 1916, still stands as the benchmark for social and family history at its best. Other books such as *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten* (1922) by Klaas Peters, formerly Grünthal, and *Aufzeichnungen Meiner Jugendzeit* (1928), by Johann F. Toews, Steinbach, were biographical and reminiscent in nature.

Institutional publications were prominent in the field of "Brandordnung" and "Waisenamnt" with 13 titles listed. These were usually small booklets outlining the organization's by-laws.

Magazines and newspapers were important in the cultural life of any community. The East Reserve pioneers were already familiar with the *Her-*

*ald der Wahrheit* of Johann F. Funk, Elkhart, Indiana, before they left Russia. They were also closely connected with the *Mennonitische Rundschau* founded in 1879. In 1897 Peter P. Toews was co-founder and editor of the *Botschafter der Wahrheit*, the denominational paper of the Holdemans. The significance of this achievement is put into perspective by the fact that the first paper among Mennonites in Russia was not started until 1903.

In 1913 Jakob S. Friesen (1862-1931), another Holdeman, founded the *Steinbach Post* which eventually replaced the *Rundschau* as the vehicle of communications among the Manitoba Mennonites

or "Kanadier" as they came to be known, and their friends and relatives in Russia, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and elsewhere.

Songbooks played an important part in East Reserve print culture. In 1902 and 1918, respectively, Steinbach merchant Heinrich W. Reimer, put out the second and third American editions of the Heinrich Franz *Choralbuch*. The *Choralbuch* was a songbook with notes or numbered melodies widely used among Mennonites.

In 1906 Aeltester Peter P. Toews edited and published the *Unparteiische Leiederbuch*, a 430 page songbook for the Holdeman church. It included some 50 songs written by Toews and other church members in the East Reserve. It is fair to say that Peter P. Toews denominated the print culture of the East Reserve prior to 1920 just as Arnold Dyck would become the leading figure in the 1930s and 40s.

A total of 56 titles were published in the East Reserve prior to 1930. By comparison only 70 titles were published among all the Russia Mennonites during the same time period. If the 11 titles published by the KG during their sojourn in Russia are deleted and added to those published on the East Reserve, the comparison is even more interesting.

The print culture which the settlers created left a lasting monument to their faith and perseverance. The fact that a pioneer community devoted such resources towards the maintenance and preservation of its spiritual and cultural foundations speaks well for their tradition of religious literature which has continued without interruption since the days of the Reformation.



*Choralbuch* by Heinrich Franz was published twice by Steinbach entrepreneur Heinrich W. Reimer (1864-1941), in 1902 and 1918. Photo courtesy of Historical Sketches, page 705.



Klaas Peters (1855-1932) settled in Grünthal, Manitoba, in 1875. From here he wrote a letter to the Nebraska Ansiedler. By 1881 he had moved to the Gretna area where he became involved in the immigration movement, settling the western provinces. By 1922 he was in Florida where he wrote his memoirs later published as *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*. Photo courtesy of The Bergthaler Mennonites, page 46.



*Unparteiisches Liederbuch*, 1906, compiled and edited by Peter P. Toews, the first songbook produced and published on the East Reserve. Photo courtesy of Historical Sketches, page 706.



Jakob S. Friesen (1862-1931), 1931, just three months before he died. Photo courtesy of daughters Margaret Friesen Hiebert and Gertrude Friesen, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 13.

# Village Life.



1904 wedding picture of Susanna Hiebert (1885-1949) and Jakob Hiebert, taken on the bride's parents' farm in Schantzenberg, NW 18-7-4E. Note the groom with the white flower in his lapel and his bride standing beside him. The big house was the first home of the Jakob Hiebert family who had planted the trees in the background when they first established the yard site. Photo caption courtesy of Regina Neufeld in Niverville: A History 1878-86, page 122. Photo courtesy of Hiebert Heritage, inside front cover.

The Mennonite emigration was unique in that it transplanted complete communities together with infants, grandparents and extended family clans. Each Mennonite community included a whole range of occupations and professions essential to pioneer life. Thus each village and district was practically self-sufficient in socio-economic terms. Thus each village or cluster of villages would have its own cowherd, blacksmith, shoemaker, midwife and storekeeper.

The complex inner-workings of the village community was articulated and made possible by a sophisticated written culture whereby all services were documented and recorded. This trait was also found in family life where parents would carefully keep track of all assistance given to children and wages owing for services performed.

Pioneer life was hard and much of the work tedious. But the pioneers also had time for fun. Barn dances were common events for the Chortitzers and were often held to celebrate a wedding. The villagers would attend these events as families and enjoy a time of visiting, eating and listening to some lively music. Some dances were also held among the more ascetic KGs but they were organized by the young people themselves, possibly without parental knowledge.

The village was one of the important constructs of rural social life. This was particularly so in a traditional *Strassendorf* where the residents all lived close together, sharing many activities, such as pasturing cattle, attending school and road work. Even their small fields or "Kagels" were adjacent to each other, and often seeding plans were village decisions. There was a seasonal rhythm of communitarian activities which articulated everyday life in the village. Community events such as funerals, weddings, engagement parties, auction sales, pig slaughtering bees, and barn raisings, were the soul of the *Strassendorf*. The women had their own events such as quilting bees, sewing parties, canning

bees, cleaning bees and sister circles.

Visiting was one of the most important forms of entertainment. Most families received visitors or went visiting elsewhere on a daily basis. Visitations were not announced ahead of time, and especially siblings and their families felt free to drop in on each other without notice. Sunday noon meals could become huge events with large families receiving several sets of visitors, especially if the local church district was hosting the worship service. This was known as a "Grot Sindsch", or Big Sunday, and people had special clothes worn only on those occasions.

Story telling was an important part of most traditional cultures and most Mennonite villages had at least one story teller.

One of the interesting aspects of Mennonite culture in southern Manitoba was the nicknames or "Bie Nomis" acquired by many. Since so many

shared the same name and even the middle initial, any slight deviation from the norm, perceived or otherwise, was enough to gain its owner a nickname. Thus, if someone had an oak tree in their front yard, they were sure to be called "Oak Tree" Reimer, or Groening, or whatever. In Steinbach, Cornelius Hiebert (1895-1986) had two large maple trees in front of his main street store and livery barn, resulting in the nickname, "Hiebut ungya dame buhm," literally "Hiebert under the tree".

In time each village developed a particular ethos of its own, depending on the mix of family clans and the personalities of its inhabitants and their historical experience in Russia. Some villages were known as pious and conservative, others as more worldly and open to new innovation.



A "Schwine's Kjast" or hog slaughtering bee at Johann F. Broesky's, Schönnenberg. L. to r.: Johann F. Broesky, Abram F. Broesky, Abraham W. Dueck, fourth person unknown. Photo courtesy of Grunthal Heritage, page 53.



# Family Life

Family, village and Gemeinde, were the three paradigms of daily life in Hanover Steinbach during the pioneer period. Tightly knit families and extended kinship circles were a characteristic of traditional Mennonite communities. There was daily visiting among members of extended families within a village, and even from neighbouring villages. The family circle was extremely important and family gatherings were regular events.

Low German usually known as “Plaut Dietsch” was the language of the home and village. Mothers sang to their children in Plaut Dietsch, the ancient Low German nursery rhymes originating in northern Germany in medieval times and earlier.

The parents, children and often grandparents lived, prayed, worked and played together from dawn till dusk. The mothers were the center of the home and family life, primarily responsible for running the household, domestic chores and socializing the children. In wealthier families, mothers supervised the family maid, as well as managing dairy, poultry, garden and orchard production, processing and marketing. In poorer homes the daughters often had to work for other families as maids. The daughters of teacher Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), Alt-Bergfeld, worked as maids for wealthy Steinbach businessman and farmers. The Wiebe girls were attractive and four of them married sons of their employers. They included Anna who married merchant Heinrich W. Reimer and Susanna who married his brother Jakob.

The fathers were busy with the other farm duties, seeding and harvesting the grain, and the operation of the farm in general. They were responsible for the family altar. Many families gathered in the evenings, after the daily toil was done, listening to father read selections from the *Martyrs' Mirror*, or perhaps some favourite poem, and then the parents and children sang

songs from the *Gesangbuch*, many of which were 20 stanzas long. Prayers were traditionally quiet, in accordance with Biblical injunction to pray in private, not like the pharisee praying on the street corner. This changed in the 1920s under the influences of American Revivalism and later Fundamentalism.

In their younger years children were socialized by their parents, and particularly by their mothers. As they got older and the family had more children, the older siblings had considerable responsibility in looking after younger brothers and sisters. It was not unusual for children to have as many as six cousin playmates who were exactly their age.

Parents in those days were quite strict and children needed parental permission to leave their own yard. When children got together the girls played with dolls and the boys played games such as “blind man’s buff” and “piggy”. Sports

was frowned upon by the more ascetic KG-ers but from the photographs of sports teams around the turn-of-century, it appears that it was not a complete taboo.

Courtship was typically initiated by the young people themselves but had to be officially sanctioned by both sets of parents. If the parents did not approve, the courtship would not take place. Divorces and separations were extremely rare although not unheard of. If the courtship proceeded there would be a “Verlobnis” or betrothal party at the bride’s home, after which their status as a couple was recognized and they were allowed to attend community functions together. The actual wedding ceremony was held after a regular Sunday morning worship service, the couple would be called to the front by the officiating minister, who then performed the nuptials.



1890s. The Krahn children, daughters and sons of Peter F. and Aganetha Krahn. L. to r: Aganetha, Peter, Johann and Maria. Photo courtesy of Grunthal Heritage, page 36.



Peter D. Neufeld at age 78 and second wife Anna Hildebrand age 63. Elderly people were highly respected among conservative Mennonites. Peter D. Neufeld (1821-1922) emigrated to Manitoba in 1874 where they settled in the Ebenfeld area west of Steinbach, acquiring a block of 800 acres of land together with his sons. Peter D. Neufeld achieved the age of 100 years and was known far and wide as “de hundat yoscha”, literally the centenarian. Photo courtesy Audrey Toews, Steinbach/Steinbach Post, March 30, 1965/Pres., No. 11, page 64.



*A typical Chortitzer family, 1911. Conservative Mennonites are known for their large and tightly-knit families and family values. Diedrich D. Wiebe, Chortitz, Manitoba, (1868-1930) was the youngest child of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) and the publisher of his father's memoirs, Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung in 1900. Back row: l-r. Back row: Diedrich K. Wiebe, Elisabeth Wiebe and Gerhard K. Wiebe; middle row: David K. Wiebe, Katherina Pries Wiebe, Margaretha K. Wiebe (Mrs. Henry K. Funk), Mr. Diedrich D. Wiebe. These five children were all from the first marriage to Margaretha Klassen; front row: Katharina P. Wiebe (Mrs. Franz S. Giesbrecht), Anna P. Wiebe (Mrs. Peter B. Fehr), Justina P. Wiebe (Mrs. Dietrich Toews and later Mrs. Jakob T. Dueck), Maria P. Wiebe (Mrs. Johann T. Dueck), Johann P. Wiebe and Jakob P. Wiebe. Diedrich D. Wiebe served his community as Waisenvorsteher for a number of years and was elected to the ministry prior to the immigration to Paraguay. Photo courtesy of grandson Dick Wiebe, Ste. Annes, Manitoba/Pres., No. 11, page 7.*



*Schönsee 1907, Martin F. Broesky wedding. Rear, l-r: Peter V. Froese, Jakob W. Thiessen, Peter P. Friesen (chiropractor), Peter F. Pries, his son, Johann Peters, Jakob Klassen, Abram Froese (in background), Jakob Toews, Jakob Dueck and Abraham Klassen. Middle row: Cornelius Dueck, Jakob N. Wiebe, Jakob W. Froese, Abraham F. Broesky and Aeltester Johann K. Dueck. Front row: Jakob F. Giesbrecht, Diedrich Dueck (auctioneer), Bernhard Wiebe, Abraham W. Dueck, George F. Giesbrecht, Johann F. Broesky and Franz Giesbrecht. Many of these men emigrated to Paraguay in 1926 and 1927. Photo courtesy of Grunthal Heritage, page 50.*

# Medical Services

Just as in all other cultures in Europe, the public sphere of church and village was patriarchal and controlled by men. But in the area of medical services Mennonite women entered into the public realm and traditionally played a predominant role. With the exception of a few male medical doctors referred to from time to time in contemporary journals, women dominated the field of medical services, acting as *Hebammen* (midwives), undertakers, and even as "Doctors".

Undoubtedly the most renowned medical practitioner among the Mennonites both in Russia and North America was the famous Dr. Bergensche, nee Justina Loewen (1828-1905). She was trained in the medical profession by her father, Dr. David Loewen. She married Isaac Baergen and became known as the Dr. Bergensche. It was said of her, "no darkness was too great, no storm too violent, no road so impassable, no work or family affairs so demanding that she would not go to the bedside of some sick person to help."

Justina remarried to Gerhard Neufeld (1827-1916). In 1878 the family emigrated to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, where Gerhard served as Bishop of the First Mennonite Church. Justina became the medical practitioner not only for the Mountain Lake area, but also made many trips of mercy to Nebraska, Kansas and Manitoba.

On one such trip to Manitoba Dr. Neufeld conducted courses in midwifery for three KG women: Aganetha Barkman (Mrs. Johann R. Reimer), Steinbach; Margaretha Loewen (Mrs. Jakob B. Toews), Hochstadt; and Anna B. Toews (Mrs. Peter B. Toews), Blumenort. Chortitzer Bishop David Stoesz (1842-1903) recorded Dr. Neufeld made at least two trips to the East Reserve, on January 26, 1884, and again on May 22, 1892. According to her obituary "...she brought over 11,000 babies into the world with her open arms." She was much loved by her patients and community and over 1,000 people attended her funeral when she died in 1905.

Two women of KG background emigrated to the United States with their family in 1876 where they became well-known medical practitioners: Susanna Isaac (born 1860) and Elisabeth Isaac (born 1866). They were the daughters of Gerhard Isaac (1836-86), Kansas, a cousin to Rev. Abraham P. Isaac of Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba.

A study of pioneer journals indicates that the level of health service did not change drastically after the move to Manitoba. The first tier of medical services, again, was provided by local women who had a gift for healing, compassion for others, and sometimes training in midwifery and nursing. Most often these services were provided without charge.

Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), Steinbach, Russia, and later Blumenort, Manitoba, continued her career in midwifery but at a much slower pace. On May 15, 1879: her husband Abraham F. Reimer recorded "At 7 a.m. my wife was taken to Joh. Reimers,

Steinbach, by Abr. Friesen with Reimers' horses. At 2:30 a baby appeared. She was named Helena [later Mrs. Jakob E. Schellenberg]. From before noon until 8 p.m. she was critically ill so that it seemed she would die." Elisabeth was brought home to Blumenort the next afternoon by son-in-law Peter Toews after Mrs. Joh. Reimer's condition had stabilized. Another midwife call came on June 30, 1879: "... C.[ornelius L.] Plett from Blumenhof came here in the morning at 7:30 and got my wife. She was there the entire day and stayed for night. A son arrived



*Pioneer midwife in Steinbach, Aganetha Barkman Reimer (1863-1938). Photo courtesy of Rev. Harvey Kroeker/Pres., No. 6, page 23.*

during the night."

Aganetha Barkman Reimer (1863-1938), Steinbach, was a midwife who worked tirelessly for her patients. She kept a journal in which she recorded the names of more than 600 babies she delivered. "Her services would include bathing the little newborn, baking biscuits if necessary or providing a pot of chicken noodle soup, especially if the children were too young to fend for themselves.

Katherina Hiebert (1855-1916), Schantzenburg, was a woman hungry for knowledge, ordering medical books from Germany. She was proactive in giving advice and instructing people, boldly correcting men who were abusive to their women. A neighbour recalled how the anxious fathers would drive up the Hiebert driveway, followed by the sight of Katharina roaring down the road a few minutes later, sitting in the middle of her buggy to balance out her weight, and urging her greys to move faster.

The pioneers of the East Reserve were accustomed to medical services provided by women. This explained why the first woman medical doctor, Anna Shilstra, was quickly able to build up a loyal clientele when she came to Steinbach in 1909. The story of local midwives such as Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, Aganetha Barkman Reimer and Katharina Hiebert is one of heroic service and selfless commitment to

community and a gift for healing.

There were also the matriarchs who used the folk remedies of centuries past for healing. Rev. Cornelius L. Plett (1846-1935), Blumenhof, described his visits to Mrs. Funk in Schönthal who treated his wife, nee Helena Rempel, for cancer with a poultice or *plaster*. The poultice was applied five times, starting September 17, 1895, and the last one on September 21. Evidently Helena was cured as she lived until 1913.

Medical Doctors were also available to make housecalls as recorded by Abraham F. Reimer on April 13, 1879: "The young Mrs. Johann Dueck from Grünfeld [Kleefeld] has suffered much in childbirth for 3 days and 3 nights until she finally gave birth with the assistance of Dr. Schwartz."

Of great importance were two local doctors, Isaac L. Warkentin, Blumenhof, and John Harrison of Niverville. Although they were not licensed practitioners they had considerable knowledge in their field. David Stoesz recorded that on May 23, 1890, he went to get Dr. Harrison to see a member of his family.

The first permanent doctor's office in the area was opened in Steinbach in 1895 by Dr. Graham: K.J.B. Reimer, *Carillon News*, "Historical Sketches," 1952. Others also went to Winnipeg to obtain various medical services. Erdmann Penner, son of Erdmann Penner (1837-1907), the Bergthaler grain merchant, became the first person of that background to become a medical doctor in Manitoba. Son-in-law Gerhard Hiebert became a surgeon at the Winnipeg General Hospital in 1906 and Chief Surgeon 1917-19. He also served patients in the Steinbach area.



*Katharina Hiebert (1855-1916), pioneer midwife for Schantzenberg/Niverville area. Katharina was a woman hungry for knowledge ordering medical books from Germany. Photo courtesy of Evangeline Harris, Ladysmith, B.C.*



# Material Culture

Material culture refers to “the aggregate of physical objects or artifacts used by a society.” Notwithstanding that the conservative branch of the Mennonite faith were people of the “plain” tradition, it would be evident even to the casual observer that their decorative culture was artistic, whose aesthetic values and forms revealed distinctive ideas of beauty and tastefulness.

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen’s, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*, 229 pages, has traced the Mennonite furniture tradition back to the artistic designs and architectural creations of the Renaissance. “Thus elements of the Vistula Delta tradition became Mennonite.” Janzen included 13 items in the canon of the tradition, including the chest (Kjist), the bed (Bad), the settee (Ruebaenkj), chair (Schtol), wardrobe (Kjleedashaup), table (Desch) and the wall-hung pendulum clock.

Many of these furniture pieces originated in Danzig, West Prussia, and were brought to Russia during the immigrations of 1788 and 1803. The item most commonly taken along from Russia in the 1874 emigration to America was the “Kjist” or chest, serving dual purpose as packing crate and a tasteful reminder of the old world upon arrival in the new.

The most important item in this category is a Kjist believed to have belonged to Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petershagen, Molotschna, founder of the KG. The Kjist is presently owned by great-great granddaughter daughter Susanna Reimer Penner, Spanish Lookout, Belize.

In 1993 Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen made a trip to Menno Colony in Paraguay where she discovered the remains of the Kjist of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) who had led the Bergthaler people to Manitoba in 1874. The chest was brought to Russia from Prussia by his parents when they emigrated in 1797. Gerhard’s son Dietrich D. Wiebe took it to Paraguay in 1927.

Also extant is a walking cane hand-carved by Klaas Reimer in 1792 while herding cattle in Prussia, presumably in Neunhuben. The handle of the cane



1819 Wall clock believed to have come from Fürstenwerder, Prussia, with the Johann Plett (1765-1833) family. It was inherited by his granddaughter Margaretha Plett Kroeker (1842-1920), who was among the pioneer settlers of Steinbach in 1874. Photo courtesy of Rev. Cornelius P. Dueck, Steinbach/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 60.

was shaped with a bulb at the end with seven intricately carved rings. The year and the initials “KR” are carved into the ring separating the handle from the stem. The stem consisted of a half dozen or so strands carved so that the strands curve and wrap around each other circularly all the way to the point, some 20 inches. The cane is carved out of one piece of wood.

The love of woodworking was passed on to Rev. Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915), Blumenort,



Cornelius Banman (1839-92) Kjist. Cornelius Banman was one of the pioneers of Blumengard. Note that the standard five pedestal base has been replaced with a new one. Photo courtesy of Sheryl Banman, Steinbach/Pres., No. 11, page 93.

Manitoba, grandson of Klaas Reimer. Peter was a talented furniture maker and a number of his works were documented in various contemporary journals as well as in his “Account Book”. In 1906 he built a miniature Kjist as a gift for his daughter Sarah (1887-1971), providing her with a place to store her valuables.

The Kjist of Heinrich Fast (1826-90), Fischau, Molotschna, and one of the pioneers of Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874, was unique as the colourful portraits commonly posted in the lid of the Kjist had remained intact in their place. The lid of the chest traditionally served as a sort of private shrine, a small cubicle, where colour and art were considered appropriate.

The tradition was illustrated by the Kjist of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82), Rosenfeld, although the artwork displayed on the inside of the lid was a New Year’s wish created by the Doerksen himself, a gifted *Fraktur* artist.

A Kjist in the Bergthaler/Chortitzer tradition was brought to Manitoba by the Cornelius Banman (1839-92), family, Blumengard. The chest is presently in the possession of great-great granddaughter Sheryl Kornelsen, still in its original condition except for a new five pedestal stand.

Another item stemming from Prussia was the pendulum wall clock of Margaretha Plett Kroeker (1842-1920), Kleefeld, Molotschna, and one of the pioneers in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874. According to oral tradition the clock was made in Prussia. The clock itself bears the date, 1819. Since the Kroeker ancestors had already immigrated to Russia in 1804 the clock must have come to Russia with the family of Johann Plett (1765-1833) who immigrated in 1827. Grandson Cornelius P. Dueck

remembered how his grandmother would carefully rewind the clock each night, pulling down the weight. With its steady ticking the clock was a constant and comfortable reminder of the past.

Other material culture items in the Plett family are two cream pitchers believed to have originated with Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903), Blumenhof, mother of Margaretha. One of these, a copperware pitcher, had a clear blue band painted around the middle, and a portrayal of a young woman sitting on a garden bench. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has suggested that it was of the sort manufactured in England and sold in South Russia in the mid-19th century.

Yet another item portrays the aesthetic values of the local settlers; this is a dinner plate belonging to Sarah Loewen Plett, quite possibly part of a dinner setting. It was a “Regent” brand and manufactured by “Johnson Bros. England”. It might have been purchased in southern Russia or Manitoba. It had a blue floral design, the flower being a traditional symbol of creation. Blue represented the heavens and God. In the centre of the plate was a five point floral pattern encompassing another flower.

Such artifacts and the story of their transmis-



Ellen Plett, Wawanesa, Manitoba poses with a dinner plate passed down from her great-grandmother Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903), Blumenhof, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Les Plett, Calgary, Alberta/Pres., No. 12, page 99.

sion to the present provide information about the life and values of their owners in ages past. The conservative emphasis on simplicity as the greater and more tasteful beauty naturally articulated a tendency to retain traditional forms.

In North America, the “Kjisten” and other furniture pieces in the canon representing the ancient designs and artforms of the Renaissance were often discarded by those who had abandoned their ancestral faith. Often they were equally uninformed of the intrinsic value and worth of these material culture artifacts, discarding priceless antiques replacing them with cheap factory goods.

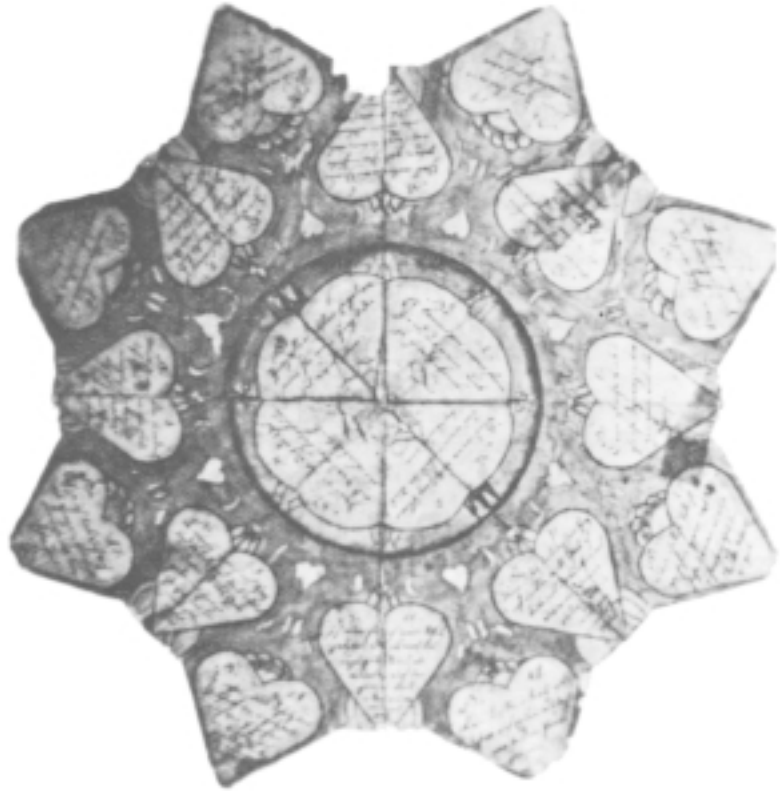
A detailed study of the indigenous material culture tradition of the East Reserve has yet to be undertaken.

# Fraktur and Schönschrieben

*Fraktur* was an artform found in Holland and Northern Germany. It had roots in the handwriting flourishes of medieval monks as they transcribed manuscripts and in the natural desire to beautify them. Schönschrieben was the art of calligraphy. "Because Mennonites believed that they should not represent Jesus or God the Father directly, they ex-



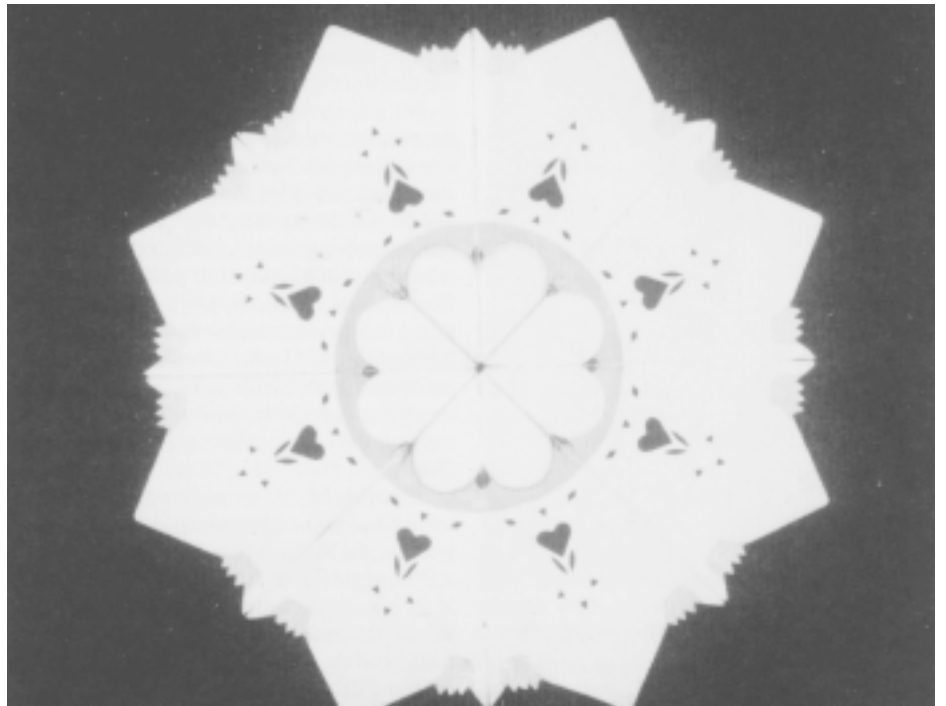
Johann Koop's (1801-38) New Years' Wish, Muntau 1808. Koop was the ancestor of the Kleine Gemeinde Koops, Neuanlage (Twincreek) who brought this piece of artwork to Canada as a treasured keepsake: Pres, No. 2, page 8.



In 1843 Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88) married for the second time to Katharina Friesen (1820-84), daughter of Ohm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, Russia. Thiessen gave his bride a beautiful valentine ("Liebesbrief") as an engagement present. Photo courtesy of E. Abrahams, *Frakturmalen*, page 120/Historical Sketches, page 649-63.



Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), Contentiusfeld, Imperial Russia, and Jansen, Nebraska. Thiessen later moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, believing that the church here was less susceptible to outside teachings. Photo courtesy of great-granddaughter Mildred Eidiger, "Thiessen and Friesen Families," Sanger, California.



Partially completed "cut-out" by Blumenort teacher Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99). Friesen had the reputation of being a talented Fraktur artist. Teachers used such material to teach geometrical designs and arithmetic as well as art. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Reimer Penner, *Steinbach/Pres.*, No. 8, Part Two, page 56.



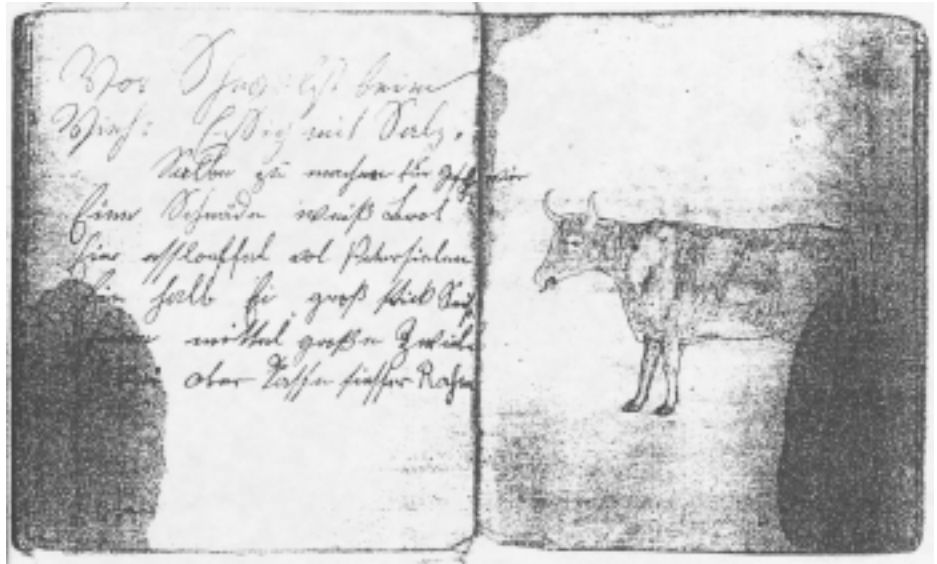
pressed their religious feelings through pictures of God's creations such as birds, trees and flowers (*Menonite Canadians*, page 28).

In her work *Frakturmalen und Schönschrieben* (North Newton, 1980), Ethel Ewert Abrahams has identified several categories of the artform: writing specimens ("Vorschriften"), used to teach the alphabet and writing; Christmas and New Year's Greetings, a particular form of writing specimen; book plates ("Bücherzeichen"), a centuries old custom of personalizing a prized book, providing cogent evidence as to their ownership; illuminated texts, most often seen in "Rechenbücher" which were handwritten and colourfully illustrated teacher manuals divided into subjects, each section containing a set of mathematical problems; Awards and Home Blessings, given out by teachers for good work or a colourful design with a motto or Bible verse used for decoration, possibly the inside of a *kjist*; maize ("Irrgarten"), a labyrinth through which the pupil traced a poem or verse, reminiscent of a spiritual pilgrimage and used to teach a moral lesson; and cutwork ("Scherenschnitte"), a scissor was used to create a beautiful design sometimes also decorated with *Fraktur* and helpful in teaching geometric forms, mathematics and decorative skills.

Abrahams writes that *Fraktur* and *Schönschrieben* were taught in the Mennonite schools in Prussia and brought to Russia during the emigrations of 1788 and 1803, and



On April 4, 1841, Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg completed a beautiful bookplate for her *Gesangbuch*, hand drawn, lettered and coloured. In 1847 Elisabeth married Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), who later became a KG minister and settled in Grünfeld, Manitoba: Photo courtesy of Elisabeth Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schönschrieben*, page 96/*Pres.*, No. 10, Part Two, 67.



Red German cow drawn by Elisabeth Warkentin in her journal in which she collected various medical recipes and remedies. 1863. Courtesy David K. Schellenberg, *Steinbach/Pres.*, No. 10, Part Two, 67.

became more sophisticated, at least until 1845.

The oldest *Fraktur* item in the KG material culture tradition was a Valentine which Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), Tragheimerweide, West Prussia, gave to his 17 year-old bride, Aganetha Quiring, in 1794. In 1797 the Bartel family emigrated to Russia, where he became a Frisian minister in Krons Garten. The Valentine was inherited by youngest daughter, Aganetha, Mrs. Heinrich Plenert, and then by her daughter Aganetha, Mrs. Jakob Klassen, and then by her daughter Elisabeth Klassen, Mrs. Peter Martens, who rescued the Valentine from the burning rubble of their home and brought it to Canada: *Pres.*, No. 4, page 11.

Johannes Bartel's granddaughters Anna Bartel Toews (1838-1918), Mrs. Cornelius P. Toews, and Helena Bartel Loewen (1833-76), Mrs. Cornelius Loewen, settled in Grünfeld, Manitoba, in 1874.

The Johann Koop, Muntau, New Year Wish of 1808 would probably be in the category of "Vorschriften" or writing specimens. Its author, Johann Koop (1801-38), was a seven year-old boy when he carefully drew the beautiful work and coloured it. Johann later took over his parent's *Wirtschaft* 14 in Muntau. The 1808 New Year's Wish was brought to Canada by son, Johann M. Koop (1831-97), who settled in Neuanlage, northwest of Steinbach.

Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82), Fischau, Molotschna, later Rosenfeld, Manitoba, was an accomplished *Fraktur* artist. Two pieces of his work are extant, a New Year's Wish dated January 1, 1834, and another dated 1838: *Pres.*, No. 5, page 13.

Johann Esau (1828-1906) was a student in Fischau, Molotschna, where he drew and coloured a New Year's Wish in 1832. Later Esau moved to Annenfeld, Crimea, coming to Canada in 1874 where he settled in Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba. In the last years before

his death, he was looked after by Jakob T. Barkman (1848-1936), Heuboden. Out of gratitude he gave the piece of *Fraktur* art to Barkman's daughter Margaretha (1892-1975): *Pres.*, No. 12, page 104.

In 1843 Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), Rückenau, made a Valentine as a wedding present for his second wife, Katharina Friesen, daughter of Ohm Klaas Friesen (1793-1873), Rosenort. Katharina was a sister to Abraham M. Friesen and Cornelius P. Friesen, later of Blumenort, Manitoba.

Blumenort teacher Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), son of Klaas of Rosenort, Molotschna, was known for his beautiful *Fraktur* and paper cutouts, used to teach geometric forms and art. Friesen also made mazes ("Irrgarten"). A fire destroyed his papers and books so only two samples of his work are extant.

An "Irrgarten" or maze in the Bergthaler tradition was created in 1851 by Jakob Doerksen (b.1837), Schönthal, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia. The maze traces the verses of a moralistic poem through its many loops, used to teach children moral values as well as artistic creativity: *Pres.*, No. 7, page 47.

In 1841 Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg (1819-1905), Blumstein, Molotschna, later Rosenfeld, Manitoba, created a bookplate for her *Gesangbuch*, hand drawn, lettered and coloured. In 1863 Elisabeth compiled a medicine book, on the back page of which she drew the picture of a Red German cow.

In a recent survey of Mennonite and Amish folk arts, Ervin Beck has written that "one of the main benefits of the continued, sophisticated study of folk art will be to demonstrate that Mennonites have always been an artistic people": *M.Q.R.*, Jan. 1997, pages 69-91. This article surveys the historiography on the topic and provides a bibliography.



# Matrifocality

A matriarchy in its traditional sense is a “form of social organization in which the mother is head of the family and in which descent is reckoned in the female line, the children belonging to the mother’s clan.” All societies and cultures of the 19th century and prior were patriarchal, at least, in the public domain.

A form of matriarchy, more accurately described as “matrifocality”, was well-known in various cultures, such as the Scottish matriarch who ran her household with a loving but iron rule, or the proverbial Jewish mother who micro-managed the minute details of her family’s lives, creating an eternal source of material for comics like Jackie Mason. Although they may vary in significance and influence, matrilineal patterns existed within traditional communities.

Matrifocality only flourished in societies which were stable, permanent, conservative and relatively prosperous. For example, sophisticated matriarchies were found within European nobility where women occasionally exercised extensive power, assuming absolute rulership as in the case of Queen



1948 Marigan Weiland Friesen (1876-1957) at age 72. Marigan was born in Antwerp, Belgium, and came to the East Reserve with her father in 1888. She married Peter T. Friesen, son of Cornelius B. Friesen, Waisenvorsteher, Osterwick. They were often called “Belgium” Friesens. Over the years Marigan became a beloved matriarch of the Chortitzer community. Photo courtesy of Abe and Mary Dueck, Niverville/Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 52.

Victoria, Great Britain, and Katherine the Great, Russia. Matriarchal networks were a phenomenon of old world cultures. They did not exist in newly established frontier settlements which generally consisted of young bachelors and couples out to seek their fortunes.

A successful matriarch in traditional Mennonite society was one who skilfully managed and enhanced her reputation and used it for the furtherance of her agenda. They preserved and enhanced their power through the implementation of age-old strategies.

The Gemeinden protected the interests of women, and therefore were foundational to matriarchal power. Changes in the Ordnung, or protocol, were typically opposed by the intelligent conservative women in the community as it represented the source of their influence. Conversely they supported policies which enhanced the strength of the Gemeinde. The relative strength of the Gemeinde would be an indicator of the influence of the matriarchy, and vice versa.

Conservative Mennonites such as the KG and Bergthaler developed numerous survival strategies to maintain their culture and preserve their faith. These strategies included language, theology, culture, community or Gemeinde. Many of the strategies such as education, confessional protocol, or land acquisitions were controlled to a large degree by the patriarchy and others were difficult or impossible to evaluate.

Other survival strategies such as kinship networks, matrilocality, socialization of children and marriage patterns were articulated largely by women and are capable of some objective assessment.

1) **Marriage strategies** were an important aspect of preserving the culture of traditional communities as well as the wealth and blood lines of individual family groups. In traditional societies of the 19th century and earlier marriages were typically arranged, a process largely influenced by women.

2) **Matrilocality** is an anthropological term defined as being “of or pertaining to residence with the wife’s family or tribe.” Matrilocality refers to the influence which pioneer women had in determining the village of residence of the family. In many cases the decision was made on the basis of matrilineal connections, such as two sisters who wanted to live in the same village or a widowed mother who wanted her children to live near her.

By the time of the emigration in 1874 the established matriarchies had grown so that sheer size dictated a dispersal and realignment as one branch moved to Jansen (Nebraska), another to Gnadenau (Kansas), Mountain Lake (Minnesota), or Steinbach (Manitoba). Others chose to stay in Russia. In each case there were conflicting claims of loyalty and family ties which had to be resolved in one way or another.

A further dispersal occurred in each area as sub-branches of the matriarchies chose a particular village or another or a village district as their new home. By this strategy the process already started in Borosenko and Bergthal, Russia, where matriarchal lines influenced spatial boundaries, women clearly exercised their influence as some villages



Elisabeth Schulz Kehler (1866-1943), Ebenfeld, widow of “Berliner” Kehler of Ebenfeld. Elisabeth was remembered by grandson Dr. Al Reimer as a “strong and resilient [woman] who knew exactly who [she was]... and what [her role was]...in the related spheres of family and community.” Photo courtesy of Louise Reimer Olsen, Rosenort/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 29.

were established around individual matriarchs or groups of women. Three Bergthaler villages, Strassberg, Osterwick and Blumengard were settled largely by the family of a single matriarch.

3) **Matrilineage** was an important aspect of matriarchal influence centring around “the tracing of lineal descent through the female line.” Within KG and Bergthaler dynasties, matrilineal descent was considered equally important to patriarchal lineage. The children of the 1874 pioneers proudly used their mother’s maternal name as their own second name. This was in contrast to the Mennonites who remained in Russia and adopted the patronymic naming system whereby the Christian name of the father became the second name of children, male and female.

It was often the women who were interested in the vast family networks extending across countries and continents and who went to great pains to maintain them. This was illustrated by the extensive letter correspondence of Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht (1825-1916), Steinbach.

4) **Socialization** of children was largely the responsibility of women. It was the women who recounted the family triumphs and tragedies and were the bearers of cultural history and oral tradition, passing on stories and folklore. Peter P. Isaac (1846-1926), leading KG folk historian, was largely informed by his mother and grandmothers (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 179-224).

Women in the conservative KG and Bergthaler cultures were remembered as strong and compassionate individuals sure of their place of love and respect in the community and in the home.

# Pioneer Women

One of the most significant aspects of the traditional culture of the conservative Mennonites was the important role played by women within those communities in Imperial Russia. The women of the KG and Bergthaler in the 19th century were an integral and essential part of the household economy, typically with responsibility for dairy, poultry, garden and orchard production.

The functions of the household economy were significantly enhanced after the immigration to Manitoba, where the pioneers had to downgrade their farming operations for the primitive economy. This required a restructuring of strategies focusing on mixed farming, dairying, poultry, and market gardening, precisely the areas traditionally controlled and managed by women.

In this regard KG and Bergthaler women seem to have been significantly more empowered than comparable women in other cultures. Although this early flowering of feminism in Imperial Russia was articulated to some degree by the necessities of running large *Wirtschaften* (farms) and of raising families of a dozen and more children it also had a biblical foundation.

In a letter dating to 1820-30, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, the second KG Aeltester, justified Mennonite inheritance practices which required strict equality for women to Russian bureaucrats who were so amazed by the practice that they had solicited an explanation. It must be remembered that primogeniture was still the standard mode of inheritance in most of Europe, namely, inheritance through the male line only (see "Woman's Rights 1820s, *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1996, Pt 2, pages 49-59).

In his explanation of traditional Mennonite inheritance practices Aeltester Abraham Friesen wrote the following: "...I believe nonetheless that our traditional equal rights for wives regarding temporal possessions has its foundation in the official pronouncement found in Matthew chapter 19, verse 6. He who wishes to be a disciple and follower of Christ must also seek to bring into reality within his marriage the full and definitive community of property of Christ, which He has with His bride--the church--which is a partaker of all heavenly property. If the wife, according to 1 Peter 3:7, is fully an heir of grace and the promises of life, then the promises just as equally apply to the provision of these as well as to the eternal and future inheritance. And just as a wife, according to Genesis 2:18, is placed beside her man as a helper, she is, according to 1 Timothy 3:18, also worthy of her due remuneration as a labourer. In view of the oneness of a man and wife, this remuneration can be no less than full equality with respect to the possessions which are entrusted to our care by the Lord."

The inheritance rights of women were enshrined in Mennonite culture through the *Ordnung* (protocol) of the *Waisenamt*. Daughters inherited equally with sons. Widows received one-half of their husband's estates, protection which other prairie women only received

through Provincial Dower legislation in 1918, and even then, they received only a third. The ownership of property and managerial independence in the household economy gave women in traditional Mennonite culture a significant role.

The lack of a labour supply during the early years in Manitoba has already been mentioned. As a result pioneer women in 1874 had to take up some of the field work and assist in the construc-



*Sarah Kroeker Dueck (1871-1951), daughter of Franz M. Kroeker and Margaretha L. Plett, Steinbach pioneers. Sarah and her husband Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), served as the Aeltesten couple for the East Reserve KG from 1901 until his untimely death in 1919. After being widowed at a relatively young age Sarah raised their large family, increasing the size of her farm with surplus available to aid others in need, such as the Russländer refugees in the 1920s. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Dietrich L. Reimer/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 29.*

tion of the first primitive homes in addition to their previous duties in the household economy.

In 1877 John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture made a report to the Committee on Immigration and Colonization after a visit to the East Reserve stating that, "Every man, woman, and child on the settlement is a producer. Women were out ploughing in the fields, thatching roofs and girls were plastering houses. They would go and work before the morning was grey and continue until dark in the evening." Evidently this degree of involvement by women in farming operations was foreign to Anglo-Canadians.

East Reserve farmers responded to the situation by rapid mechanization. Thus women could again devote more time and attention to their former responsibilities on the farmyard. Because of the proximity to Winnipeg the household production traditionally managed by women--dairy, poultry and vegetables, thrived. In fact, these categories of production were to become permanent features of the Hanover Steinbach economy which today produces anywhere from 20 per cent and more of Manitoba's

milk, chickens, eggs and swine.

Pioneer women of course still had all domestic chores to look after. They were usually pregnant bi-annually, all the while nursing babies and nurturing a string of youngsters. Most wealthier families were able to hire a maid to assist the mother of the home. In Russia maids were often hired from among German and Russian neighbours, but in Manitoba they were in short supply. Pioneer diaries refer to men travelling for miles having heard a maid was available for hire in some distant village. Although the life and times were hard many pioneer women were in the enviable situation of having a career, the management of the household economy, and domestic help to look after the routine household chores, giving them the freedom to pursue that career.

Women in traditional Mennonite society were protected from abuse by the *Gemeinde* and the *Ordnung*. There are recorded instances demonstrating that perpetrators were strictly punished by excommunication, and even shunned, until they were prepared to apologize and rectify their conduct.

The unique empowerment of women in traditional Mennonite culture was largely a function of the *Gemeinde*, and as the congregations were weakened by various factors, so was the relative influence of women.

The school laws of the Provincial government in 1916-27 "exiled" many of the more conservative and traditional Mennonites in the East Reserve. These actions also weakened the congregations remaining in the East Reserve and fractured the extended family networks essential to the successful functioning of matriarchies.

As Mennonites in Hanover Steinbach became secularized and assimilated they also became vulnerable to the evils of popular culture, such as wife and child abuse, previously prohibited. This was enhanced by the Calvinist triumphalism of American Fundamentalist religious culture adopted by some churches, which propagated the subservience of women in the home.

The power of women was also diminished by the growing commercialization of agriculture in the 1930s and 40s, a process which often relieved women from their important role in the household economy and relegated them to the kitchen.

Changes were also taking place in inheritance practices as local residents adapted to Canadian culture where daughters were often excluded in order that the farm could be passed on to one or more sons. Historian Royden Loewen has stated that "By the middle of this century, 'the scriptural rationale for ordinances shifted from a social imperative of 'justice' and 'protection' to moral virtues of 'guarding against avarice' and 'avoiding the law courts of the unjust'....a new view of women as wards of men had seemingly arisen."

By the 1970s and 80s the tide had turned again, as women sought and received greater empowerment and equality within society and work place.

# Pioneer Charity, 1880-1900

In 1874 the Mennonites in southern Manitoba established one of the first social welfare systems in Western Canada. The earliest form of church social aid was the community granary where surplus grain was stored in the church attic to be distributed to the needy in bad years. The Gemeinde elected deacons and provided a fund, the "Armenkasse" (paupers box), used to support widows, orphans and others in need. Orphans were provided with foster homes, their inheritances were invested by the Waisenamt, already referred to earlier, and paid to the beneficiaries upon attaining the age of majority.

One of the most inspiring chapters of the pioneer period is the charity of the settlers towards others in need. Notwithstanding the harshness of the pioneering process and the restructuring required to adjust farming strategies for the primitive Manitoba economy, they were already actively sending aid to assist poor and landless Mennonite families in Russia as early as the 1880s. The *Mennonitische Rundschau*, a contemporary Mennonite newspaper, contains examples of such aid which was gathered and sent to various colonies in Russia.

The story of the "Lilges Gemeinde" has already been told by Dick Wiebe, Greenland, who wrote a series of articles published in *Preservings*, No. 3, pages 8 and 11, No. 5, page 10, and No. 7, pages 22-23. A community of the Moravian Brethren Church settled in Bruderheim, Alberta, in 1895. Their leader was Bishop Andreas Lilge, and hence the name. The Moravians were destitute and in danger of starvation. Being familiar with the Mennonites from Russia, they appealed to the Aeltesten of the Mennonite Church in Manitoba for help. Dick Wiebe's grandfather, David Stoesz, the Chortitzer Bishop at the time, was actively involved in the aid effort. The response was dramatic and substantial, with rail-



Barbara Blatz (1886-1983) married Henry Choote (1883-1943). Choote was born in London, England. He was placed for adoption by Dr. Barnardo and taken in by the Peter Toews family of Bergthal, north of Mitchell. In the 1920s Choote bought the hotel in Steinbach, operating it as the "Choote Hotel" until 1931. Photo courtesy of Stoesz Heritage, page 46.

way wagons full of cattle and other material goods shipped to Alberta.

A granddaughter, now an old woman, recently recalled how moved and inspired the Moravian leaders had been when they arrived in the East Reserve. Instead of being treated like beggars asking for help they were hosted like royalty. Bishop

Stoesz had insisted that they sleep in his own bed. "You see," she said, "they not only gave them the aid but also let them sleep in the best bed they had. If it had not been for the Mennonites our people would have starved to death," she added with tears in her eyes.

The following record dated January 11, 1895, appended to one of the early Chortitzer church registers, shows the aid provided by the village of Alt-Bergthal: "Kornelius Toews and Peter Sawatzky - 1 cow given; Julius Toews - 1 cow given; David Falk, David Falk and Heinrich Wiebe - 1 pair 4 year-old oxen given; Peter Falk and Jakob Falk - 1 pair 3 year-old oxen given; Peter Toews Sr. and Peter Toews Jr. [the future Aeltester?] - 1 cow given; Jakob Hamm - \$1 given; Kornelius Wall and Peter Klassen - 1 cow given; and Jakob Wiebe [the teacher] a 3 year-old ox, \$21, without interest for 3 years"--courtesy John Dyck, *Historical Sketches*, page 19.

Another example of pioneer charity occurred in the 1890s when various Chortitzer families took in English orphan boys put out for adoption by Dr. Bernardo, London, such as Edward S. Dudman (1886-1983) by Jakob D. Wiebe, Chortitz, and Henry Choote (1883-1943) by the Toews family in Bergthal, etc. Both of these boys were born in London, England, and grew up to be useful and productive citizens.

Henry Strains in Silberfeld and Arthur James Dare (1895-1910) with the Falks in Grunthal were two other orphan boys adopted by Chortitzer families.



Peter T. Falk family Bergfeld, circa 1907, posing in front of their house-barn built in 1904. L. to r. Daughter Katharina Falk, Mrs. Jakob J. Braun, Margaretha Braun, Mrs. Peter Falk, Anna Falk, Mrs. J. Wiebe (first wife), Johann Falk, Lena Falk, Mrs. Johann Wiebe (second wife), Grandmother Falk, nee Anna Abrams, son Jakob Falk, Grandfather Peter Toews Falk: see also Grunthal History, page 46. Peter T. Falk and his brother Jakob donated a pair of three-year-old oxen for the Lilge's Gemeinde in Alberta. Photo courtesy of Grunthal Heritage, page 44/Pres., No. 10., Part One, page 44.



# Clearsprings

The Clearsprings settlement consisting initially of the southeast quarter of Township 7, Range 6E, was settled by English, Scottish and Irish, Presbyterians and Catholics most of whom originated in Southern Ontario. According to government homestead records six families lived in the area by 1874 but eventually the settlement included some 60 families and had spread eastward encompassing much of Township 7, Range 7E in the Rural Municipality of Ste. Anne.

Thomas and William Laing, for example, settled on a river lot near Ste. Anne in 1870. They did not like the site along the river and two years later they relocated to NW12-7-6E in Clearsprings where the family has farmed ever since.

The Clearsprings and Mennonite settlers quickly established a warm and respectful relationship. Stories are told of Clearsprings settlers providing helpful advice and sometimes even loans. By 1876 Steinbach entrepreneur Abraham S. Friesen had gone into partnership with John Peterson, with the joint ownership of a threshing machine.

The Mennonites, in turn, were a Godsend to the Clearsprings settlement. Very quickly Mennonite merchants and entrepreneurs provided a host of services previously only available in Winnipeg. Clearsprings farmers obtained fire insurance coverage in the Kleine Gemeinde Brandordnung, while others borrowed money from wealthy farmers such as Abraham R. Reimer, Blumenort. Sociologist E. K. Francis has written that many of the Clearsprings pioneers learned Plaut Dietsch to facilitate doing business in Steinbach and some conversions to the Holdeman faith took place.

In 1890 the Clearsprings area was transferred

from the R. M. of LaBroguerie, which was mainly French, to Hanover, which the local residents saw as more progressive and to which they gravitated naturally in any event. In 1891 the R.M. of Hanover appointed William Mooney as road supervisor for the area and served in that capacity for many years. By the 1890s Mennonites



*William Mooney (1830-1920) homesteaded on SW14-7-6E, adjacent to P.T.H. 12 where Ste. Anne Co-op is located today. Mooney later joined the Holdeman church. Photo courtesy of Alice and Ed Laing, Steinbach/Carillon News, Dec. 23, 1949.*

# Friedensfeld.

Friedensfeld was originally a KG territory consisting of the portion of Township 6, Range 6E, south of Steinbach. It was apparently named after the village of origin in Russia of spiritual leader Rev. Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), who drowned in the Red River in 1875. Many Steinbach families owned a quarter section or two in this area. The Friedensfeld land was either stony or light sandy soil.

By 1890 German Lutheran immigrants came to the area 1890s to work for Mennonite farmers with whom they were already familiar from Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Since many of these German colonists originally came from Prussia, they were referred to as "Priesze".

By the time of the 1891 census a number of ethnic German families were listed in the East Reserve: 13-year-old Johann Riedel servant with the Jakob L. Plett family in Blumenhof, Johann Brokowsky age 33 - Steinbach, Karl Taepek age 25 - Steinbach, Johann Kriese age 33 and Rudolph Kriese age 27 - Bergthal, Wilhelm Lehman age 32 - Blumengart, Philip Agendal age 26 - Osterwick, Adam Kaiser age 33 - Hochfeld and John Wittich age 50 - Niverville. In 1895 the Jakob L. Plett family, Blumenhof, had another Prussian working for them, Clements Richter. Sometimes local farmers would go to the train station in Winnipeg looking for workers, and naturally would prefer those that could speak German.

The ethnic Germans worked for Mennonites until they had enough money to buy land of their own. In 1898 the "reserve privilege" was discontinued allowing non-Mennonites to purchase land in the East Reserve. At the same time better land was becoming available north of Steinbach in the Clearsprings settlement. KG farmers were ready to dispose of their holdings in Friedensfeld which were purchased by ethnic Germans. The Friedensfelders worked tirelessly to build up their farms and in time many became highly successful.

In 1900 the settlers of that area erected a spacious building which served as both church and school, situated on NE16-6-6E, the Schinkel homestead. In 1903 a larger worship house was constructed and the church renamed "St. Paul's Lutheran Church."



*Gustav Freund (1848-1942), Volhynia, Poland, immigrated to Canada with his family in 1900. He farmed on Section 24-6-6E. Photo courtesy of Freundschaft, page 18.*



*In 1872 William Laing homesteaded on the NW15-7-6E, a mile north of brother Thomas on the NW12-7-6E, where Laingspring Farms is located today. Photo courtesy of Alice and Ed Laing, Steinbach/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 11.*



*In 1874 Rachael Melvina Mack age 22, married William Laing and came to Clearspring as his wife. Photo courtesy of Ed and Alice Laing/Pres. No. 10, Part Two, page 11.*

# Trains, Planes, and Automobiles



The railway siding at Niverville, circa 1904. The building in the foreground is the Ogilvies warehouse, the middle part of which was built in 1882. The elevator in the middle of the photograph was built by John Wittich. The elevator was replaced with a larger one in 1938. In the rear, right side of picture is the grain elevator built by William Hespeler in 1879. Niverville, page 210.

In Russia the Mennonites had delivered their wheat and other commodities to the sea ports by oxen-driven wagon trains. By the 1860s railways were common and served most larger centres in the Black Sea area.

When the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba their first transportation was the primitive Red River ox-cart of the Metis teamsters they hired to haul baggage and freight to the Shantz immigration sheds. But in the very first year some

Mennonites already had horses.

In 1879 the railway line to Moorhead was built along the western edge of the East Reserve providing some access to world markets. Others used the Winnipeg Road which was graded the same year, transporting their goods to the City, where they marketed their grain, meat, butter, cheese and vegetable produce to a growing population.

The railway through Ste. Anne and

LaBroguerie was completed in 1892. Tradition states that Steinbach's leaders had rejected the railway, fearing it would bring a worldly influence into the community. Consequently, a station and railway siding was built at Giroux, called the "Steinbach Station". Local teamsters now hauled their produce to Giroux instead of Winnipeg, and supplies for local merchants were received there as well.

When motor trucks became available in the early 20th century they gradually replaced teams of horses. The tradition of Mennonite teamsters hauling produce to market and returning with supplies for their village continued with the evolution of three international trucking



1904 wedding of Jakob R. "J.R." Friesen (1879-1950) and Maria B. Reimer (1884-1938) representing the marriage of two of Steinbach's most powerful and wealthy families. Photo courtesy of Ralph Friesen/Pres., No. 9, Part One. page 73.



Peter K. Penner, Blumenort, started out in 1924 by hauling livestock and freight to the railway line in Giroux, driving a Model T Ford truck. In this 1984 photo, son Milton Penner and Manitoba Highways Minister John Plohman drive down the newly opened four-laned P.T.H. 12. Photo courtesy of Is there any place like it?, page 68.



*J. R. Friesen garage circa 1920. A proud array of new model A Fords ready for delivery to their purchasers. Photo by John D. Goossen, courtesy of E. R. Goossen estate.*

firms which at one time or another called Steinbach home: Reimer Express, Penner International and Southeast Big Freight.

The introduction of the automobile was strongly opposed by KG Bishop Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), Steinbach. However foul smelling and noisy the first motor vehicles may have been, such a convenience proved unstoppable. By 1914 Steinbach businessman, Jakob R. Friesen (1879-1950) obtained a Ford franchise and became the first rural Ford dealer in Western Canada. "J.R." built upon his reputation by various strategies such as the Piedenpol airplane

constructed by son Edwin and son-in-law Bill Wiebe in 1932, promoting a progressive and dynamic image.

Friesen's marketing strategies were soon outdone by another aggressive entrepreneur Abram "A.D." Penner, Blumenort, whose Steinbach car dealership rose out of the Depression-era in 1937. Penner was successful by employing a variety

of new strategies. He did everything from relentless advertising to applying a personal touch. It is said that he sealed one sale by having Mrs. Penner spell off a busy farm family by milking the cows, while Penner took them for a test drive. "A.D.", as he was called, came up with the slogan, "Steinbach the Automobile City" and later became its mayor.



*A. D. Penner and his crow, circa 1956. "A.D." used many gimmicks to attract people's attention creating the image of a successful and progressive business. Since crows were seen as scavengers, "A.D." paid people to bring in crows' eggs. This was a promotion with a lot of appeal for young country boys, thereby introducing future customers to his business. Photo courtesy of So much to celebrate, page 122.*



*The "Reimer Express Lines" trucking business grew out of the family store owned by Peter B. "Butcher" Reimer, Steinbach. Founded by son "Carload" Frank F. Reimer in 1943, it has grown into an international enterprise. Photo courtesy of Canadische Mennonit, page 94.*



# Sarto, Pansy and Trentham

Around 1900 Ukrainian settlers from Galacia moved into the area around Sarto. Pansy and Trentham in Townships 4 and 5, Range 6E, which had never been occupied by Mennonites because of poor land quality.

The Ukrainians were called “Russ’e” by the Mennonites, “Rus” being the generic word for Slav in Plaut Dietsch. These Ukrainians actually originated from Galacia which was a province of Austria-Hungary prior to WWI.

The Ukrainians in Hanover built the first Greek Catholic church in 1903. The area was originally known as “New York”, but was named Sarto in 1904 when the new post office was so named in honour of Pope Pious X del Sarto.

*Celebration at the Greek Catholic Church in Sarto, 1917. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 32.*



## The Jewish Community 1891

The Jews and Mennonites were well acquainted with each other in Imperial Russia. Itinerant peddlers and tradesmen regularly visited the Mennonite villages providing a range of services such as tailoring, shoemaking, etc. Yiddish and Plaut Dietsch were similar, allowing communication between the two cultures. Conservative and orthodox Mennonites were typically well-disposed towards the Jewish people regarding them as another tolerated minority as they were. On April 10, 1849, for example, the KG received a commendation from the Imperial Supervisory Committee for grain which they had provided the Jews, presumably as a relief effort.

It was natural that Jewish immigrants would gravitate towards people with whom they were familiar from the “old” country and who were favourably disposed towards them. The 1891 census listed five Jewish families resident in Hanover: Wolf Moskovitch - Schönwiese, Hirsch Polinowski age 40 - Niverville, Moses Goldstein age 42 - Niverville, Issac Rosen age 39 - Niverville, and Meyer Goldstein age 60 - Niverville. Several local communities such as Grunthal and Chortitz had Jewish store keepers until the 1930s. Historian Royden Loewen has written that “By 1923 there were four Jewish merchants in Steinbach...[including] Balthasar Cherry.”

Jewish peddlars serviced the Hanover Steinbach area until the 1940s. Maria Friesen, Osterwick, remembered the Jewish peddlars fondly: “She was particularly fascinated with Max Shuckstra, the farmer Jew as he was known. He came on the yard with a high covered wagon



*Moses Goldstein family. L-r. Standing: Dina (Walch) married in Niverville, Harry (died 1910), Sarah (1885-1952) Meltzer, Esther (Mrs. Herman Yacht). Seated: Mr. and Mrs. Moses and Rivka Goldstein, baby Hilda (Mrs. Jim Nolan). Lower left is daughter Grace (Mrs. Jim Nolan). Moses Goldstein came to Canada in 1883. The family farmed on SE28-7-4E. Photo courtesy of Niverville, page 116.*

drawn by a horse. He took money, eggs, or chickens in exchange for his goods. Mom would stock up on materials, etc....” *Heritage Collections: New Bothwell*, page 187.

The Jewish peddlars knew in which homes they were welcome. The children of Abraham L. Plett, Blumenhof, remembered how father’s friend would pull on the yard, seemingly ex-

actly at dusk. After he had eaten and spent an enjoyable evening visiting with father, Plett’s daughters made his bed in the “grott’e sctoave” (the great room) where he reposed for the night.

The Jewish community in Hanover did not take root as it did in Winkler and Altona in the West Reserve, possibly because of the proximity to Jewish cultural amenities in Winnipeg.

# Expansion

From the time of its first settlement the East Reserve has been one of the most densely populated rural areas in the Province of Manitoba. The initial population of 4000 was significantly reduced by the secondary migration of 1800 Bergthalers to the Altona area in 1878 to 1881. In 1881 the population was 2362 which increased to 3438 by 1901. It was natural, therefore, that many would soon be looking elsewhere for land for their growing families.

The most immediate source of additional land was in areas adjacent to the eight townships of the East Reserve. By the 1890s, Chortitzers were expanding beyond the northern periphery of the reserve, establishing the villages of Silberfeld and Reinland in the R. M.s of Tache and Richot. They also expanded in the southwest, as villagers in Gnadenfeld purchased additional land in the R.M. of DeSalaberry.

In 1892 the Holdemans moved out of Blumenort and expanded into Greenland in the R.M. of Ste. Anne. This was originally Metis script land and referred to as the "Brittie Shtapp". The Holdemans were also among the most active purchasers of farms in the eastern portion of the Clearsprings settlement, reflecting that they were more assimilated and comfortable dealing with the Anglo-Saxons.

At the same time, KG farmers in Blumenort and Steinbach were purchasing land in the western part of the Clearsprings settlement, which had initially separated the two communities. The KG also expanded into the Krim east of Blumenort in the R. M. of Ste. Anne, and later also into the Ekron area to the east and south of Steinbach, in the R. M. of LaBroquerie. In 1917 a decision was made to purchase large tracts of land in Prairie Rose, now known as Landmark in the R. M. of Tache.

The population of Hanover Steinbach also increased as new immigrants, such as the Soberings, Riegers and Krebs from Holland and Hungary, moved to the area, attracted by employment opportunities.



The Peter F. Thiessen yard in "De Krim" (Section 29-7-7E), 1905. Peter F. Thiessen (1859-1937) came to Manitoba from Jansen, Nebraska, in 1889 to marry the daughter of Johann S. Janzen. In this photo Peter F. Thiessen, leaning against the buggy, is visiting with brother-in-law Johann P. Janzen (1868-1934), Blumenhof. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer; Steinbach Post, May 25, 1965, page 6.

# Colonization

Others settlers looked further afield for land and economic opportunities, beginning a process of colonization. The result has been a diaspora which has seen thousands of East Reserve people moving elsewhere to establish new homes and communities.

Many Chortitzers moved to Lowe Farm, Manitoba, and even further, to the Hague-Osler Reserve, Saskatchewan in the 1890s. Around 1905 another Chortitzer movement took place to Herbert and Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Rev. Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933), Schönthal, was the minister in charge of coordinating this resettlement.

At the same time, a dozen or so KG farmers moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1905. The KG never organized a congregation there al-



Dyan Cannon Friesen. Although her family never lived in the East Reserve, she had countless relatives here. The famous movie actress is part of the Bergthal diaspora. Photo courtesy of Ben Friesen/ Pres. No. 12, page 31.

The physical expansion beyond the borders of the East Reserve enlarged the cultural territory of the original settlement. This was later recognized by the borders of regional institutions such as the Hanover School Division and the Bethesda Hospital, and in other activities such as telephone calling districts.

though Aeltester Peter R. Dueck, Steinbach, did visit the settlement to serve communion. The Holdemans expanded to Swalwell (Linden), Alberta in 1905 where they established a highly successful settlement.

A decade later a number of KG families from Blumenhof moved to Satanta, Kansas. In 1917, a group of Holdeman families from Greenland, Blumenhof and Steinbach moved to Littlefield, Texas, but soon came back because of the extreme war hysteria.

The most successful colonization took place in 1926 and 1927 when 1156 Chortitzers "exiled" from Hanover Steinbach settled in Paraguay. They established the Menno Colony, which has become a model agricultural community of 95 villages with a population of 8000 and 420,000 hectares of land.

In addition, thousands of families over the past century have emigrated from the East Reserve on an individual basis, moving to places like Abbotsford (B.C.), St. Catherines (Ontario), Fresno (California), and many other places. This included, for example, individuals such as Leonard Dueck (1902-52), grandson of Grünfeld school teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87), who founded "Dueck Motors" in Vancouver in the 1920s, currently the largest G.M. dealership in Canada.

The totality of the Hanover Steinbach diaspora, that is, those people who once lived here and all their descendants, is well in the range of 50,000 people. This would include, for example, practically all of the modern-day descendants of the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia.



John Denver (1943-1997), famous folk singer, had numerous relatives in the East Reserve, being related to the Kleine Gemeinde Koops, Muntau, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Pres. No. 12, page 13.



Leonard Dueck (1902-1954). Founded "Dueck Motors" Vancouver, currently the largest GM dealership in Canada. Leonard was the grandson of Peter L. Dueck (1842-1887), Grünfeld, teacher. Photo courtesy of son David C. Dueck, Vancouver.

# Village Dissolution, 1910

Eventually the 59 traditional villages and hamlets identified in 1891 were disbanded and families moved on “onto the land” on their own individual quarter sections. The dissolution of the villages marked the end of the Strassendorf period and the beginning of North American style communities, followed by rapid acculturation.

Blumenhof, a small KG village of 12 farmers located three miles north of Steinbach, was the first village to dissolve in 1887. Some of the smaller villages in Township 4, Range 7E, south of Niverville, such as Strassberg, Pastwa and Schantzenberg, appear to have been disbanded around this time as well.

In Steinbach, Mayor Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937) worked tirelessly to survey the village, a process completed with the registration of plan 1711 at the Winnipeg Land Titles Office in 1911. This allowed each business person and home owner along main street to obtain individual title to their own property creating a stimulus for commercial and business development.

The village as a form of social organization in the East Reserve never achieved the status of an inviolate part of the traditional culture and faith as it did in parts of the West Reserve. The proponents of disbanding the villages were the ministers themselves, often the larger farmers who recognized the advantages of moving out to their farmsteads, having all their land in one place and adjacent to their farmyards, and having their own title for financing purposes.

Alt-Bergfeld in the southwest corner of the East Reserve was unique as the only village which continued in the old ways until the 1920s when the villagers decided as a community to emigrate to Paraguay.

All of the presently existing hamlets and communities in the East Reserve area, with the exception of Steinbach, were relocated to some extent during the process of dissolution of the Strassendorf villages.

By the 1890s some individual farmyards appeared in Hanover. The “winckje hus” or “L-



*Prosperous farmyards soon dotted the East Reserve landscape after the dissolution of the Strassendorf villages. The farmyard of former Strassburg teacher Cornelius C. F. Toews (1867-1928) on SW4-7-4E. Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett, Landmark, Pres., No. 8, Part One, page 16.*

shaped house” often connected to the barn via an intermediary building such as a summer kitchen or milk house replaced the traditional housebarn. By the turn of the century houses were detached and large square two-story homes became popular with the more established farmers and business people. Board siding, painted white for houses and red for barns, replaced cedar shingles, giving the new farm yards and hamlets a brighter look.

By 1910 almost all of the Strassendorf villages had been dissolved. Typically a few older retired couples continued to live in the former village sites until they passed on. By the present day only few remnants such as old abandoned cemeteries remain of these once thriving communities. Ironically,

Steinbach the most commercialized of the various communities, most fully reflected the continuity of a farm village, located as it is, diagonally, parallel to a creek.



*Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915) house built in “old” Blumenort in 1889. It was moved to the SE28-7-6E when the village dissolved in 1910. After his death in 1915 the property was purchased by son David P. Reimer (1894-1963), who became the Bishop of the Blumenort Church in 1948. The house was used until the 1960s. The house illustrates the use of cedar shakes as an early sheathing material. Photo courtesy of Martin P. Penner, Ridgewood/Plett*



*Circa 1902. The farmyard of Heinrich B. Neufeld (1853-1931), Ebenfeld area. Heinrich B. Neufeld homestead on SW4-7-6E 1 1/2 miles west of Steinbach on P.T.H. 52 where Dr. Paul Peters lives today. L. to r: Jakob B. Neufeld family; Heinrich B. Neufelds with Sarah, and Peter Neufeld, son of Jakob B. Neufeld holding the horses. Photo courtesy of Audrey Toews, Steinbach/Pres., No. 11, page 66.*



# 1900-1910



Johann E. Funk (1878-1968), Chortitz, married Barbara Wiebe, daughter of deacon Johann D. Wiebe (1853-1909), Chortitz, and granddaughter of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900). Funk was active in his community as a photographer, and started the Chortitz telephone exchange in 1912. Funk was one of the first in the area to own an automobile and often called upon for rides. One of his major lines was the building of trailers from which he got the nickname "trailer Funk". Heritage Collections, page 233-234. Photo courtesy of Linda Buhler, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, page 41.

In many ways life in the first decade of the 20th century continued relatively unchanged. Young people in the villages gathered in groups



Continued economic growth especially in the farm sector resulted in employment opportunities which brought new immigrants. Eva Berger (1884-1966) came from Karlsdorf, Hungary in 1903 and worked in Winnipeg as a maid. In 1907 she married Sebastian Rieger and came to Steinbach where they founded "Riegers Clothing." Photo courtesy of Henry Rieger, Steinbach/Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 61.

on Sunday, and in their spare time, to socialize. Ball teams from one village challenged teams in neighbouring villages, often evidencing considerable rivalry between communities.

Photography became a common--albeit frowned upon--avocation as local photographers such as Peter H. Guenther, Steinbach, and Johann E. Funk, Chortitz, mastered the art. Some East Reserve residents, particularly the KG, continued to regard photographs as being worldly and did not sanction the practice.

Local residents of means travelled frequently, usually under auspices of visiting relatives in sister settlements. KG members visited their co-religionists in Rosentort (Manitoba); Jansen (Nebraska); and Inman (Kansas). Chortitzers visited sister



1900. Gerhard F. Giesbrecht married Elisabeth T. Loewen, daughter of Steinbach businessman Cornelius B. Loewen. In 1907 the couple decided to go west to Lanigin, Saskatchewan, to homestead. By 1909 they returned to Steinbach purchasing the Anderson farm in Clear Springs, SE12-7-6E. They built a spacious new two-story house in 1917. Giesbrecht later became a minister of the Holdeman Church. Photo courtesy of daughter Mrs. Ben D. Penner, Steinbach/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 73.

settlements in Mountain Lake (Minnesota); and Hague-Osler and Herbert (Saskatchewan). After the death of his first wife in 1912, Steinbach entrepreneur Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916) went on a six-month journey across North America visiting relatives and friends.

But under the surface many changes were brewing. Within a few short years innovations such as the automobile, radio, airplane, and the computer would completely alter the tranquil pastoral life of the East Reserve.



Local residents of means were travelling all over North America. In 1907 Peter R. Friesen (1872-1933) and wife Margaretha Kornelsen Friesen (1884-1948), visited the Cawston Ostrich Farm, California, with their four daughters. Friesen was wearing his trademark bowler hat. Both Friesen and his wife came from prominent local families: he was the son of Abraham S. Friesen and, she, the daughter of pioneer teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen. In the 1920s Friesen returned to Steinbach and started Modern Groceries, later purchased by Jake Penner and renamed "Penner Foods." Photo courtesy of Ralph Friesen, Winnipeg/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 71.

# World War One, 1914-18

World War One heralded a boom period for Hanover Steinbach as it did for the rest of Canada. Wheat prices shot up to \$3.00 per bushel and farmers reported buying land one year and paying for it with the profits of next year's crop. These profits also provided cash for rapid mechanization, as farmers purchased Titan tractors and Oil-pulls, replacing horses and outdated steam-engines. Farms continued to grow and some operations increased to 1000 acres and even more.

Mennonite leaders such as Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933), Schönthal, and Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), Steinbach, worked tirelessly to maintain the integrity of the promises and guarantees eagerly given by the Dominion Government in 1873. Mennonite young men were automatically granted exemption certificates from military service as guaranteed by the Dominion Government in 1873. But all men of military age had to be registered. The government pressed local residents for money, which was paid, after being promised that it would be used for widows and orphans and not for the war effort.



Aganetha Fast and siblings 1917. L. to r. Ben, Tien, Anna, Margaret, Henry, Agnes, and brother-in-law John Friesen. Standing in the rear behind the buggy is brother David Fast who served in the Canadian Army and was severely gassed on the Front lines in France. The photograph was probably taken while he was home on leave. Photo courtesy of nephew Cornie Fast, Blumenort/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 38.



Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933) and Mrs. Doerksen, nee Katharina Dueck (1860-1943), Schönthal. Together with brothers, Abraham, Aeltester of the Sommerfelder in the West Reserve, and David, Aeltester of the Bergthaler in Saskatchewan, Heinrich worked tirelessly for his people, making various journeys on their behalf, including Ottawa. Heinrich maintained a diary starting in the 1880s and continuing into the 1920s which when translated and made available for research may well change the way Chortitzer people see themselves. Photo courtesy of grandson Rev. William Rempel, Niverville.



1918. Franz K. Reimer (1903-77) lied in order to enlist at the age of 14. He was wounded in active duty in France. Franz was the son of Steinbach pioneer merchant Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906). Photo courtesy of son Bob Brandt, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 9.

A few local men such as Franz K. Reimer (1903-77), Steinbach, served in the armed forces. Several were killed in action in France, including Jakob H. Kornelsen (1898-1917), from Rosenort, killed at Vimy Ridge, and Peter W. Friesen (1895-1917), originally from Steinbach, killed and buried in Flanders Fields. David Fast (1881-1968), son of pioneer teacher Cornelius W. Fast (1840-1927), was severely gassed in the trenches in France. Peter (1895-1923) and John Dueck (1897-1921), grandsons of Grünfeld teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87) joined the American Army and were gassed in France and died from their injuries.

The war also impacted through the influenza which struck the Hanover Steinbach area in its aftermath in 1918. Local nurse Aganetha Fast (1883-1977) worked valiantly and at great risk to her own life to nurse those afflicted. Aganetha Fast has been referred to as the "Florence Nightingale of Steinbach."

With the affluence of WWI came the automobile and telephone both of which caused consternation to conservative leaders concerned about the impact this would have on the spiritual values of their parishioners.



# Schools 1916-27.

Population increases by immigration into Manitoba after 1880 insured Anglo-Canadian domination of the political system. A concerted effort followed to anglicize the province. The Manitoba Act of 1870 had also established funding for denominational schools. The Public Schools Act in 1890 abolished it and the use of French, German and other tongues, as the languages of instruction. The Chortitzer were not directly affected as they had deregistered their schools in 1880.

A huge controversy erupted as the French battled what they regarded as an underhanded attempt to anglicize them. After years of political fighting the Greenway - Laurier compromise was reached in 1898. Schools with 10 or more pupils with a language other than English, could now use that language in a bilingual system.

In 1906 the "Flag Issue" shocked the Mennonite denominational school system. The idea of flying the Union Jack smacked of militarism to these pacifists, an indication that their upmost loyalty was now to be to the Crown and not to God. Rather than acquiesce to such measures even the KG deregistered their schools. A split occurred in Steinbach where the more assimilated Holdeman and Brüdertaler churches insisted on a registered district school. The result was that the KG established their own private school in Steinbach which operated from 1911-19.

Matters worsened as Canada entered the war against Germany in 1914. Anti-German and anti-pacifist sentiment became mass hysteria as politicians and newspaper reporters flamed the fires of paranoia and ignorance.

In 1916 the Liberal Government of T. C. Norris came to power. They acted immediately to abolish the Laurier-Greenway compromise and made it unlawful to use languages other than English. The Hanover area suffered other oppressive measures and discrimination. In 1917 Mennonites were disenfranchised and their newspapers such as the *Steinbach Post* closed and allowed to publish only in English as a "threat" to national security. In September 1918 a troop of soldiers descended upon Steinbach arresting citizens who could not produce "Military Registration Cards".

Further legislation was enacted allowing the Government to establish public schools in areas "not adequately served". The school districts were imposed in Mennonite areas at the expense of local taxpayers. When the parents refused to send their children to these schools they were fined and imprisoned. According to one report, 2018 cases were referred to the police for prosecution in Manitoba in 1921. Another source states that at one point six Mennonite ministers were jailed in Winnipeg for counselling their parishioners to abide by the freedoms guaranteed by the Federal Government in 1873.

One can imagine the fear and anguish which gripped the hearts of God-fearing mothers as Sheriff's officers and armed police stormed various farmyards across southern Manitoba seiz-



*Part of the emigration from Chortitz, Manitoba, to Paraguay. Emigrants in St. Pierre on their way to the Carey train station. Photo courtesy of Dick F. Wiebe, Ste. Annes/Pres., No. 7, page 10.*

ing goods to satisfy fines and imprisoning innocent victims of a government intent on implementing a policy of forcible Anglo-conformity.

Numerous petitions from the Mennonites were made to the provincial governments in which they declared their readiness to compromise, to bring their schools to Department of Education standards. The government position was firm--they wanted to make "little Englishmen" out of the Mennonite children.

The government did not budge. The result was the "exile" of almost 10,000 Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba to Latin America, including some of Canada's most progressive farmers. The Mennonite population in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in 1921 was 42,000.

The impact in Hanover was the emigration of 1156 Chortitzer people, possibly a sixth of the total, to Paraguay in 1926 and 1927. In Alt-Bergfeld, a picturesque village southwest of Grünthal, the villagers decided to emigrate *en masse*. Hundreds of Chortitzers perished from diseases in Puerto Casado while they waited to get onto their land.

The KG were also inclined to emigrate but seemingly could not agree on an appropriate destination. Although some favoured Mexico, various delegations were sent to Quebec, but when appropriate cultural and religious safeguards could not be negotiated the emigration fever died down for the time being.

The economic loss to Canada from the 150,000 descendants of the 10,000 "exiles" presently in Latin America, could be as high as three billion dollars annually. A tragic example of social engineering gone awry.

This was the end of the denominational school systems in Hanover Steinbach and the beginning of district schools. It also marked a period of forced Anglicization and cultural accommodation. Many local people now saw themselves as second class citizens. With the transition from one culture to another, educational standards plummeted so that those educated in the district schools of the 1920s were barely

literate in either language. It was only with the university educated generation of the 1960s and 70s that literary levels in English of local youth were elevated to that of their great-grandparents in German.



*Katharina Falk Braun in her coffin, pictured with grieving husband and children, March 24, 1927. She was one of several hundred victims of a government which had turned its back on the solemn guarantees it had given in 1873 to her grandparents promising perpetual religious freedom. Photo courtesy of Ernest Braun, Niverville/Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 46.*

## Anglo-conformity.

Anglo-conformity is the social premise whereby all ethnic and minority groups (including French and Aborigines) in Canada were judged by how quickly and diligently they adopted Anglo-Canadian culture, values and mores. The racist philosophy was based on writings such as *Strangers at Our Gates*, published in 1909 by social-gospeller J. S. Woodsworth.



# Russländer, 1923-29.

Just as some Mennonites were preparing to leave the East Reserve, or better said, were being “exiled” by the Provincial Government, others were desperately happy to be allowed entry into Canada.

On August 20, 1923 the people of Hanover Steinbach welcomed the first group of 95 Russländer into their midst at the railway station in Giroux. A total of 20,000 Mennonites managed to escape from the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the revolution, civil war and a period of anarchy, arriving in Canada between 1923 and 1929.



*Katharine Vogt (1894-1966) and Arnold Dyck (1889-1970) on their engagement in 1918. They came to Steinbach in 1923 together with the Katharina's mother and siblings. Photo courtesy of Roy Vogt, ed., A Vogt Family History (Winnipeg, 1994), page 100.*

Hundreds of these families came to the East Reserve and stayed for a month or two, or over the winter, until they were able to go on to other opportunities. A number of families stayed permanently in the area, generally settling in pockets where the majority of Chortitzers had or were emigrating to Paraguay, particularly in the Grünthal, Niverville and Chortitz districts. Among the immigrants was Arnold Dyck, renowned writer and Low German humorist who purchased the *Steinbach Post* from Jakob S. Friesen in 1924.

No systematic study has been done regarding the exact numbers of Russländer families who passed through Hanover Steinbach, or of those who stayed.

Many Russländer families quickly became well established and made significant contributions to local culture and the economy.

The Russländer immigration also brought two new church denominations to the area. The Brüdergemeinde or Mennonite Brethren established congregations in Steinbach and Niverville. The “Kirchliche” (literally the churched), later known as the General Conference, established congregations in Steinbach, Niverville and Grunthal.

Significant cultural differences had developed between those Mennonites who had come to Manitoba in the 1870s, known as “Kanadier” (Canadians), and those who came in the 1920s, known as Russländer (Russians). Some of the Russländer had obtained higher education and coming from a quasi-feudal society, regarded themselves as more refined. Some thought of the Kanadier as being boorish, illiterate and of a lower class. The Kanadier thought of the



*1927, William Dyck and Anna Reimer. William Dyck (1903-71) emigrated to Canada in 1924. In 1926 he married Anna Reimer (1903-89). After various endeavours in Saskatchewan and Alberta the Dyck family returned to Manitoba and settling in Niverville in 1932. Together with his family William founded “Wm. Dyck & Sons,” one of Niverville's largest employers. Photo courtesy of son-in-law Alex Fast, Niverville, Manitoba.*

Russländer as being snobbish, lazy and incompetent farmers, and tired of listening to their endless stories of a paradise lost in the old country. Some of these caricatures were dramatically portrayed in the “Koop and Bua” stories written by writer Arnold Dyck.



*Gerhard S. Derksen (1887-1957) and Maria Unger (1889-1977), emigrated to Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1923. In 1932 the family moved to Steinbach at the invitation of friend Arnold Dyck and purchased the printery four years later. Photo Steinbach: So much to Celebrate, page 113.*



*Passport photograph. David D. Enns and Margaretha Franz Enns and daughters Katharina 8, Barbara 6, Mary 2 and Margarethe 5 emigrated from Russia in 1924. They settled in Dominion City, moving to Grunthal in 1927. Bob Banman, former Provincial Cabinet minister is the son of Barbara Enns Barnman. Photo courtesy of Margaret Thiessen Rempel, R.R.1, Ste. Annes, Manitoba.*

# The Roaring '20s.

The 1920s are often referred to as “the roaring '20s”, a time when people let loose after the restraint and privations of the war years. It also marked the beginning of a time of greater openness after the restrictiveness of the Victorian era of puritanical mores.

World War One had ended with a period of great prosperity as manufacturers and farmers cashed in on an unsatiable demand for their products. New farm machinery was everywhere to be seen as farmers purchased modern “old-pulls”, Titans, and Internationals, to replace out-moded steam engines and horses.

Commodity prices remained high for the first years of the decade but soon started falling. By 1925 Blumenhof farmer Abraham L. Plett complained in a letter about low prices and that they had decided to slaughter an additional cow for themselves as the prices were so low it did not pay to ship to market.

In Steinbach the Heinrich W. Reimer enterprises continued to dominate the main street retail trade, while down the street cousin J. R. Friesen, and competitor Peter T. Loewen, were blazing new trails in the car business.

Automobiles had become a common sight on the highways and bi-ways of Hanover Steinbach. With the twin deaths of Aeltester Peter R. Dueck and businessman Jakob W. Reimer in 1918 and 1919, respectively, even the conservative KG decided to allow automobiles, provided they were not too gaudy, so that bumpers and wheels, for example, had to be painted black.

The dislocation caused by the “Great War” and new methods of communication such as the radio resulted in a much greater openness in rural

communities across North America and Hanover Steinbach was no exception. This resulted in a new interest in things of the world and in education. In 1929 Abraham H. Wiebe, son of Alt-

Bergfeld teacher Jakob Wiebe (1835-1914), became the first resident of the East Reserve to obtain a doctoral degree.



“Still courting in the upstairs parlour” 1920. Anna H. W. Reimer (1886-1958) and younger sister Margaret, Mrs. Henry T. Kroeker (1902-67) in the flower of their womanhood, 1920. The sisters appropriately represented the women of the East Reserve, their father Heinrich W. Reimer being of Kleine Gemeinde merchant stock, and their mother Anna Wiebe, being the daughter of Jacob Wiebe, Alt-Bergfeld, a Berghaler/Chortitzer career teacher. Photo courtesy of niece Elizabeth Reimer Bartel, Courtenay, B.C./Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 1.



1890 Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936), Vollwerk (Mitchell) became a prosperous farmer. Although he was a progressive and generous man, he refused to purchase a motor car, reflecting the thinking of many folks in the area. Jacob's grandson, Harry Peters, owned “Peters Auto Sales” in Steinbach in the 1980's. Photo courtesy of George D. Peter, Steinbach.



Local residents enjoyed travelling. 1921, Anna Toews Reimer, (left) and John H. W. Reimer (holding oldest daughter Naomi), and sister Margaretha W. Reimer (later Mrs. Henry T. Kroeker), visiting Pike's Peak, Colorado. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Reimer Bartel, Courtenay, B.C./Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 40.



The H. W. Reimer house built in 1911 and its choice location on Steinbach's main street, where the Steinbach Credit Union is located today, reflected the prominent position of the family in the 1920s. To the right is visible the housebarn built by Klaas R. Reimer, pioneer merchant, 1881 and destroyed by fire in 1936. Photo courtesy of Adeline Kroeker, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, Part One, page 45.



Church at Chortitz, 1920s. View from the cemetery looking north. Most of the vehicles are buggies. Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 38.



The first Fordson tractor plowing demonstration held at Chortitz in 1918 on the David Hiebert farm. J. R. Friesen is on the tractor. The advent of the farm tractor became a contentious issue. It was argued a tractor would pack the land too severely as well as pollute the soil with waste lubricants whereas hores spread valuable fertilizer. Mechanically, the first gas tractors were perhaps quite well designed but ignition and carburation were not developed to the degree where they would start reliably. Photo courtesy Jac. P. Rempel/Reflections, page 198.



1928 Pontiac, the only car ever owned by Peter P. Friesen (1890-1965). In 1948 Peter P. Friesen and his family moved to Bergthal, Paraguay. Photo courtesy of Niverville: A History, page 111.





*Heinrich W. Reimer (1864-1941). His retail 17,600 square foot store in Steinbach was the largest in rural Manitoba for several decades. It was demolished in 1963 after being in business for 77 years. Photo courtesy of Naomi Lepp, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, Part One, page 44.*



*Abraham L. Plett's 10/20 Titan oil-drive purchased in 1918. It was one of the first modern tractors in the Hanover Steinbach area. Operating the tractor is son Peter A. Plett (1898-1990), later Landmark deacon. Photo courtesy of Peter A. Plett, Landmark/Blumenort, page 347.*



*Notwithstanding that she was of Bergthaler/Chortitzer origin, Mrs. H. W. Reimer, nee Anna Wiebe (1866-1932), was much beloved as the matriarch of Steinbach. It was reported that over 1,000 people, many of whom she had befriended over the years, attended her funeral in 1932. Photo courtesy of Naomi Lepp, Steinbach/Pres., No. 7, Part One, page 44.*



*1918. Peter W. Siemens, Rosenort, visiting at his in-laws, Jakob L. Pletts, Blumenhof, with his new truck. Photo courtesy Blumenort, page 346.*

# The Depression.

The World War One boom had petered out by 1922, and commodity prices dropped steadily. The stock market crash of 1929 heralded that this was more than a serious economic downturn. Drought years followed and windstorms created dustbowl conditions on the prairies. Hanover Steinbach was spared the worst ravages being snuggled into the forests and bushland of southeastern Manitoba. Although more open, the land in the northern parts of the reserve was heavier, less susceptible to soil drifting, while the south was generally treed and suitable to subsistence farming.

The mixed farming economy of the Hanover Steinbach area also shielded it to some degree, with greater diversity of products. Many of the most prosperous farms of the present were started during these lean years, as innovative young men looked for survival strategies. For some this meant specializing in new areas such as poultry and turkeys.

In 1932 cheese factories were again opened in Blumenort, Steinbach, Ebenfeld and New Bothwell, in response to the plummeting fluid milk prices. With the exception of Medo-Land in Grunthal, the cheese factories of this period were operated by farmer owned co-operatives. Medo-Land, Grunthal, and New Bothwell, are the only two cheese factories still in production.

The East Reserve became a refuge for others from elsewhere where economic conditions were

more desperate, "...literally scores of unemployed were shipped from across the Red River to Hanover..." where they were employed on public works projects. One of the major accomplishments of the period was the completion of the Piney Highway, 13 miles of road connecting Steinbach to Winnipeg in 1931-32, via Highway 59. Between 100 to 150 teams and 200 men worked on the two and one-half year project.

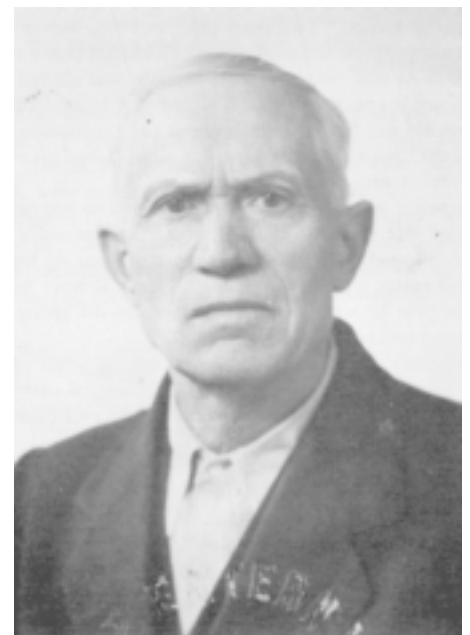
The road to Zhoda was cleared in 1938.

Some new residents such as the Gerhard Doerksen family from Rush Lake, Saskatchewan, soon were among Steinbach's most prosperous entrepreneurs owning the *Steinbach Post*. A group of Bergthaler from the West Reserve settled in the Edenthal (Spenser) area south of Grunthal where many soon became well established, specializing in poultry.

Many of today's most prosperous businesses grew out of the economic necessities of the depression. The co-operative movement was strong during the depression and most present-day co-operatives and credit unions had their roots in this period. The East Reserve was more entrepreneurial than the West Reserve, reflecting the Molotschna roots of the KG. As a result, the co-op movement never achieved the



*Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970) was elected as Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde in March 1932. He served in this office for thirty years, an unequalled legacy within his community. He was the grandson of the famed Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) Photo courtesy of daughter Mrs. George Funk, New Bothwell/Pres., No. 6, page 9.*



*Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), Blumenort, was elected as Aeltester of the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde in 1926 and served until 1948 when he led 100 conservative families of his denomination to Mexico. Peter P. Reimer was the great-grandson of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), KG founder. Photo courtesy of Blumenort, page 422.*



*Cornelius T. Loewen (1888-1960) as a young man, circa 1908. In 1905 "C. T." started his lumber business on Main Street, which evolved into one of Steinbach's financial empires. Photo courtesy of C. T. Loewen & Sons 75 Anniversary, page 6.*



*This photograph of what is now P.R. 205 through Sarto demonstrates the state of most roads in Hanover Steinbach during the 1930s and later. Any rain turned rural and even main roads into quagmires. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 134.*



October 7, 1933. The KG church at the south end of Main Street, Steinbach, the funeral of Abraham T. Kroeker. Most of the vehicles by now are model "As". Photo by Jakob D. Barkman, Steinbach, courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 70.

significance that it did on the West Reserve.

In March 1932, Peter S. Wiebe (1888-1970), son of deacon Johann D. Wiebe (1853-1909), and grandson of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz, was elected as Aeltester of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, serving in that office until 1962. Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), Blumenort, was elected as KG Aeltester in 1926. Both men were conservative intellectuals who sought to steer the middle ground between those wanting to adopt American Fundamentalist religious culture and others who wanted to abide by the old ways. Under their devoted leadership the traditional communities of Hanover Steinbach provided for those hardest hit by the ravages of the depression--widows, orphans, refugees and the poor.

Some individuals had invested heavily in land during the 1920s and were unable to pay when values fell drastically. Cornelius B. Loewen (1863-1928) had purchased 640 acres in Isle des Chenes and new equipment and lost heavily as a result of falling commodity prices. At the same time, son Cornelius T. Loewen (1883-1960) had built his lumber enterprise into a booming concern. By the 1930s "C.T." had become one of the dominant forces on Steinbach's Main Street, known for his unending ability to help those in

need by extending credit on materials for building construction and loans.

For most of western Canada, the 1930s were "the dirty 30s". This did not hold true for Hanover Steinbach. Some people lost their farms

because of the recession, and all had tough going, but by and large fared reasonably well compared to the rest of North America.



Winter roads. Hanover 100 Years, page 137.



1939. The Hanover Co-op Dairy Society cheese factory at Ebenfeld, SE8-7-6E. It was situated one mile northeast of Mitchell, where the Steinbach lagoon is located today. The Ebenfeld cheese factory operated from 1936 to 1946. A Co-op store was operated in conjunction with the cheese factory. Photo courtesy of Historical Sketches, page 118.



Road building in the Steinbach area in the 1920s. This dredge was owned by "Fast Brothers" of Kleefeld--Henry D. Fast, George S. Fast and Neil S. Fast. Drainage was a perennial problem throughout the Hanover Steinbach area until the construction of the Manning Canal in 1908 and the Tourond drain, cutting across Hanover from the Sarto corner on P.T.H.12 to Kleefeld and west to Otterburne. Photo courtesy of Is there any place like it? page 22.



# World War Two 1939-1945.

World War Two was a boom period in Hanover Steinbach for business and agriculture. Commodity prices never reached the highs of World War One but yields were good. Specialization of the poultry industry became significant during the 1940s and by 1976 Hanover had 14% of the laying hens, 22% of the pullets, 41% of the broilers and 20% of turkeys produced in the Province.

The conscientious objectors or C.O.s in Hanover Steinbach were generally permitted to serve their time in public works camps planting trees or in essential industries such as forestry or farm work. Many worked in local forestry operations such as "Plett & Co." of Blumenort which operated lumber camps at Vassar and Roblin, employing as many as 150 men during the war years.

An Aeltesten Committee was formed by the conservative Mennonite churches in Manitoba which worked hard to insure that the rights of the conscientious objectors, as guaranteed by the Dominion Government in 1873, where at least to some extent recognized. The members of this committee from the Steinbach Hanover

area included David P. Reimer (1894-1963), Blumenort, Jakob F. Barkman (1883-1949), Steinbach, and Rev. Cornelius W. Friesen (1901-1975), Osterwick.

Many men of Mennonite background joined the armed forces and served their country with gallantry. No study to date has been done on exactly how many men joined, service joined, types of service and total casualties.



*Ernie Goossen (1926-1985) visiting family and friends in Steinbach, probably 1945. He is wearing his navy uniform, probably he put it on at the coaxing of his sisters. Ernie served on a Corvette in the Canadian Navy seeing active service in the North Atlantic as well as the Caribbean. In 1951 Ernie returned to Steinbach and took over his father's conveyancing practice. Photo courtesy of Hilton Friesen, 280 Henderson Hwy, Winnipeg, R2L 1M2.*



*The Roblin, Manitoba, lumber camp of "Plett & Co.," Blumenort. Hundreds of East Reserve boys performed their "C.O." service here. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Willy Dueck, Arborg/Blumenort, page 318.*



*David H. Hiebert (1923-44), one of hundreds of men from the Hanover Steinbach area who served in the armed forces. David H. Hiebert was killed in action November 3, 1944. Photo courtesy of Hiebert Heritage, page 142.*



*Jakob Klippenstein (1920-44) killed in action. Photo courtesy of Hiebert Heritage, page 63.*



*Members of the Aeltesten Committee worked hard to encourage their youth to remain true to their faith and conscience. In this photo members of the Aeltesten Committee are visiting a C. O. camp. L-r: David P. Reimer, Blumenort, Jakob F. Barkman, Steinbach, David Schulz, representing the Bergthaler from Altona, and deacon Jakob Bartel. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Memories (2d), page 232.*

# Post-War Years.

By the end of World War Two, Hanover Steinbach had become a much more pluralistic society. The war had opened the community to the outside world, with hundreds of local boys serving in the military. Local entrepreneurs had realized that opportunities were no longer limited to their home area and that a great deal of trade could be attracted from elsewhere by aggressive advertising and promotion.

The year 1948 was an important year in Hanover Steinbach. During the war years many Mennonites had felt impinged and threatened with respect to their civil liberties and religious freedoms. They were concerned that the guarantees given by the Federal Government in 1873 were not being met.

The result was an emigration movement in 1948 among both Chortitzers and KG: 750 Chortitzers from the R.M. of Hanover emigrated to Paraguay where they founded the Bergthal Colony, consisting of seven villages with 11,000 hectares of land. With a population of 1870 in 1995 Bergthal has become one of the wealthiest settlements in Paraguay; 100 KG families immigrated to Northern Mexico where they founded



Photo taken of the 1949 Silver Jubilee celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Steinbach: 40 Years, page 26; see also Mennonite Memories (1974), page 172, and (2d)(1977), page 26.

the Quellen Colony settlement near Cuauthemoc. The current population is 1250. In 1958 a secondary migration resulted in the establishment of Spanish Lookout in Belize, Central America, also with a current population of 1250.

The emigration of some 250 conservative families from the Hanover Steinbach area opened the door to increasing assimilation and greater outside influence.

At the same time Hanover Steinbach again experienced an influx of Mennonite immigrants from Europe. During the retreat of the German army from Russia in 1944, 35,000 Mennonites managed to escape from the Soviet inferno where as many as 50,000 had suffered death from unnatural causes since the Revolution in 1917. 23,000 were later forcibly repatriated in box cars to the Gulag in Siberia. Another 8000 of these refugees were able to find new homes in Canada between 1947 and 1951.

Sponsors in Hanover Steinbach signed commitments for employment and sustenance for many refugee families who settled in the area. No statistics have been compiled to date regarding the exact number of these refugees passing through the region nor of those who settled here.

In 1949 Hanover Steinbach Mennonites celebrated the 75th anniversary of the settlement. This followed earlier celebrations in

1934 and 1923.

Electrification of Hanover was started in the 1940s and completed in 1952. The year 1949 saw the completion of P.T.H. 12, connecting Steinbach to the Dawson Road in Ste. Anne. The highway to Piney on the U.S. border was finally completed in 1954.

Hanover Steinbach remained unique in Manitoba with only one liquor outlet in the municipality, located in Sarto. At the same time Steinbach was the only town in the Province where the sale of spirits was completely forbidden, with only a men's beer parlour.



"Good-byes in the rain." 1948 Chortitzer Emigrants to Paraguay at the Niverville train station. L. to r. unidentified, the minister reading from the Bible is Rev. Peter F. Wiebe, Niverville (grandson of Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe), unidentified, man holding umbrella - unidentified, man with rubber boots is Aron Schulz, brother-in-law to Rev. Wiebe, Johann D. Peters of New Bothwell and Peter Unger. Photo courtesy of Lydia Penner, Hanover 100 Years, page 20/Pres, No. 7, page 1.



One of the last farms in Grunthal-Barkfield area to be hooked up to electricity was that of Jacob T. Martens. Gordon Penner, Manitoba Power Commissions representative at Grunthal at the time (1959-60) is seen about to make the connection. The R.M. of Hanover was one of the first municipalities in Manitoba to receive electric power (1948-52, though larger towns within the municipality had it before then) but because of the cost and (or) distrust with which anything new was always met, not nearly all the people were immediately connected up, especially in the rural areas. Carillon News photo/Reflections, page 137.



# Modern Communities.

Only few remains can be found today of the 39 *Strassendorf* villages and 20 or so hamlets that once dotted the East Reserve landscape. But a number of communities have survived and prospered: Steinbach, Grunthal, Niverville, Kleefeld, Blumenort, New Bothwell, Randolph, Mitchell. Each of these communities has a proud history and roots going back to the Strassendorf period. They were joined by the communities of Niverville, Greenland, Friedensfeld, Sarto, Pansy and Landmark, with more typical North American origins. Each community had its own hinterland or trade area, a territory which typically included several of the disbanded Strassendorf villages.

With the fracturing of the traditional Mennonite Gemeinden--the Chortitzer and KG--resulting from punitive Government measures such as school closures in 1916-19, and increased assimilation, many residents adopted American Fundamentalist religious culture during the 1930s and

40s. Consequently Hanover Steinbach has sometimes been referred to as part of southern Manitoba's Bible belt, particularly by the media.

By 1998 the population of the City of Steinbach was 9,500 and that of the R. M. of Hanover, around 12,000 and Niverville 1,700. An estimated 5,000 people resided in the areas of East Reserve expansion, a total population of around 27,000. The cultural reality of the greater Hanover Steinbach area was recognized by the establishment of regional institutions such as the Hanover School Division and Bethesda Hospital District and telephone calling areas creating a toll-free zone.

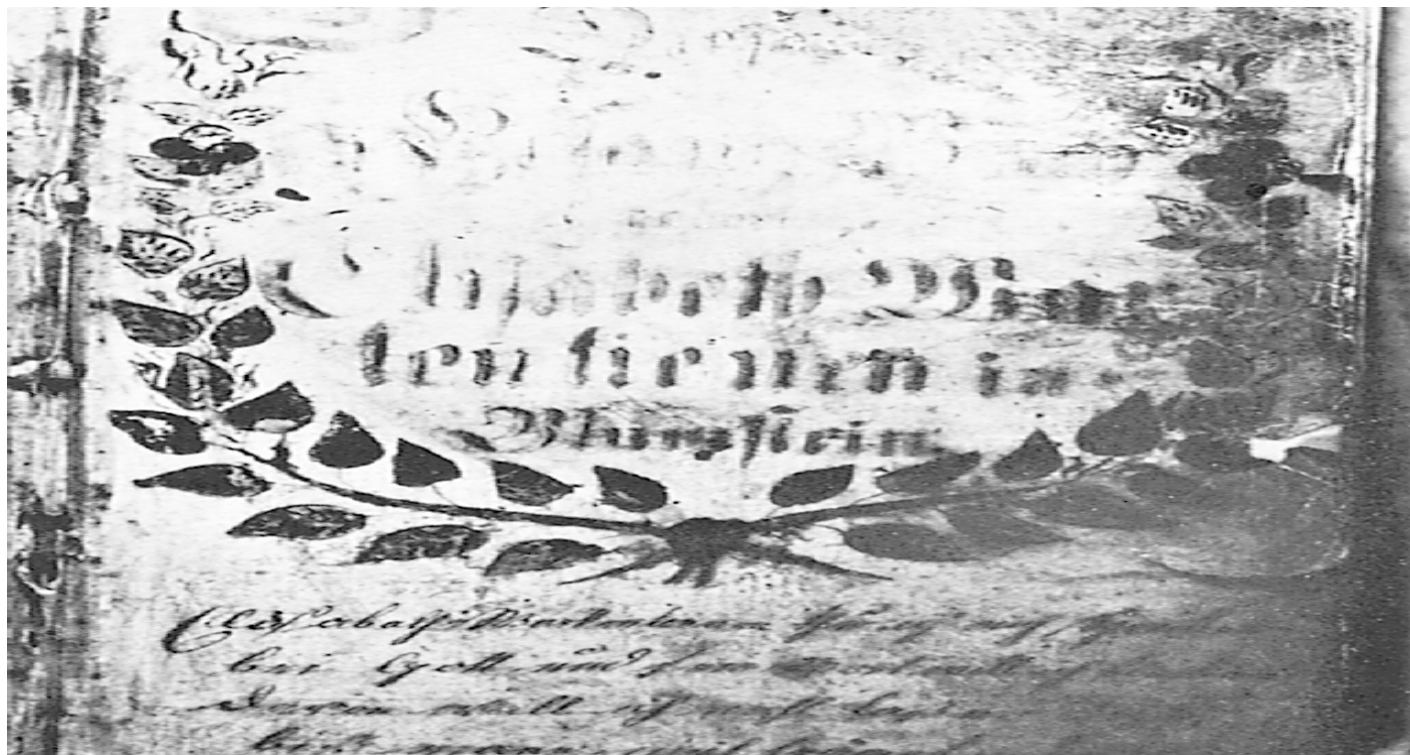
Probably about 10% of the region or 3000 still adhere to some form of traditional or conservative Mennonite faith. Somewhere in the vicinity of three-quarters of the total population would be of Mennonite background, and possibly one-half might still attend a church with a Mennonite name or origin.

The population of the service area for Hanover Steinbach is currently estimated at 52,000.

The region is undoubtedly among the most progressive and prosperous farming areas in the Province of Manitoba. In 1994 the R. M. of Hanover alone had 63 layer farms (12% of the Manitoba total), 75 broiler producers (37 % of Manitoba), 14 turkey producers (20% of Manitoba total), 137 dairy farms (11% of Manitoba total) and 174 hog farms (10% of Manitoba total).

In 1994 Hanover with .8 % of the acreage in Manitoba had 2.3 % of the farms and 4% of farm income. These statistics reflected the intensive and diversified mixed farming economy of the area. With the addition of the entire cultural territory, these statistics might well double in terms of the percentage of total Provincial production.

Hanover Steinbach is also known for sharing its wealth. The community consistently ranks in the top category for charitable giving in Canada.



*A group of Vollwerk young people and friends, circa 1900. One of the older group photos extant from the East Reserve. The photograph shows the Chortitzer people as self-confident and prosperous, optimistically moving into the future. It is representative of their taste and styles in clothing and personal appearance.*

**Rear:** Peter "Schmet" Harder, former Steinbach blacksmith is standing in the rear row, at the far left. David Hiebert, father of Erdmann H. Hiebert, formerly C. T. Loewens, is standing the fifth from the left in the rear row. Cornelius Peters, Reichenback, father of Rev. C. J. Peters, New Bothwell, is second from the right in the back row.

**Back row seated:** Reichenbach bachelor Jakob Peters, uncle of Peters' Liese who later worked for David D. Peters, is sitting in the middle row, far right. Third from the right hand side is Peter W. Peters, brother to Jakob, and father to Jac. R. Peters, post carrier in Mitchell, and grandmother of Marianne Stoesz, Fairway Ford. The lady sitting fifth from the right is Mrs. Abram Peters, mother of Mrs. Ed G. Friesen, formerly Mitchell. Mrs. and Mrs. Jakob W. Peters are seated the second and third, respectively, from the left, in the second row. Helena Doerksen Peters is holding a child in her arms. Helena's sister and husband, Mr. and Mrs. Abram Giesbrecht are sitting in the second row, Mrs. Giesbrecht is the sixth person from the left in the second row and Mr. Giesbrecht, seated somewhat to the front and right of her, is holding a child.

**Front row seated:** Seated in the second row, behind the boy, third from the right in the front row, with a dark jacket and white skirt, is George K. Doerksen. Second from the left is Peter K. Friesen, father of Helen, Mrs. Eugene Derksen. Next to his left is Abraham Giesbrecht.

**Front, lying down:** Jakob Hiebert ??? right hand side.

Only a few in the photograph have been identified to date. Anyone who can identify others on this important historical photograph is asked to contact the editor 1(204) 326-6454. Photo courtesy of Ed D. Peters, Vineland, Ontario. Photo identification courtesy of Ed D. Peters, Katherine Peters (Mrs. Jakob D.) and Helen (Mrs. Eugene Derksen), Steinbach, Manitoba.



# Kleefeld (Grünfeld).

Although Grünfeld is sometimes referred to as the first Mennonite village in Western Manitoba, this designation probably belongs to Heuboden (Seaton), a small KG village located several miles to the northwest. The name "Grünfeld" came from the village of the same name north of Nikopol in Imperial Russia, from which a number of the settlers had originated.

Grünfeld founded by 19 KG families in 1874 was originally laid out on Section 32-6-5E. Among the settlers were Aeltester Peter P. Toews, his brother Delegate Cornelius P. Toews, and the four Dueck brothers--Peter, Jakob, Abraham and Johann. The Grünfeld pioneers were highly literate who left many writings for posterity.

Grünfeld was the home of the Holdeman division in 1881 but over the years many members of that denomination moved to Hochstadt several miles further south.

When the original *Strassendorf* disbanded in 1905 a new village evolved a mile further south, on Section 20-6-5E. The name of the village was changed to Kleefeld at the time that Post Offices were being established in many rural communities and another Post Office in the West Reserve already had the name Grunfeld.

During the 1930s Kleefelders went into the honey business in a big way. By 1974 the area was producing 12 % of Manitoba's honey. Kleefeld bills itself as "the honey capital of Manitoba."



*Kleefeld young people circa 1908. L-r. Front row: Helen Bartel (Mrs. Isaak W. Toews), Elisabeth Bartel (Mrs. Johann W. Toews), Nettie Toews (Mrs. Jakob R. Loewen - second wife), Maria Isaac, Katharina Toews (Mrs. Frank Hiebert). Second row: Mrs. Jac. Bartel, Margaretha Toews (Mrs. Jakob R. Loewen - first wife) and Elizabeth Hiebert (Mrs. Jac Regehr). Third row: 1, 2, 3 Diedrich Dueck, 4 Jacob E. Regehr, 5. Fourth row: Rev. John I. Penner, Frank L. Isaac, 3, 4, 5, Gerhard de Veer, 7. Can readers identify others? Photo courtesy of Clifford Regehr, Royston, B.C./Pres., No. 11, page 55.*

*Henry L. Fast (1865-1963), one of the long time residents of Kleefeld. Reflections page 36.*



*After Sunday worship service at the Kleefeld Kleine Gemeinde church, 1949. Traditionally a lot of visiting took place after the service and many folks arranged to invite other families over for Sunday dinner. Photo courtesy of In Search of Utopia, 160.*



*1949. A Holdeman Mennonite, Mr. Frank L. Isaac, NE4-6-5E, visits with George G. Kornelsen in front of the former Hochstadt post office, three miles south of Kleefeld. Photo courtesy of In Search of Utopia, page 160.*

# Randolph (Chortitz).

The founding of Chortitz was unique among villages in the East Reserve as its original population was diverse, eight pioneer families were Bergthaler and seven were Old Colony. Chortitz was the name of the first Mennonite settlement in Russia and presumably the Old Colony families gave the village its historic name. Among the first settlers was Wilhelm Vogt, whose great-grandson Alfred van Vogt, later became a famed science fiction writer.

By 1875 several of the Old Colony families



*Alfred van Vogt (b.1912) a science fiction writer whose books sold in the millions. Vogt, who roots were Old Colony, was probably the most famous writer to come out of the Russian Mennonites. Vogt was a descendant of Wilhelm Vogts and Peter Wiebes, two of the founding families of Chortitz in 1874. Photo courtesy of Prairie Fire, Vol 15, No. 2, page 205/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 66.*



*1920 view of the village street in Chortitz (later Randolph), Manitoba, symbolizes the importance of the educational system within the culture of the pioneers of the Hanover Steinbach area. To the far right is the Worship House of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, to the left, the R. M. of Hanover Municipal office, and in the middle, the denominational private school. View to the northwest. Photo by Jac. P. Rempel. Photo caption courtesy of Reflections on our Heritage, page 61.*

had moved on to the West Reserve, making room for new arrivals from Bergthal, including Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), who arrived that summer. Consequently the village gave its name to that of the East Reserve branch of the Bergthal Gemeinde.

In 1877 the villagers signed a "Village Agreement" covering legal matters relating to the community which was laid out on SE10-7-5E, a piece of land owned by Aeltester Wiebe. The first worship house on the East Reserve was built in Chortitz in 1877. It was replaced by a new building in 1897, presently the oldest church structure in the area, and probably one of the oldest places of worship still in active use in Western Canada.

From 1880 to 1883 and again in the 1920s and 30s, Chortitz also served as the seat of Municipal government.

In 1919 the Manitoba Department of Education imposed a district school in Chortitz and legislated the closure of the private school. The new district school was called Randolph which subsequently also became the name of the local Post Office, a name still used on Highways Department maps and government documents.

Many of Chortitz's most prominent citizens were among those emigrating to Paraguay in 1926-27. The school, a cornerstone of many rural communities, was closed in 1972.

Chortitz, which had shown such promise of developing into a potential capital for the Hanover Steinbach area, remained a small tranquil hamlet.



*The Chortitz store as it appeared in 1920. The store was owned by Henry F. Wiebe from 1928 to 1941 when it was sold to Henry R. Barkman, Steinbach. Photo courtesy of Ed Wiebe, Steinbach/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 37.*

# Mitchell (Vollwerk).

The present-day community of Mitchell includes part of the territory of the former *Strassendorf* villages of Vollwerk and Ebenfeld.

Vollwerk was founded by Oberschulz Jakob Peter (1813-84), who also served as the first and only district mayor of the East Reserve Gebietsamt from 1876 until it was superseded by the municipality in 1880. The name "Vollwerk" means country estate and also, literally, a completed work or undertaking, signify-

ing the completion of the vision of the Oberschulz, the resettlement of the Bergthaler people into a new land.

In 1919 the Provincial Government legislated the closure of the Vollwerk church school and created a district school called Mitchell. The school was closed in the 1960s. After years of lobbying, Mitchell finally received a K-9 school, which opened in 1986.

The Mitchell community is situated among

gorgeous bluffs of oak and aspen on Section 6-7-6E and recently expanded south, across P.T.H. 52, to Section 31-6-6E. The four-lane highway connecting Mitchell to Steinbach was completed in 1996.

In contrast to Chortitz, Vollwerk has blossomed into one of Manitoba's fastest growing bedroom communities. It is a pleasant community with a current population of 1200.



*Heinrich Harder (1846-1934) and Helena Harder, pioneers of the village of Bergthal, located two miles north of modern-day Mitchell. Harder was a wealthy farmer. They were the parents of Anna Harder Peters (1869-1942), wife of long-time Reeve Jakob Buhr Peters (1869-1937), and mother of Jakob H. Peters (1893-1990) "Reef Petas". Photo courtesy of Elma Peters Plett, Landmark/Pres.. No. 11, page 70.*



*If Hanover Steinbach had a shrine other than the grave of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), in the old Chortitz cemetery, it would be here at the corner of Highway 52 and Reichenbach Road, situated in the former hamlet of Vollwerk, NW31-6-6E. Here lies buried the venerable Oberschulz Jakob Peters (1813-88) who settled here in 1876. Also buried here are his sons and other family members. In the rear is the barn built in 1886 by son Peter F. Peters, probably one of the oldest buildings in the Hanover Steinbach area. The graveyard has recently been restored and registered as an historic site. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 162.*



*Jakob W. Peters (1869-1936) farmyard probably taken around 1952. The house was built in 1920, a marvel of technical and modern conveniences at the time. It had the kitchen in the basement where it was cooler for cooking, two full stories, attic and veranda. The house and farmyard was a landmark for travellers passing on the Piney Highway (now called P.T.H.52) for decades. Photo by son Erdmann D. Peters, Vineland, Ontario.*



# New Bothwell (Kronsthal)

Kronsthal was founded by 21 Bergthaler families in 1874 on the NE30-7-5E. Evidently it was intended to be one of the larger *Strassendorfer* originally laid out in the East Reserve. By 1881 there were only nine *Wirtschaften* in the village of which the Hildebrandt family owned five. Of note was the family of Isaak Hildebrand (1838-1929), whose great-grandson Bill Hildebrand later became the Bishop of the Chortitzer Conference.

In the early years Kronsthal was known as the gateway to the East Reserve being situated a-mile-and-a-half south of the point where the Winnipeg Road entered the East Reserve.

In 1919 the Provincial Government legislated closure of the village school and created a school district called Bothwell. A new school was built on SW29-7-5E, a half-mile south of the original village. In 1936 a cheese factory was established on SE30-7-5E. At about the same time, Peter N. Hieberts built their store just south of the cheese factory and across the road from the school.

In 1938 a Post Office was established in Kronsthal and given the name New Bothwell. These establishments became the nucleus of the modern village of New Bothwell situated on SE30-7-5E and SW29-7-5E.

New Bothwell has the Province's only cheese factory still operating as a co-operative. The New Bothwell Co-operative produces the renowned "Bothwell Cheese".

In recent years the name "Crown Valley", a direct translation of the ancient name Kronsthal, has become popular, being the name of the east west cross street of the hamlet as well as of several businesses.



*Peter P. Toews, Bergthal, with 1933 Plymouth, getting ready for his wedding. New Bothwell book page 400.*



*New Bothwell cheese factory opened in 1932. The photo shows the cheese factory as it looked around 1950 and the modern premises on New Bothwell's main street. Photo courtesy of Heritage Collections, page 404.*



*1914 wedding of Jakob H. Hildebrand (1890- ) and Elisabeth Unger (1896- ). Jakob was the grandson of Isaak D. and Katharina Hildebrand, pioneers of Kronsthal in 1874. Photo courtesy of Heritage Collections, page 404.*



*Large families were normal years ago. The children of Peter K. and Helena Doerksen, Bergthal, E. R., 1927. Anna 16, Helen 15, Lizzie 13, Mary 11, Margaret 10, John 10, Peter 8, Nettie 6, Elma 5, Esther 5, and Edward 3. Photo courtesy of Heritage Collections, page 158.*

# Blumenort

Blumenort was founded on Section 22-7-6E by 24 KG families in 1874. Some sources indicate that the 1874 settlers referred to their new village as Blumenhoff, which was the name of their major village in Imperial Russia. But when the Plett and Warkentin families from Blumenhoff arrived the following year, they used the name Blumenhof for their new village a mile east, and the original settlers took the name Blumenort for their village.

In 1878 the extended Johann Koop (1831-96) clan moved out of Blumenort to establish Neuanlage (Twin Creek), two miles to the southwest.

According to municipal assessment records Blumenort was one of the wealthier villages in the East Reserve. The area was known for its steam engine threshing rigs which went out to

other communities as far away as Ste. Anne, Friedensfeld and Lorette, custom threshing late into the season.

The original village was dissolved in 1910. A new village grew up around the cheese factory

established a mile-and-a-half north of the original location in 1932, Section 34-7-6E.

In 1948 27 families from the Blumenort Ridgewood area emigrated to Chihuahua, Mexico where they established the Quellen Colony settlement. During the 1950s a number of families settled in Riverton and Arborg in the Interlake region, Manitoba, and others moved to Maryfield, Saskatchewan.

Over the years Blumenort has been the home of many prominent entrepreneurs, including A. K. Penner, founder of "Penco Construction", currently the largest commercial builder in Manitoba and the 18th largest in Canada. The major employer in Blumenort is Grannys Poultry, a poultry eviscerating plant, the largest in the Province.



*Friends visiting on a Sunday, 1920. Maria Reimer (Mrs. A. K. Penner), and Elizabeth (Mrs. P.K. Penner), were second cousins, daughters of Abraham P. Reimer and Klaas P. Reimer, Blumenort, respectively. They married brothers, sons of Klaas R. Penner, who died in the 1918 influenza epidemic. Maria and her husband founded "A. K. Penner & Sons (today Penco Construction)" and Elizabeth and her husband founded "Penner Transfer" (today Penner International). Photo courtesy of Blumenort, page 212.*



*Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908) was a diligent young lad and compiled a prayer book between the ages of 10 and 17. He married Margaretha P. Isaac, and settled in Blumenort in 1874. He served at least one term as the village Schulz or mayor. In 1894 the Friesen family moved out of the village settling on SW35-7-5E where "K.K. Penner Tires" is located today. Abraham M. Friesen was a learned man who served as a teacher and maintained a valuable journal. Photo courtesy of LaVerna Klippenstein, Winnipeg/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 48.*



*Blumenhof ball team 1914. Standing Peter R. Wiebe, Jakob T. Reimer, Cornelius P. Doerksen, John D. K. Plett, Peter P. Wohlgemuth, unknown, Henry P. Doerksen, Peter K. Plett, Aaron W. Reimer, unknown. Front, Henry P. Giesbrecht, Cornelius A. Plett, unknown. Photo courtesy of Blumenort, page 210.*



*1946 Plettville, a family village on SE27-7-6E four miles north of Steinbach, founded by Heinrich E. Plett (1870-1953). Plett moved out of the Blumenort village in 1909. Working together with ten sons, the Pletts ran a blacksmith shop, cheesebox factory, store, feedmill and a lumbering operation as well as a dairy and farmed over 1000 acres of land. In 1948 most of the Plett family moved to Mexico. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, pages 58-59.*

# Grunthal

Grunthal, as it was originally written, was settled by 11 Bergthaler families on Section 21-5-5E in 1876. Most of the settlers had emigrated from Russia in 1875 but overwintered in Ontario. The original settlers included Klaas Peters, author of *The Bergthal Mennonites*, a collection of remembrances about the Bergthal Colony in Russia and the emigration. Another well-known citizen was Dr. Johann Peters (b. 1851), a famous “Tracjh moecka”, or chiropractor and lay doctor. Johann Braun (1857-1925), was a prominent entrepreneur, founder of the Grunthal steam flour mill, and various other enterprises.

Grunthal became the service centre for the southern portion of the East Reserve. It received an economic boost from the Ukrainian settlement at Sarto to the east, many of whom did their business in Grunthal.

The original village street in Grunthal, running north and south, was superseded in the

1930s with a new Main Street running east and west along the half mile line. The original street is now called Church Avenue, where the Chortitzer worship house was built in 1886. Rüsslander immigrants established the new main street by setting up their enterprises in the new location.

Grunthal has a unique mix of Mennonites of

various backgrounds, from Kanadier who settled there in the 1870s, to Russländer of both Old Colony and Molotschna origins, and Bergthaler and Sommerfelder returnees from the West Reserve and Paraguay.

The largest employer in Grunthal currently is “Medo-Land Dairies” producing cheese and other dairy products.



*The “new” Grunthal Main Street, 1937. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 113.*



*Johann Peters (b.1850) and wife Anna Harder (b. 1851). Dr. Peters was one of Grunthal’s most famous citizens, renown far and wide for his healing skills. Peters and his family emigrated to Paraguay in 1926. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 83.*



*Early Grunthal Main Street showing the newly established Grunthal garage owned and operated by John D. Warkentin. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 121.*



*Ben Gerstein store 1918. Although Ben Gersstein was Jewish he operated a store in Grunthal for many years. Photo courtesy of Grunthal History, page 32.*



*1925 Passport photograph, Abraham Driedger (1878-1965) and Aganetha Enns (1878-1930) family. Children, l.-r.: Agatha (Art Guenther, school board trustee), John A. Driedger (father of Albert Driedger, former Highways Minister and John Driedger, present Reeve, R. M. of Hanover), Agnes (John F. Warkentin), Abe (former Hanover Councillor), and Helen (Mrs. Henry Unger). Baby Anne (Abr. Hildebrand) is sitting on mother’s knee. The Driedger family came from Schönfeld-Brasol, Russia, where Abraham’s grandfather Johann Abraham Driedger had served as the first Oberschulz. Photo courtesy of Albert Driedger, Grunthal.*



# Niverville

Niverville was unique among the communities of Hanover Steinbach as it originated as a railway town and not as a Strassendorf village. It was founded in 1878 when William Hespeler bought a piece of land opposite the railway, the NW30-7-4E from Peter Dueck (b. 1836), and laid out a townsite, originally part of the village of Schantzenberg. By 1881 Peter Dueck, original owner of the town site had moved on to the village of Schönau, West Reserve.



Mr. and Mrs. John Harrison, Niverville. Mr. Harrison was a good veterinarian but also acted as a "lay" doctor successfully treating many people. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 222.



John Wittick, an important Community man in the early days. Photo courtesy Niverville, page 202.

Although Hespeler's dream of a commercial centre servicing the entire East Reserve did not come to pass, the new community was much more cosmopolitan than others in the area. Four of the five Jewish families in Hanover in 1891 lived in Niverville or the adjacent village of Schantzenberg - Goldstein, Polinviski, Rosen and Goldstein, as did two Lutheran families - Wittich and Agendal, and seven Anglo-Saxon families - Church, Armstrong, Church, Webster, Wade, Street and Harrison.

Niverville continued to grow slowly and steadily as a local service centre, serving the Anglo-Canadians farming west of the village, as well as Mennonites to the east, south and north.

In the 1920s many Russländer families made

Niverville their home, including prominent businessman William Dyck (1903-71). In later years many returnees from Paraguay have settled in Niverville.

Niverville was incorporated as a village in 1969, the only community other than Steinbach to seek independent incorporation within Hanover.

Niverville also became the home of Puratone Feeds one of the major corporations in the Manitoba hog industry.

In later years Niverville has also become a bedroom community for many who work in Winnipeg and commute to work. The current population is 1700.



A portion of Niverville's business area in 1900 showing the old hotel and the Penner Brothers general store. Photo courtesy of Niverville: A History, page .



The Penner Store, Railway Avenue, 1916. The customer purchasing the material is believed to be Albert Wittick, a Niverville district farmer. Clerk on the right is believed to be Anne Penner, daughter of Erdmann Penner, the store owner. Photo courtesy of Niverville: A History, page .

# Greenland

Greenland was founded in 1892 when nine Holdeman families were allowed to take two sections out of the Blumenort *Strassendorf* complex. Two years earlier several other Holdeman families had already purchased Metis script land, immediately to the north of the village in the R. M. of Ste. Anne. The “script land” was purchased in 240 acre parcels. During the 1880s the entire area was under lush green grass and hence the name “Greenland”. The community eventually expanded north including practically all of the land to the Seine River and west into the R. M. of Tache.

During the 1940s the Greenland area was a leader in poultry specializatoin, particularly laying hens. One local farmer, Cornelius E. Giesbrecht (b. 1891) was known as the “chicken king” because of his large-scale operation.

During the 1950s and 60s the Greenland had several businesses of which Hart Feeds became prominent.

Today the Holdeman church, school and tract house, are the focal points of the community.

During the 1960s Holdeman families from Greenland established a new settlement at Whitemouth, Manitoba. Since that time, dozens of other families have moved to various locations such as Swan River and Sinclair, Manitoba, Bradenbury, Saskatchewan, and even to Nova Scotia.



*Abram G. Toews outfit plowing in the Greenland, 1909, with one of the first International gas tractors in the area. L. to r.: “Groute” Peter B. Toews, sons Jakob and Cornelius, Henry P. Toews, Abram G. Toews (owner), and leaning against the wheel cover; John Toews, another son of Peter B. Toews. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 182.*



*Jakob T. Wiebe (1872-1965), Greenland, served as Bishop of the Holdeman congregations in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Francis Toews, Greenland/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 52.*



*Greenland young men, circa 1910. L. to r., front row: Henry Penner and John T. Toews. Middle row: Cornelius Toews, Jakob Toews and unidentified. Back row: Peter G. Toews, Peter T. “Central” Toews, and Neil “Raleighs” Toews. Peter “X” Friesen Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 307.*



*Mrs. Martin Penner, nee Aganetha B. Toews (1854-1920) Aganetha was the great grandmother of many people lving in Hanover Steinbach today. Pres., No 11, page 85.*

# Friedensfeld

Friedensfeld was named for the KG village of Friedensfeld in Russia. In the 1890s when the KG-ers began selling their holdings in the area, it was bought by German Lutherans. With hard work and diligence, the Friedensfelders built up a prosperous farming community. The community also expanded east into the R. M. of LaBroquerie.

During the 1930s a number of Friedensfeld families moved to the Brokenhead area north of Beausejour.

Friedensfeld was the home of two Lutheran Churches, St. Pauls and St. John's. In 1966 the congregations amalgamated and formed one united St. Pauls Lutheran Church in Steinbach, where they built a new church.

The Friedensfeld community is known far and wide for the "Friedensfeld Community Hall", a large banquet hall and dance facility, frequently used for weddings and other social functions, such as ball games and barbecues.

*Michael Schinkel (1878-1960) was born in Schmaloff, Russia (Radon), son of Christian Schinkel (1830-1904) and Rosalie Begalky. Michael Schinkel came to Canada in 1905 and married Ottela Geise (1878-1960). Michael and Ottela took over his father's farm, SW18-6-7E, a mile east of Friedensfeld Hall. Photo courtesy of grandson Bob Schinkel, Steinbach, Manitoba.*



*Christof and Emily Krentz. Pres., No. 11, page 78. Christof (1891-1970) was the son of Gottlieb Krentz and Karoline Krentz who came to Canada from Russia in 1891. They settled on SE10-6-6E which is still owned by grandson Art Krentz today, a centennial farm.*

# Sarto

The Ukrainians came to the East Reserve in 1900 taking up the unoccupied land in township 5, Range 6, and township 4, range 6E. In 1903 a church was built in the centre of the community at Sarto. Later other community centres developed at Trentham and Pansy, each with their own post office and school. With

modern farming techniques much of the land in these areas has become quite productive and also favoured as sites for large hog operations.

Sarto today is known for the unique architecture of its Ukrainian Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. It also has a community centre and the R. M. of Hanover's only liquor store.

Pansy is located along the picturesque Jobert Creek, six miles south of Sarto. It has a community hall and Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Trentham used to have its own Post Office and school but both are gone years ago.



*Greek Orthodox church. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 45.*



*The Romaniuk store in Sarto, 1942. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 98.*



# Landmark (Prairie Rose)

Landmark is located north of the East Reserve in the R. M. of Tache. The first residents such as Peter M. Penner and family settled in the Landmark area in 1907. Actual settlement only took place in 1917 after the Kleine Gemeinde church investigated the area as a potential home for its many young families. Abraham L. Plett was one of the men who investigated the area and within a few years purchased over a 1000 acres. At this time the land was drained making it suitable for farming.



*Peter M. Penner from Greenland had moved to Alberta but returned to become one of the first settlers in the Landmark area in 1907. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 343/Pres., No. 11, page 87.*

Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) served as the first teacher and preacher and is often referred to as the father of the community.

The area was known as Prairie Rose during the early years. Landmark was the only large community which grew out of the East Reserve expansionary areas.

The community later encompassed the school districts of Landmark, Linden and Willowridge, an area extending from the northern boundary of the East Reserve, to the Seine



*Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) was considered the father of Landmark. He served as the spiritual leader of the settlement as well as school teacher. Photo courtesy of Doris Penner, Landmark/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 59.*

River to the north and almost to Highway 59 and Ile des Chenes to the west.

Landmark became the home of "Landmark Feeds", one of the major corporations in Manitoba's hog industry.

Landmark also developed into a bedroom community for commuters working in Winnipeg, 20 miles away. By 1999 the roots of over half of the population of Landmark were in Winnipeg. The current population is around 1500.



*1909. John A. K. Plett (1883-1957) and Margaretha R. Penner (1884-1978), one of the first families to move into the Willowridge area, west of Landmark and Linden. Photo courtesy of Franz P. Plett, Landmark/Plett Picture Book, page 101.*



*1918 Martin Penner sons. L. to R.; back row: Jacob M., Cornelius M., John M., and Aron M. Penner. Setting: Abram M., Peter M., and Marten M. Penner. The photograph may have been taken by Abram Eidse, married to their sister Katherina. Pres., No. 11, page 86.*



*Mr. and Mrs. David K. Plett and daughter Helena (Mrs. Abram J. R. Barkman) in 1914. David K. Plett died in the typhus epidemic of 1930. Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Erwin P. Reimer.*



*Peter B. Koop and Corneliuss K. Plett, 1912. Plett Picture Book page 123.*

# Steinbach

Anyone who has flown from Minneapolis to Winnipeg on a moonlit night has been favoured with a fabulous view of Steinbach: the twinkling lights of the diagonal streets in the centre high-



*Johann G. Barkman (1858-1937) who served as mayor of the village of Steinbach for 25 years between 1885 and 1912. He is credited with implementing a survey of the community allowing all property owners to obtain individual titles for their properties. Although this destroyed the traditional Strassendorf communal village, it positioned Steinbach to pursue business growth. Johann G. Barkman's record of service to his community is unrivaled by anyone in the area. Photo courtesy of Reflections, page 72/Pres., No. 12, page 50.*

lighted by orange globes around the square mile, glistering pristinely like a giant diamond on the prairie.

Steinbach was founded on September 15, 1874, by 18 families of the KG, taking the only land still available. They laid out a village parallel to a small creek which traversed Section 35-6-6E from southeast to northwest.

The business acumen of Steinbach's pioneer entrepreneurs such as Klaas R. Reimer, Abraham S. Friesen and Peter K. Barkman has already been referred to. Nevertheless, Steinbach remained a small, albeit bustling *Strassendorf* village. The village was served by a private electrical system started in 1903 and a private telephone exchange established two years later.

The turning point in the growth of Steinbach was the survey of the main street completed in 1911 allowing property owners to obtain individual titles for their properties. This was followed by registration as an unincorporated village district in 1920. By 1915 Steinbach had 117 households and a population of 463.

The next period of Steinbach's history was marked by steady growth. An influx of Bergthaler and Rüsslander Mennonites, ethnic Germans and Anglo-Saxons, added a rich cultural diversity. By the time of its incorporation as a Town in 1946, Steinbach had become the business and trade centre, not only of Hanover, but of the entire southeastern region of the Prov-

ince overarching the other communities in terms of regional requirements.

Recent decades have witnessed rapid expansion in manufacturing, trucking, retailing and, especially, the car sales industry. Steinbach is known throughout Manitoba as "the Automobile City". The completion in 1984 of the four-laning of P.T.H. 12 north to the Trans-Canada Highway, completing a four-lane link to Winnipeg, was an important milestone.

A number of large North American Corporations such as the Loewen Funeral Group and Reimer Express Lines originally started in Steinbach. Other local businesses became well known in western Canada. They included: Steinbach Credit Union Ltd, Penner Foods, Penner International, South-East Big Freight, Loewen Millwork, Schmitke Millwork and Barkman Concrete. In recent years national chains and franchises have discovered Steinbach and established outlets in the community - Canadian Tire, McDonalds, Safeway, Extra Foods, IGA, Shoppers Drug Mart, etc. Steinbach currently has 250 retail establishments and over 30 restaurants.

Of the 9,500 residents in the City of Steinbach an estimated two-thirds are of Mennonite background, the majority being descendant from the pioneers of the East Reserve. About a third still worship in a church with a Mennonite name.



*1940s. Abraham T. Loewen with the company's first hearse. His son Ray Loewen later developed the Loewen Funeral Home enterprises into the second largest funeral home chain in North America. Photo courtesy of Is there any place like it? page 85.*



*In 1910 Klaas R. Toews built Steinbach's first hotel and livery stable west across the street from his mother's house on Lot 9. The recently constructed Kornelsen School further south on Lot 11, can be seen in the background. This is where the City of Steinbach business offices are located. "In 1918 Klaas R. Toews opened a municipally licensed hotel and coffee shop." The modern day Royal Bank is located just to left of the Toews (Tourist) Hotel. Photo courtesy of Ernest Toews, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 20.*



*Steinbach Main Street, 1914, looking southeast from the spot where William Avenue is today. The modern day Fairway Ford would be behind the team of houses on the righthand side. Photo courtesy of Ernie Toews, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 15.*



*Steinbach's Main Street, late 1920s. A funeral procession is on the way to the Pioneer Cemetery on Reimer Avenue, after a funeral service at the "south end" Kleine Gemeinde church. The procession is passing the "K. Reimer Store" and the butcher shop recently acquired by H.W. Reimer. This is where Steinbach Credit Union and Steinbach Plaza are located today. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 59.*



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## About the author:



Delbert F. Plett is a lawyer practising in Steinbach since 1973. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1992.

## Appeal to the Readers:

The HSHS is planning to produce a more complete history of the Hanover Steinbach area within the next few years. If you have photographs and/or old journals and letters, please contact the editor or anyone of the board members. If you find that the history of your family is missing from this booklet, the reason probably is because we do not have the information regarding your family and ancestors. The only way to insure that your family is properly credited in the historical record, is by making this material available, possibly by doing an article for *Preservings*. We will appreciate your assistance.

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# **East Reserve 125 “Motto”**

**May the 125th Celebrations  
refresh our memories of the hardships  
our ancestors endured in Russia, the  
struggles they encountered in their  
re-settlement in Manitoba,  
and may we ever remember that  
their faith in God sustained them  
through the years.**

