

Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000

In 1875 the Old Colony (Reinländer) Church was formed in Manitoba, Canada, a Christian community committed to the restoration of the Apostolic Order. For 125 years Old Colony Mennonites have persevered through exile, poverty and harrassment, blazing a trail of Biblical faithfulness across North and South America.

This anthology of historical sketches, biographies and congregational histories is written by professional historians and by the Old Colony people themselves. The inspiring story of this remarkable community is finally told.



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Editor Delbert F. Plett Q.C.



D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc.

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Sketch of the central Old Colony (OK) village of Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba, Canada, founded in 1875. The drawing by W. T. Smedley dates to the early 1880s and was published in Grant, editor, Picturesque Canada (Toronto, 1882), page 318. At this time J. B. McLaren referred to Reinland as the "Windmill village, as it is the capital' of the Colony and has the largest church," (page 324). The post, front centre in the sketch, is part of the famous, "Post Road," which traversed the West Reserve.

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Front Cover Caption

Rempel/Ens Heritage Housebarn, Reinland, Manitoba, photograph by Harold Funk, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Editor's Foreword

When he sat down to write his memoirs in 1965, Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Aeltester of the Old Colony Gemeinde at Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, since 1935, justified the recounting of his life's experiences by referring to Psalms chapter 78:

"I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generations to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he has done. For he established a testimony in Jakob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, That they might set their hopes in God, and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments," Psalms 78, verses 2-7.

One of the greatest things that can happen for a community and for a people is a rediscovery of their history and heritage, a precious gift of God.

This collection of writings about the Old Colony Mennonites in Canada is an attempt at compiling their story, recounting the past from their own perspective and spiritual ethos.

This book is an anthology only and not a systematic history. The completion of an analytical work--especially one covering the many large Old Colony Gemeinden in Latin America--will require further study and gathering of information, a challenge which remains for the future.

In the meantime this anthology will provide at least a rudimentary account of the proud history and noble tradition of the Old Colony people. This will also make it more difficult for predator religious cultures to prey on them and denigrate them.

Notwithstanding much adversity--including small-minded harassment from fellow Mennonites, and, of course, the major trauma of the 1922 exile from Canada, God has blessed the Old Colony people. Where they constituted six per cent of the Russian Mennonite community in 1875, they now make up some 30 per cent.

It was indeed an honour for me to have had the opportunity to edit this book. In the process I have come to know more about the Old Colony Churches and have gained a deep respect for the leadership as well as lay members for their genuine Christian faith, devoted discipleship, sense of "Gelassenheit" and their ability to survive and to "press towards the mark" under the most difficult circumstances.

I have been absolutely inspired by the positive attitudes and enthusiasm with which many of the recent returnees from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America have gone about reestablishing themselves in their former Homeland, the country their ancestors once wrested from the wilds of the Canadian prairies in the 1870s. Like immigrants everywhere they have often taken the most menial jobs if necessary to get established.

I have been equally downheartened by the bigotry with which some Canadians have treated their new neighbours. Sad to say, this attitude seems particularly noticeable among fellow Mennonites who have converted themselves over to so-called Evangelical religious culture.

History has demonstrated that whenever the Old Colony people have just barely gotten established, overcoming the privations and adversities of the pioneering experience, Satan has mustered his forces to attack and destroy their communities. But God has also been faithful, calling forth courageous leaders and loyal believers who have remained true to the teachings once received from their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

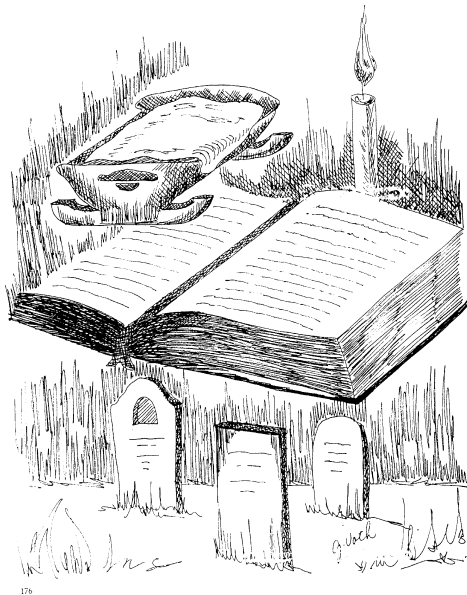
The year 2000 marked the 125th anniversary of the Old Colony (Reinländer) Gemeinde in Canada. May this collection of writings truly be a blessing to the noble people of the Old Colony Church and its diaspora across North and South America now numbering in the range of 150,000 souls.

May they indeed heed the exhortation of Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck, to recount the days of old for their children and descendants for generations to come.

Delbert F. Plett, died in 2004.



The Editor, D. Plett, Q.C. is a lawyer practising in Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, since 1973. He is editor of Preservings and has written about conservative Mennonites.



From Cradle to Grave. A poignant portrayal of the existential Christian faith of the Old Colony people. Drawing by G. Voth, courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 176.

Part One: Historical Background

Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde

Reinländer Mennonite Settlement on the West Reserve, 1870s – 1920s, also known as the Old Colony Mennonite Church, by John J. Friesen, Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Introduction.

In 1875 immigrants from the Chortitza and Fürstenland settlements in Imperial Russia arrived at Fort Dufferin on the Red River, and made arrangements to settle west of the river. The government had set aside eight townships of land east of the Red River, but the leaders of this group of immigrants felt that that land was not suitable for settlement. So the request was made to the government to settle west of the river on the treeless, flat lands of the Red River valley.

The conditions for the immigrants were primitive and difficult. Some people despaired and left for the USA, but the majority decided to begin a new life on this open prairie land. While the government surveyors were completing their work, the Mennonite men inspected the lands to see where villages could be laid out. Sites were selected near creeks. Also while still in Fort Dufferin, the group decided to organize as a church.

Since the immigrants came from different settlements in Russia, they brought no single church organization with them. They decided to organize into one church group, and elected Johann Wiebe, who had been the Aeltester in the Fürstenland settlement in Russia, as their Aeltester. They named their church the Reinländer Mennonite Church.

By the end of summer, the land was surveyed and they were able to lay out the villages, decide who would settle in each village, and build sod homes for the coming winter. As the villages were begun one by one, each village elected a mayor, and two assistants. The mayors elected a mayor over all mayors (Obervorsteher), Isaak Mueller. He was responsible for the civic affairs of the settlement. The basic religious and the civil organizations were thus established for the community.

Who were these new immigrants? Where did they come from? What forces had shaped them?

Anabaptism.

Mennonite roots go back to the 16th century Reformation era. In the 16th century, the major Protestant reformers Martin Luther in Central Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in northern Germanic

Switzerland, and Jean Calvin in French Switzerland, broke with the Catholic Church to found new, reformed religious movements. They broke with the Catholic medieval tradition, and emphasized the Bible as the source of authority. Instead of a faith based on merit theology, they emphasized salvation by grace. Instead of Latin they used the vernaculars in worship services. Instead

and Hans Denk in Central Germany) felt that by depending on the governments, the Reformers were compromising their reform visions. Thus in numerous areas “radical” reformers attempted to bring about a more complete reform which would be based on the insight gained from scripture and not corrupted by compromises with governments.



Menno Simons (1496-1561) on the left, baptizing. Engraving by Bernard Picart. 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. Courtesy Visser and Sprunger, Menno Simons Places, Portraits and Progeny (Altona, 1996), page 78.

of the mass as the central feature of worship, they emphasized the sermon.

However in one area the Protestant Reformers did not reform the Catholic Church. They continued to ally themselves with local governments for protection. The Constantinian synthesis of church and state continued. The result was that the Reformers' frequently had to take direction from governments about the nature and speed of their reforms. Some of the younger members of the Lutheran and Zwinglian reforms (Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz in Zurich and Hans Hut

and Hans Denk in Central Germany) felt that by depending on the governments, the Reformers were compromising their reform visions. Thus in numerous areas “radical” reformers attempted to bring about a more complete reform which would be based on the insight gained from scripture and not corrupted by compromises with governments.

In the 16th century these radical reformers were called Anabaptists, which means rebaptizers, since they rebaptized people who had been baptized as infants. The first rebaptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland in January 1525, and was followed by many rebaptisms in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire in Central Europe. Many of these rebaptisms happened quite spontaneously, and were not dependent upon the Zurich experience. The Holy Roman Empire saw the Anabaptists as a threat to the stability of society, and decreed that Anabaptists be put to death.

Some of the major emphases of Anabaptists were a faith based on scripture, separation from the state, adult baptism, an emphasis on discipleship (ethics), rejection of the oath, not holding positions in the governments, a willingness to suffer for the faith, election of church leaders from within their own ranks, and in most cases nonresistance (even though a few Anabaptists were also involved in the Peasants' revolts of 1524-5).

In the Netherlands the Anabaptist movement became the major reform movement, with numerous factions going in different directions. Some Anabaptists were spiritualist and charismatic and gave little weight to the Bible. Others were quite individualistic and had little place for the church. Still others, especially in the city of Muenster, believed that true reform could be brought in violently.

In the midst of these confusing directions, Menno Simons left the Roman Catholic church, to take up leadership in the Dutch Anabaptist movement. He promoted a reform which would be based squarely on the Bible, see the church as central to the Christian life, and accept the way of nonresistance and peace as normative. His movement became the major Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands and in Northern Germany. His followers were called Mennists or Mennonites!

Poland and Prussia.

Because of fierce persecution of Anabaptists in the Netherlands by the Spanish who controlled the Netherlands in the sixteenth century many Mennonites fled to the Danzig (Gdansk) region along the Vistula River in Poland. They settled in the Polish province of Royal Prussia, also known as West Prussia. From the 1530s to the end of the 16th century, many Anabaptists came to Poland on one of the many trading ships that sailed from the Netherlands to Danzig.²

It was in this region around Danzig and along the Vistula River, within the kingdom of Poland, that Mennonites developed many of the traits that characterized them throughout their subsequent migrations. During the era that this region was under Polish rule, from the 1530s to the 1770s, Mennonites were rarely granted the rights and privileges of citizenship. They saw themselves as a people whose primary loyalty was not to a nation, but to Christ and His church.

It was here that they learned to see the church as central to the Christian faith. Following Menno, they emphasized the purity of the church, a purity that was to be attained by exercising discipline and even excommunication in severe cases. They also believed in repentance and the re-acceptance of excommunicated members back into full church membership.

Mennonites followed Menno's views of a visible, holy church. They believed that Christian salvation included a commitment to share with fellow believers both spiritually and physi-

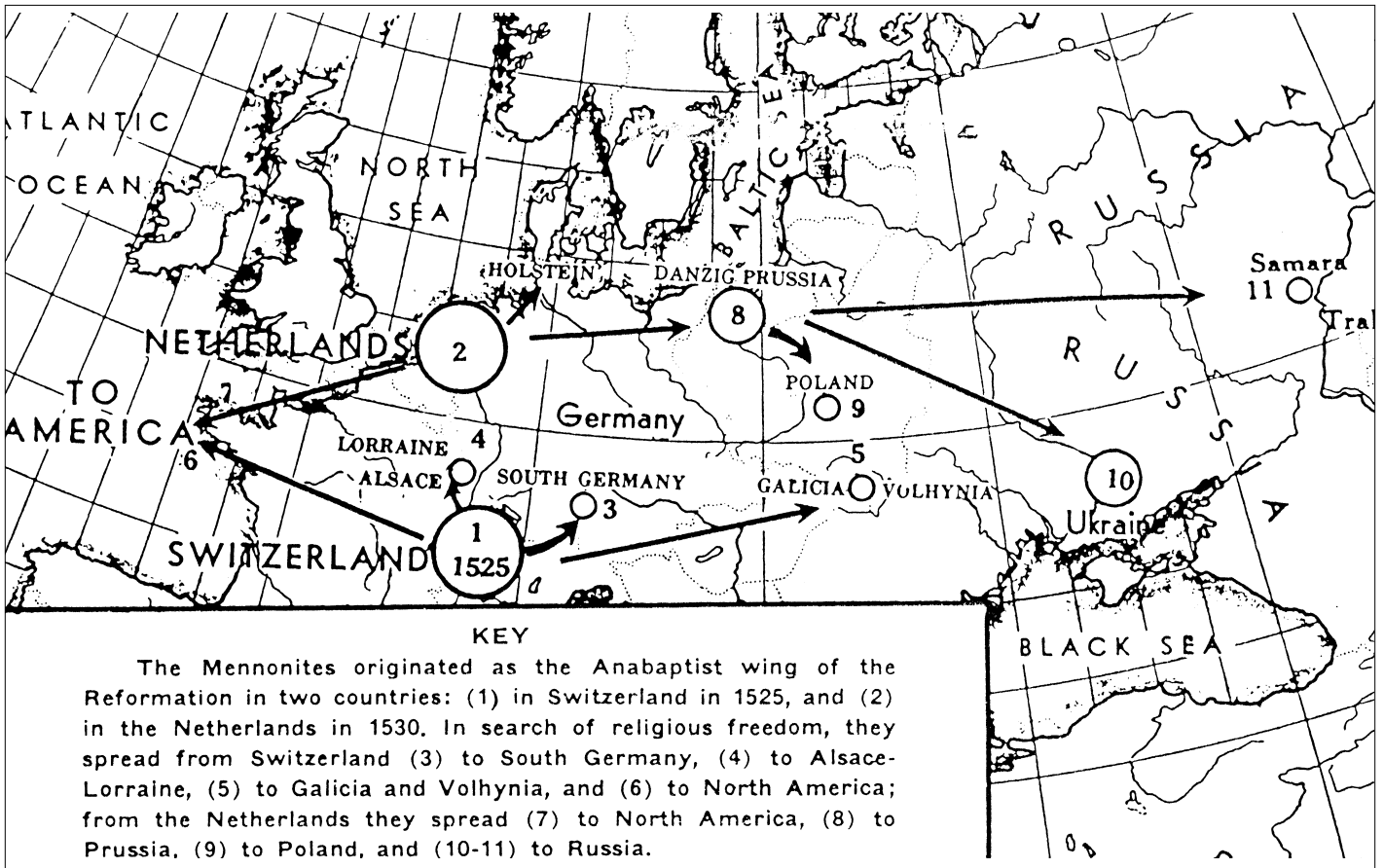


The Mennonites were persecuted for their faith. An estimated 4,000 were executed by hanging, burning, quartering and drowning. More often than not, women bore the brunt of the persecution, here chained to the stake for execution by burning. Engravings such as this were used to illustrate the first editions of Thielmann van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror*, an account of the early Mennonite martyrs. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, *Klassen A Family Heritage* (Winnipeg, 1980), page 42.

cally. They organized insurance and inheritance organizations to give expression to the practical aspects of the faith. The Bible was their basic authority for faith and life.

It was during this Polish era that they devel-

oped the threefold leadership (Lehrdienst) system of bishop (Aeltester) ministers, and deacons. Elected bishops had the responsibility to baptize and serve communion, and were responsible for the religious life of the churches under their care.



Origin and spread of the Mennonites, courtesy of Mennonite Life/History and Events, page 148/East Reserve 125 Years, page 5.

Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde

Ministers, called “Lehrer” (teachers), had the task of preaching and teaching. During most of this era Mennonites were not allowed to have church buildings, so their services were held in homes, barns or sheds. The ministers either stood or sat behind ordinary tables, not pulpits. Deacons had the responsibility of taking care of the financial and physical needs of people in the congregation.

The office of song leader (Vorsänger) arose early in the 18th century when Mennonites were again given permission to engage in group singing. They used traditional Dutch Mennonite hymns, as well as more unfamiliar German Pietist and Lutheran hymns. Since many of the

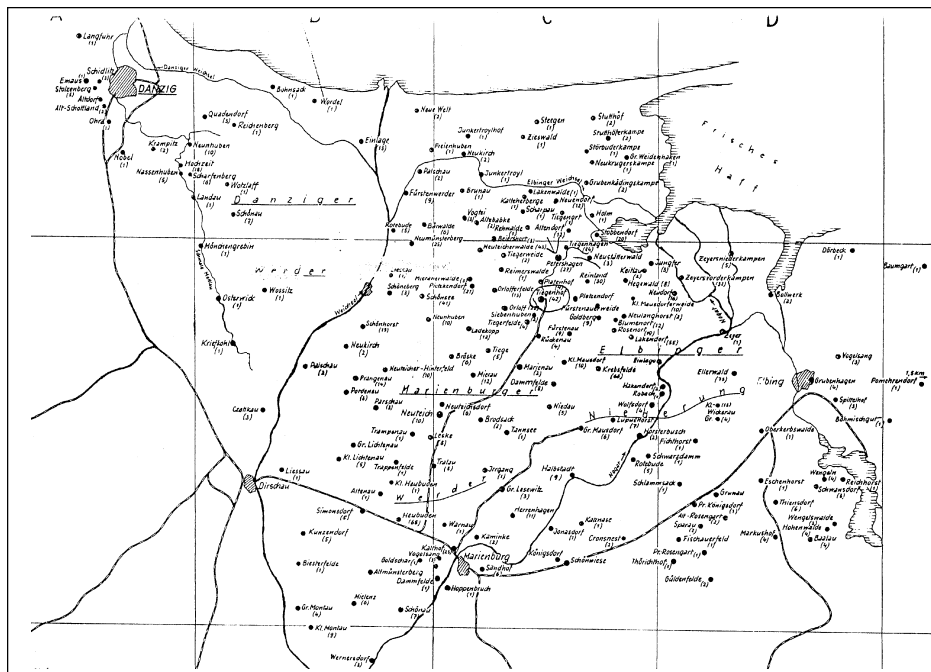


Dirk Philips (1504-68), was the gifted theologian and writer of the infant Anabaptist movement whose writings are revered among conservative Mennonites to the present day. Dirk became the first Aeltester of the Flemish Gemeinde in Danzig, Prussia. Photo courtesy of Saints and Sinners, page 31.

tunes were unfamiliar, men were chosen who could lead the congregation in singing. Song leaders did not conduct, but rather learned the tunes and sang vigorously in leading the congregation.³

Toward the middle of the 18th century Mennonite congregations were given the right to build meeting houses. They were, however, required to keep the church buildings plain and unobtrusive (e.g. no towers, no bells, no pointed windows.). It was also during this same time period that Danzig and West Prussian Mennonites changed the language of their worship services from Dutch to either Low German or High German. For everyday discussion Low-German had already supplanted the Dutch language since the latter part of the seventeenth century.⁴

West-Prussian Danzig Mennonites were strongly committed to peace and non-violence. In times of war, when they refused military service, government officials demanded frequent and large cash payments. Because Mennonites were not citizens, they were unable to protect themselves against such extortions. Finally in 1642 they negotiated a *Privilegium* with the Polish King Wladislaw IV⁵ in which Mennonites agreed to pay a fixed annual sum of money to the Polish king in exchange for the right to live in the king-



Map of the Vistula Delta (modern-day Poland) by Dr. Karl Stumpp, 1963. Mennonites found a home in Prussia/Poland for over 400 years. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746), the grandfather of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), founder of the Old Colony Gemeinde, lived in Blumenort, in the Mennonite heartland in Prussia. Later Heinrich Wiebe settled in Einlage in the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, see Plett, *Dynasties*, pages 108-9. The vast majority of the ancestors of the Old Colony people were Flemish Mennonites from the older more established communities around Tiegenghagen in the Marienburg Werder (Island) formed by the Nogat and Vistula Rivers. Karl Stumpp was a life-long researcher and historian of the German settlements in Russia, publishing his signature work, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia (Lincoln, Neb.)* in 1978. The village of Reinland was located 3km northeast of Tiegenghof (circled) on the Tiede River.



The harbour in the city of Danzig, Prussia (today Gdansk, Poland), had one of the first grain elevators, middle right. In the 14th and 15th centuries, when the Dutch-Northwest German trade began to develop, artisans and master builders settled in Danzig, a prosperous medieval city belonging to the Hanseatic League. The work of the master fortress builder Adam Wiebe, was renowned. He built a suspension carriage system for constructing the fortifications of the city. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, *Klassen A Family Heritage (Winnipeg, 1980)*, page 75.

dom of Poland as pacifist Mennonites. They were allowed to organize their own schools – a matter of great importance to them, since, with their emphasis on the centrality of the Bible, functional literacy for both men and women was essential. The schools served the purpose of instilling the church's values and beliefs in their young people.

In 1772 Prussia, Austria and Russia participated in the first partition of Poland. Prussia received that part of Royal Prussia in which the majority of the Mennonites lived. Prussia was slow in granting Mennonites exemption from military service. When it finally did so, it demanded a large annual cash payment, and forbade Mennonites to acquire any additional land. This caused the rapid development of a landless group, which constituted a major problem for the Mennonite churches.

Consequently, during the latter part of the 18th century, Mennonites were receptive to the invitation by Catherine II of Russia to settle in the newly conquered steppes of the Ukraine. From 1788 to the 1830s thousands of Mennonites migrated to the Ukraine and founded the two settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna in the southern Ukraine.

The Ukraine - New Russia.

Mennonites entered the Ukraine, at that time called New Russia, upon promises entailed in a *Privilegium* agreed to by the Russia government and published in 1800 by Czar Paul I.⁶ The conditions of the *Privilegium* were similar to those granted to all the various ethnic groups which immigrated into the Ukraine. For Mennonites the key terms were exemption from military service, the right to exercise their religion as they wished, and control over their own schools. The Russian government wished to insulate its own people from the influences of these foreign colonists, and thus set up a separate governing structure to relate to the foreign colonists, including Mennonites. The Russian Department of the Interior established a committee called the Guardians Committee to supervise the foreign colonists.

The people who settled the Chortitza colony pioneered Mennonite life in the Ukrainian steppes.⁷ They suffered through the pioneer years. They paved the way for future settlers. Gradually they established not only church organizations according to the pattern they had had in the Vistula region, but also developed a comprehensive local civil structure under the control of the Guardians Committee, which was responsible for schools, village functions, and local justice. The Mennonites did not object to this semi-autonomous civil structure which was required by the Russian government, nor did they see this as a violation of their practice of separation of church and state. They saw this as an opportunity to express their faith in all areas of their life.

In the settlements in the Ukraine, Mennonites developed the single street or "row" village (Reihendörfer) with farmsteads on both sides of a central street. This village, adapted from the northern European areas where Mennonites had lived, became their distinctive pattern of commu-



Marienburg (Malborg) castle was built by the Teutonic Knights between 1274 and 1448. It was situated at the southern tip of the triangle of the Mennonite settlement in the Vistula Delta, only six kilometres from the village of Heuboden. The village was the centre of the Heuboden Gemeinde, home of many of the Mennonites who emigrated to Imperial Russia in 1788. Although severely damaged during WWII, the castle has been partially restored. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Klassen A Family Heritage (Winnipeg, 1980), page 80.



Grazing cattle and stately brick buildings, a typical landscape in the Vistula Delta. By 1578 the Mennonite refugees in Prussia had already reclaimed part of the land along the Haff, Draussensee (Outer Sea), the Vistula, Nogat and Tiege Rivers. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Klassen A Family Heritage (Winnipeg, 1980), page 61.

nity organization, and influenced their religious, social, economic, and political relationships.

The settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna were established according to this pattern, each "Wirt" (farmer) receiving 65 desjatins (about 175 acres) of land. As the populations in these settlements increased, new villages were established. Eventually all the land was taken up, however, and there emerged in Russian Mennonite society a new class, the landless, or "Aunohna." A temporary solution to the problem was found in the

establishment of daughter colonies such as Bergthal founded in 1836, and Fürstenland in 1864-70.⁸ The prospect of acquiring large land grants at a nominal price in Manitoba was very attractive for the church in which many (at least one-thirds in the Bergthal settlement) had become landless.

By 1870, the Russian government's attitude toward the colonists had changed. In an attempt to "russify" the numerous foreign settlers, the government passed legislation requiring univer-



A Mennonite Vorlaubhaus (arcaded house) in Lubieszew, formerly Ladekopp, West Prussia/Poland, possibly dating from the 18th century. A beautiful example of this type of building, many of which are still in existence. Photo by Ron and Wendy Dueck, Kleefeld, Manitoba, 1996. Photo courtesy of Pres., Part Two, page 59.

sal military service of all young men, taking greater control of schools, and demanding the use of the Russian language in schools and civil institutions.

These changes alarmed the Mennonite communities. Negotiations with the government to revise these restrictions in respect to the Mennonite communities were at first fruitless. However, after Mennonites had sent a delegation to

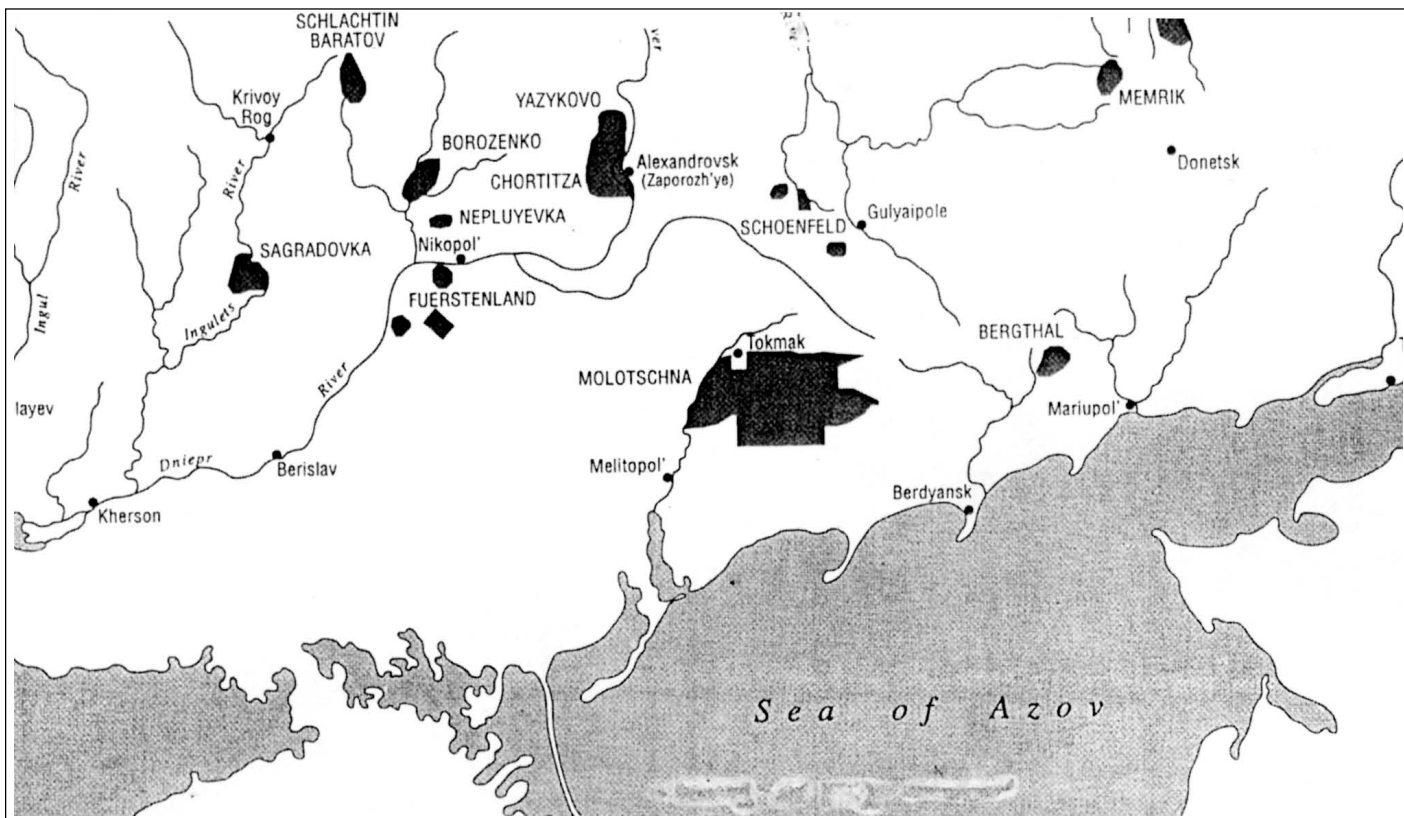
North America to investigate emigration possibilities,⁹ the Russian government became worried that the whole community of about 50,000 Mennonites might emigrate. A German-speaking official representative, General von Todtleben, was dispatched to the Mennonite colonies with offers of concessions, the most significant of which was exemption from military service in exchange for alternative forestry service. For one-

third of the Mennonites these concessions were unsatisfactory, and they persisted in their plans to seek a new homeland.

There were other reasons for emigration.¹⁰ The innovations which Johann Cornies imposed upon the Mennonite settlements were unacceptable to the conservative element in the daughter colonies. Johann Cornies (1789-1848) had prescribed rigorous rules for agricultural improvements, village planning and village layout. He had implemented far-reaching educational reforms that concerned themselves not only with such details as the location and construction of schools, but also with program of studies. The school program changed from providing the basic skills necessary for responsible membership in church and village to offering an increasingly expanded liberal arts education, which exposed the students to influences and ideas from the larger world. These changes were a matter of concern to the members of Bergthal and Fürstenland, who feared these new ideas would cause their children to become too worldly.

The same people also resented the new hymn melodies that had been introduced into the churches, as well as the Pietist and Baptist revival influences which were being introduced into the Mennonite churches. Emigration to Manitoba held the promise of freedom from these new influences and a return to the old, more familiar ways.

Fürstenland and Chortitza had not sent any delegates in 1873 to inspect the land in Canada and the United States. They depended upon the reports of the two delegates and one independent representative from the settlement of Bergthal.



Mennonite settlements in Southern Ukraine, Imperial Russia. Courtesy of Huebert and Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (2 ed.), page 15/East Reserve 125 Years, page 5.

These three men, together with two representatives from the Kleine Gemeinde, had inspected the land in Manitoba, and had decided to recommend Manitoba as the location for settlement. The delegates had travelled to Ottawa to negotiate terms for immigration. The terms were summarized in a letter dated July 23, 1873, written by the secretary of the Department of Agriculture, John Lowe.¹¹

The most important points in this letter were numbers one and ten. Point one stated: "...An entire exemption from military service as is provided by Law and Order-in-Council, will be granted to the denomination of Christians called Mennonites." Number ten stated: "...the Mennonites will have the fullest privileges of exercising their religious principles, and educating their children in schools, as provided by law, without any molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools." On their return journey the delegates stopped in London to obtain Royal confirmation for the validity of these provisions. They received assurance, and subsequently considered this letter a *Privilegium* which the Canadian government was extending to them.

In fact the letter did not extend special privileges. Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, along with Quakers and Tunkers (Church of the Brethren) had earlier already been granted exemption from military service. The section promising them control over their schools was consistent with the Manitoba Act of 1870 which provided for denominational schools in Manitoba.

On the basis of this letter from John Lowe, and the positive reports of the Mennonite delegates, many Mennonite families left Russia.¹² In all, 17,000 emigrated, 10,000 to the United States, and 7,000 to the new Canadian province of Manitoba. The new immigrants were full of optimism regarding the future.

The four groups that came to Manitoba were the Kleine Gemeinde, the Bergthal settlement, and people from both the Fürstenland and Chortitza settlements. The last two groups, those from Fürstenland and Chortitza, joined into one, and settled the villages in the western end of the West Reserve in the years 1875 and following.

Settlement in Manitoba

In the spring of 1873 the Dominion government in an Order-in-Council set aside eight townships of land for exclusive Mennonite settlement east of the Red River. The first Mennonite immigrants who arrived from Russia in 1874 laid out numerous villages on these eight townships. All the settlers were from the Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde churches.

The first immigrants from Fürstenland and Chortitza arrived in 1875. They found the land on the eight townships of the East Reserve unsuitable, and chose the area between the Red River and the Pembina Hills. This land was treeless and had been considered undesirable for habitation by earlier settlers from Ontario. The fact that it was flat, treeless and not divided by rivers, made it an ideal location for laying out villages, and a number were established in the next few years. In 1876 the Dominion government offi-



Threshing in Russia 1815, using threshing stones. Photo courtesy of Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites, page 27/East Reserve 125 Years, page 6.



1850s - Jakob Hildebrandt's *Wirtschaft*, on the beautiful Chortitza 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./East Reserve 125 Years, page 7.



A steppe landscape scene north of Franzfeld, Yazykovo Colony, sketch by Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Volume One, page 466. The area around the Chortitza "Old" Colony was quite rolling interspersed by river valleys and creeks. By comparison, the Molotschna was relatively level/East Reserve 125 Years, page 7.

cially reserved 17 townships in this region for exclusive Mennonite settlement. The area was called the "West Reserve," to distinguish it from the settlement on the east side of the Red River, known as the "East Reserve."

Settlers on both reserves came with fond hopes of establishing faithful Mennonite church communities, and improving on the communi-

ties that they had left behind in Russia.¹³

Two distinct groups emerged on the West Reserve. As mentioned above, the western half was settled by immigrants from Chortitza and Fürstenland. They hoped to establish one church for the whole West Reserve when they organized the Reinländer Mennonite Church and elected Johann Wiebe as their Aeltester. For the first few

years that dream seemed possible.

Starting around 1878, large numbers of Bergthal people who had settled on the East Reserve, and who discovered that their land was unsuitable for farming, moved onto the eastern half of the West Reserve. Many laid out villages while others settled on individual farms, as allowed by the Canadian Homestead Act. These Bergthaler settlers did not have any loyalty to Johann Wiebe, and disagreed with some of the decisions of the Reinländer church. So the Bergthaler did not join the Reinländer church, but continued to invite the Chortitz (the name of the East Reserve Bergthaler Church) bishop Gerhard Wiebe, to baptize and serve communion. In 1882 the Bergthaler Church ordained a new Bergthaler bishop on the West Reserve, Johann Funk. This election divided the West Reserve into two churches, the Reinländer Church with Johann Wiebe as bishop, and the Bergthaler Church with Johann Funk as bishop. A permanent division had been introduced into the West Reserve.

The civil administration¹⁴ that developed was an extension and expression of the religious convictions of the settlers who were dedicated to the ideals of brotherhood, economic sharing, equality and mutual support. The major difference between the village structure in Russia and Manitoba was that in Russia the village organization was supported by law, whereas in Manitoba it was based solely upon voluntary commitment. As a matter of fact, special permission, known as a "Hamlet Privilege" had to be obtained from the Dominion government to allow Mennonite settlers to fulfill their homestead requirements without actually residing on their own quarter sections.¹⁵

Each village had approximately 20 to 24 farmsteads (Wirtschaften) consisting of a house-and-barn-combined building, plus other buildings, gardens and a small pasture for the cattle. Surrounding the village, in the five to six nearby sections, were the fields and a common pasture. The fields were divided into long narrow strips (called *Koagels* in Low German), and were allotted to the people in the village in such a way that everyone had some good and some poor land; some land near the village and some farther away. At one end of the village was a large common

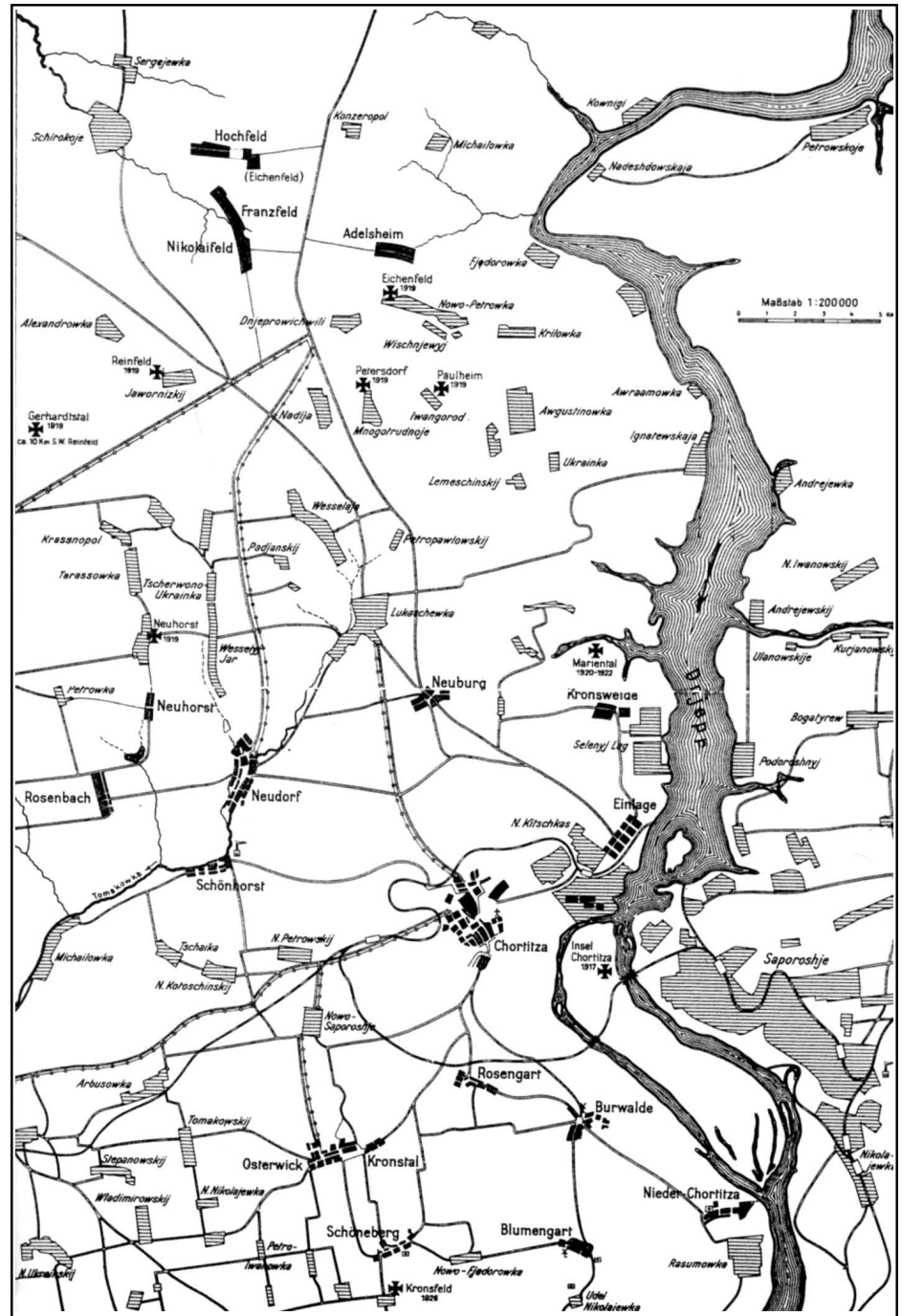
pasture in which the village herdsman cared for the cattle of all the farmers in the village.

Village Administration.

Each village elected a *Schultz* (mayor) and two *Beisitzer* (assistants). Together these officials made up the *Dorfsamt*, (village government). They were responsible for maintaining the vil-

lage street, roads, bridges, drainage, hiring the school teacher and the herdsman, providing guardians for the estates of widows and orphans, maintaining the property which belonged to the village, and collecting taxes.

The top civil administrative official in the settlement was the *Oberschultz* or *Obervorsteher*. His duties were roughly equivalent to those of a reeve



1941. Map of the Chortitz Colony founded at the junction of the Chortitz and Dnieper Rivers in Imperial Russia in 1789. The map is helpful as it shows the names of the Mennonite villages in the Chortitz and Jasykowo Colonies as well as numerous Russian and Ukrainian villages in the surrounding area. The map was prepared by Dr. Karl Stump and a Wehrmacht task force during the German occupation of 1941-43. The map has appeared in numerous Mennonite publications including N.J. Kroeker, *First Mennonite Villages in Russia 1789-1943* (Chortitz - Rosenthal (Vancouver, 1981), page 47; John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia* (Winnipeg, 1989), page 13; and Loewen, *Jasykowo* (Beausejour, 1995), page 167.



H. Dyck

Driving across the Russian steppe ("stappe") - 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/East Reserve 125 Years, page 6.

Part One: Historical Background

of a municipality even though his responsibilities went considerably beyond the duties of a reeve. He was responsible for co-ordinating the tasks among the villages, arranging for the municipal work each person had to contribute annually, and saw to it that the Schultz of each village handled his tasks properly. The *Obervorsteher* worked closely with the bishop and ministers in

the decisions he made: his task was to oversee the civil life of the church community. If necessary he related to the provincial government. The first *Obervorsteher* on the West Reserve was Isaac Müller, a long time resident in the village of Neuhorst.

The central village for the western part of the West Reserve was Reinland, where the offices of

the *Obervorsteher* were located. Even the North West Mounted Police office was located here for a time. The first meeting place for the Reinländer Mennonite Church was built in Reinland. The village was on the Post Road which led into the interior of the province. A number of businesses were located here from an early date.

Settlement 1875-79.

Life on the West Reserve was difficult during the first few years. Most people spent the first winter in a semlin (sod house), although as soon as possible frame houses, barns, and granaries were built. The wood for these building had to be cut and transported from the forested areas along the Pembina River in North Dakota, or from the Pembina Hills. Since the CPR railway lines across the West Reserve were only begun in 1882, all supplies in the early years had to be brought in along the Post Road from Fort Dufferin on the Red River just north of Emerson.¹⁶

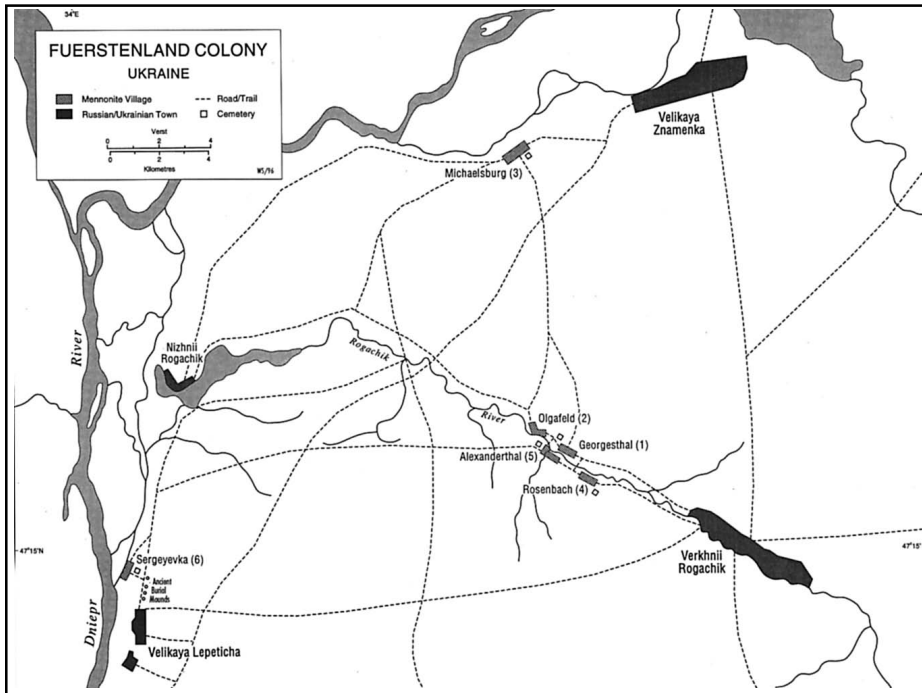
In December, 1879, Peter Wiens sent a report to the *Nebraska Ansiedler*, in which he described the state of the villages in the West Reserve. The total population had risen to 3534 people (1917 males and 1617 females) in 38 villages. These 38 villages had 753 families (Wirten), on the average about 20 families per village. The economic progress indicated in the report is quite remarkable. More than 14,000 acres had been seeded, yielding 127,000 bushels of wheat, 34,000 bushels of barley, and 48,000 bushels of oats. In addition they had harvested more than 31,000 bushels of potatoes.

In four short years, the Reinländer West Reserve settlement had become self sustaining. For the farm work horses and oxen provided the principle source of power. The settlement had 717 horses and 939 oxen. The numbers indicate that there was a gradual transition from oxen power to horse power. Some of the villages, like Reinland, had up to 77 horses. Other villages still had more oxen. Burwalde, for example, had 34 oxen and 2 horses.

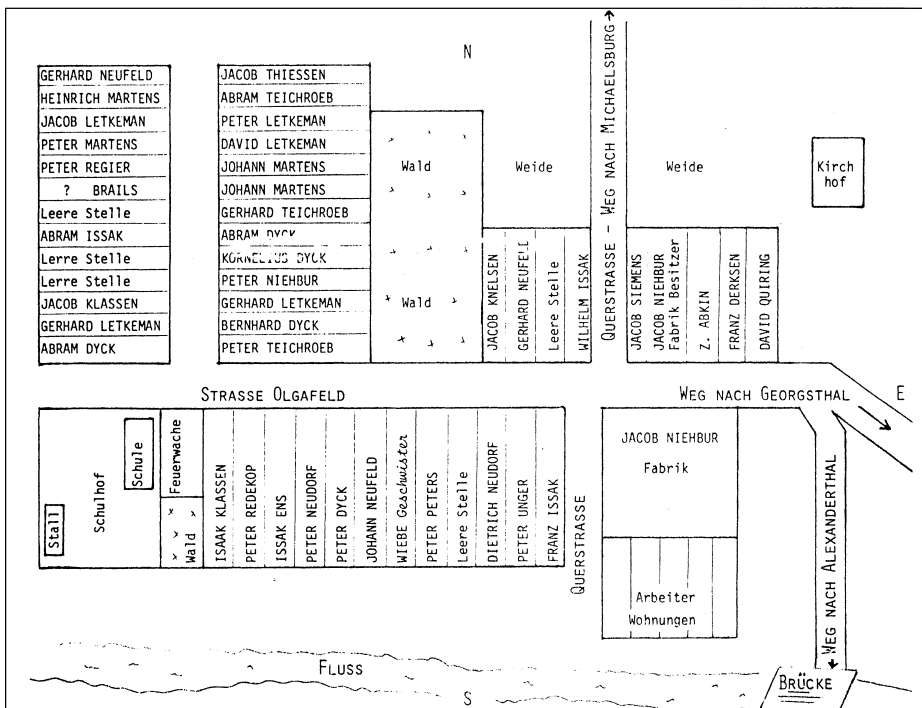
The production was accomplished with considerable mechanization. The same report indicates that the settlement had 12 steam threshing machines. This mechanization was obviously a great advance over the flail and rolling stones used only a short time earlier for harvesting grain. For grinding wheat into flour for baking bread, and oats and barley into feed for the cattle, there were two mills, a windmill and a steam powered mill.

Wiens, in his report in the *Nebraska Ansiedler* estimates the value of the assets of the community. The total value of the settlement, including all the buildings as well as the crop for 1879, is \$480,000. Even though the first few pioneer years were hard, by 1879 Mennonites had built a fairly solid financial base.¹⁷

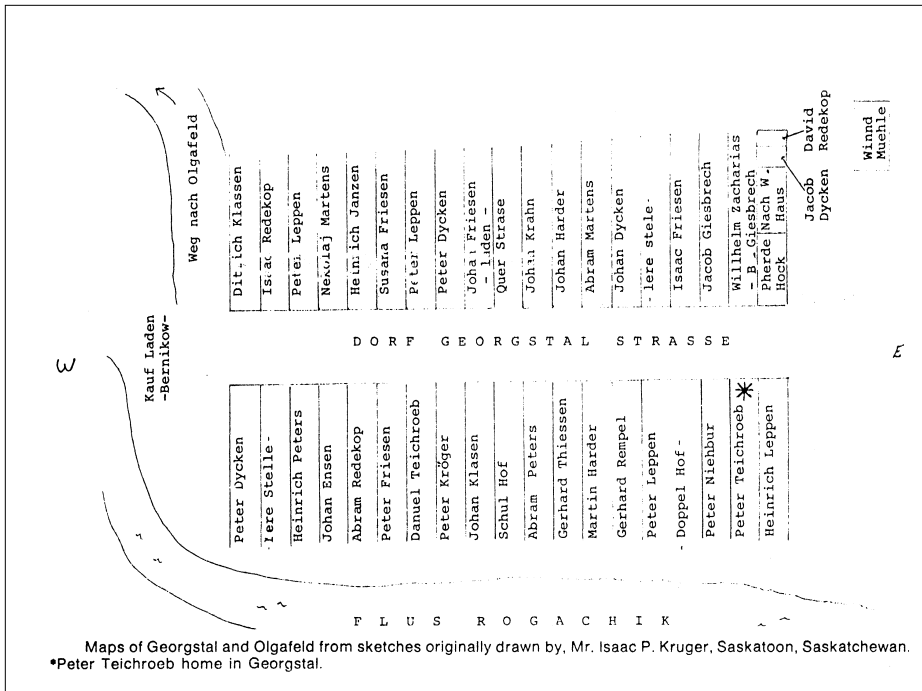
As the years went by, life in the West Reserve became less strenuous, although many hardships continued. Various children's diseases remained a constant threat. In Gnadenthal for example, during the decade of the 1880s, 68 children were born.¹⁸ During the same decade, 16 children died. In the next decade, the 1890s, 82 children were born, and 26 children died. In these two decades



Map of the Fürstenland Colony established south of Nikolopol, Imperial Russia, in 1864. It was a very fertile and productive region. A third of the Old Koloniers in Manitoba had lived at Fürstenlandt. Map by Wm. Schroeder, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and courtesy of Mennonite Atlas (2d.), page 30.



Village map of Olgafield, Fürstenlandt, Imperial Russia, from a sketch originally drawn by Isaac P. Kruger, Saskatoon, Sask., and courtesy of Peter Goertzen, Teichroeb (Winnipeg, 1979), page 5. Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) settled in Olgafield, probably in 1864 when the Fürstenlandt settlement was established.



Maps of Georgstal and Olgafeld from sketches originally drawn by, Mr. Isaac P. Kruger, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. *Peter Teichroeb home in Georgstal.

25 percent of the infants died. Gradually as the years went by, life in the West Reserve became less strenuous, although many of the hardships continued. Various children's diseases remained a constant threat, and the abundance of work taxed all members of the community. On their own, the settlers would likely have failed. What made success possible was the mutual support provided by a variety of community organizations and village structures.

The Herdsman.

Each village had a herdsman to drive the cattle to the pasture in the morning and to bring the cattle back to the farms in the evening. Since in the early years, barbed wire was not known in Manitoba, a herdsman was crucial to control the cattle.

Most often the herdsman was not a native of the village, nor a Mennonite.¹⁹ In the Gnadenfeld village records the names that appear are Nikolay Duder and Joseph Arremscheck.²⁰ In some cases it was not possible to hire a herdsman, and then villagers would have to do this task themselves. In some cases younger women of the village took turns herding the cattle.

Contracts with the herdsmen were annually drawn up by the village. The herdsman's duties were to take the cattle to the pasture punctually in the morning and return them safely in the evening. Usually the cheerful sound of his horn alerted the villagers at an early hour upon which a general hustle and bustle ensued in the barns or Kohocks (cow-pens) since *nojoagen* (driving the cattle to the pasture after the herdsman was al-

ready off with the herd) was considered a disgrace. Should any harm come to an animal while under the herdsman's care, he was responsible and had to replace the animal. Should an animal be injured due to a wind or hail storm, the loss was divided equally among all the Wirte and the herdsman. Thus if there were 25 villagers, the



Justina Teichroeb, nee Wolf (1834-1915) and Peter Teichroeb (1829-98), who owned a *Wirtschaft* at the east end of Georgthal, south side of the village street. The photograph appears to date around 1880 and is typical of the many pictures taken of Old Colony people during this time. Of this family only son Jakob Teichroeb (1853-1936) RGB 272-2 emigrated to Canada, settling in Blumstein, a few miles southwest of present-day Winkler. Photo courtesy of P. Goertzen, Teichroeb, page x.

herdsman was responsible for 1/26th of the loss. According to extant contracts, the herdsman's wages were partially paid in kind, e.g., 3 pounds of meat and 3 pounds of lard from each Wirt, 7 loads of hay, 110 bushels of wheat, 90 bushels of barley, 60 bushels of oats, as much straw as he needed, 1/3 load of manure from each Wirt, and transportation to get to market in town, to bring grain to the mill, and to get firewood. He also received a house for himself and his family. In one of the extant contracts, in 1914 a herdsman's cash wages were \$1.20 per month.

The Teacher.

The *Schulze* and *Beisitzer* also had general responsibility for the school system, and for hiring the school teacher, who was always a Mennonite. His contract year extended from seeding time to seeding time. His school year began with a month's instruction when seeding time was finished. School was then suspended during the busy summer months until October 15th, and subsequently continued until seeding time in the following spring.²¹

The contracts indicate that the teacher received a dwelling adequate for himself and his family, free fuel for heating his home, free pasture for his cows, 100 bushels of wheat, 100 bushels of barley, hay from 5 acres, free schooling for his children, and a salary. The salary varied, but for the school year 1919 to 1920 in one school, it was \$50.00 per month, and for the school year 1920-1921 it was \$65.00 per month.

To support the teacher, parents of the school children were assessed a certain amount of money. For the year 1920, families had to pay \$2.18 per child per month. This was based on an enrollment of 46 pupils. In addition each *Wirt*, even if he had no school children was assessed a certain amount of grain. The records indicate that for the year 1920 in one of the villages a *Wirt* was able to provide only half the grain he had been assessed.

A neighbour contributed 50 per cent more that year so that the required grain was contributed.

The contract for the school year 1916-17 notes that the teacher was also to receive free teaching material. This may indicate that in the earlier years he had to provide the material from his own salary.

The Waisenamt.

Another responsibility of the village government was to oversee the Waisenamt, an institution that took care of the estates of orphans, widows and widowers. Two *Waisenvorsteher* (Orphans' Representatives) were elected for two year terms by the *Wirte* of each village to administer the estates. Their terms were staggered so that one of the *Waisenvorsteher* would always be experienced. A special note in the "Rules and Regulation for Waisenvorsteher and Vormünder and their Duties" specifies that candidates for this office were to be honourable, diligent, and men of good character.²²

The two *Waisenvorsteher* were required to present an annual financial statement to the



The village of Olgafeld, Fürstenlandt, Russia, view towards the northeast. Photo courtesy of Quiring, In the Fullness of Time (Kitchener, 1974), page 62/ Peter Goertzen, Teichroeb (Winnipeg, 1979), page 8. The prominent Neibuhr factory is visible at the upper right hand side. Nothing is left of the village of Olgafeld except the cemetery.

Oberschultz, who also signed all the inheritance distribution contracts. Thus the Gebietsamt (settlement government) was clearly informed about the transactions, and carried the final authority for the proper administration of estates, and the care of widows and orphans.

Brandvorsteher.

The Reinländer Mennonite Church, as did each of the Mennonite church groups, had a *Brandvorsteher* (fire marshal), elected by the *Wirte* of the villages. The *Brandvorsteher* had the task of overseeing the church's fire insurance organization. The fire insurance organization included all the farm machinery, buildings and contents of the whole Reinländer Church. Each village also had its own *Brandvorsteher* who was responsible for maintaining accurate records for that village.²³ The *Brandvorsteher's* task was to oversee the fund, collect dues, and pay the fire insurance in case of fire. His task also extended to enforcing fire safety regulations.

The quality of life in the Mennonite village communities depended upon the quality of leadership provided by the *Gebietsamt* (the *Oberschultz* and his assistants), and the *Dorfsamt*. Because these offices rotated around the *Wirte*, the majority of villagers were knowledgeable in the affairs of the village, and could provide the necessary support to ensure the smooth operation of the village.

The Church.

The Mennonite groups that emigrated to Manitoba from Russia had two major reasons for settling in Manitoba.²⁴ One was the desire to be exempt from military service. The second was to have control of the schools. By controlling their schools they felt they could transmit their values to their children. The reason why they had not chosen to settle in the United States was because the American states had not been willing to grant them exemption from military service and control of their schools.

The Reinländer Mennonite Church constructed numerous meetings houses, each house serving a number of villages. Services were held every Sunday morning at 9.30 and continued for one-and-a-half to two hours. Men sat on the left side of the building and women on the right. Men and women entered by separate entrances. Church services were formal. The preaching was done by ministers (*Prediger*) elected from the

membership.²⁵ The ministers were elected for life, and had no formal training. Their only preparation was grade school education, attendance at the church, and self study. Some of the early ministers had probably been trained in the Chortitza Zentralschule in Russia.

Of considerable help to the lay minister was the practice of reading sermons that had been prepared by ministers in the past. The sermons had been copied and recopied numerous times, and were without author or date. It seems likely that many of them had been written in Prussia, or in Russia. The ministers read the sermons in German. Interpretive comments were usually made in the Low-German language. The sermons were good expositions of biblical texts, reflecting to a large extent the discipleship theology of early Anabaptism, especially the views of Menno Simons. The themes of faith, salvation, peace, adult commitment, the seriousness of sin, grace and forgiveness were prominent.

Salvation was perceived as a corporate reality by the villagers. God had called them to faith in Jesus Christ, and the response to this call was properly expressed by committing themselves to the believing community. This commitment meant subjecting individual desires and wishes to the good of the whole group. The believer lived in the village and participated in its communal structures. Individualism in dress, lifestyle, consumption, and land use was submerged in order to maintain harmony in the community. In this manner the Reinländer Church attempted to maintain a spirit of equality, unity, community, and a setting in which mutual admonition among church members could occur.

Outside Disruption.

While the church was still trying to meld the various groups within it into one harmonious whole, disruptive developments affected all the Reinländer churches. The Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite Churches in the United States sent missionaries to the Mennonite communities in southern Manitoba. This development puzzled the Reinländer churches, because a scant decade earlier, prior to emigration, all of these Russian Mennonites immigrants in the United States and Manitoba had been their fellow Mennonite believers in Russia. The missionary visits were interpreted by the Reinländer Church as judgment. One segment of the Mennonite community was considering another in

need of conversion from "heathen" ways.

There are a number of reasons why Mennonites in the USA had this attitude to Mennonites in Manitoba. Most of the people who settled in Manitoba came as groups and settled in groups. The Bergthaler, Kleine Gemeinde, Fürstenland, and Chortitza settlers were all intent on maintaining and conserving a village based way of life which they deeply believed was the Christian way. Most of the Mennonites who settled in the United States did not settle in villages.²⁶ The villages that were established were broken up before long. U.S. Mennonites settled in scattered communities over a four state area: Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Minnesota. Soon many of them were open to change and looked for ways to get away from the old patterns of life. New farming techniques, dress styles, the English language, and advanced education were adopted by them. Some also adopted new religious terminology and concepts.

In 1883 the Mennonite Brethren Conference sent Heinrich Voth of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and David Dyck of Kansas, to Manitoba. The General Conference Mennonite Mission Board sent N. F. Toews and S. S. Balzar, both of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in the early 1890s. The Mennonite Brethren missionaries rebaptized the converts from the Reinländer church by immersion, and formed a new church at Burwalde near Winkler in 1888. The church building was moved to the town of Winkler in 1897. The General Conference missionaries concentrated their efforts in Hoffnungsfeld, a village near the present town of Winkler.

These mission efforts had profound effects upon the Reinländer Church. A number of the earliest General Conference Mennonite missionaries to Manitoba had been trained in Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.²⁷ The communal understanding of the Reinländer churches seemed very different from the dispensationalism and the more individualistic view of salvation taught at Moody. Consequently the missionaries felt the Manitoba Mennonites ought to be converted to their more individualistic view of salvation if they were to be genuine Christians.

People who were converted not only withdrew their land from the communal village system, but also withdrew from membership in the various village organizations. This caused numerous villages to dissolve. Sometimes converts would even disregard loans made from the

Waisenamt, claiming that “all things were made new” and even old debts were wiped away.

The Mennonite Brethren Church members quickly established themselves in business and government in the town of Winkler. The new converts took on the role of acculturators in the community. Thus for people who either wanted to live in town, get into business, or become generally more acculturated, religious conversion became melded with these added attractions.

The General Conference missionaries converted the Reinländer, but did not rebaptize them nor establish separate General Conference Churches. They counseled the new converts to join the Bergthaler Church. Because the Bergthaler Church had baptism services only once a year, at Pentecost, some of the new converts became impatient and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. This created additional negative feelings between the groups.

It is evident that these mission efforts had divisive results. Not the least of the problems was that the understanding of the Christian gospel which the missionaries brought was considered by the Reinländer Church to be much more limited, narrower, and less biblical than what the Reinländer people already had. The revivalist preachers called for a religious conversion of the soul, but allowed a large part of the civic and economic life to be lived according to individual tastes rather than community discerning. The fact that the missionaries were better educated, spoke a better English, and maybe even spoke a better High German, gave them an advantage and put the Reinländer members and leaders on the defensive.

The missions program from the south hit the Reinländer Mennonite Church at a crucial point in its early development. As a result of these attacks as they saw it, the church became defensive, fearful of change, and suspicion of outsiders. The Reinländer Church might have developed along very different lines had these mission efforts not happened at that early formative stage of their development. The proselytizing endeavours created and accentuated conflicts in Manitoba. The relationship between Reinländer and Bergthaler churches was obviously affected negatively. The Bergthaler Church was seen as the accomplice of the General Conference missionaries, although it too was uncomfortable with some of the developments. It had not invited the missionaries. Indeed some of the Bergthaler leaders even requested that the missionaries be withdrawn. The whole affair soured the Bergthaler view of the General Conference to the extent that they refused to join the General Conference Mennonite Church until almost a century later.

Church Leadership.

The Reinländer Church had three levels of ordained leaders. All ordinations were for life. At the head of the church was the *Aeltester* (bishop) whose responsibility was to set the tone for the church, chair the discussions of the church and leadership meetings, and be a leader in every respect. Much authority was vested in the office of the *Aeltester*. His authority could be exercised properly only if it was based on the support of



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/East Reserve 125 Years, page 8.

the people. The *Aeltester* kept the church membership books and recorded all the names of the people whom he baptized, or accepted as church members through transfer. He recorded marriages, births and deaths. It was his responsibility to ordain all ministers and deacons, as well as to officiate at all communion and baptism services.

The *Prediger* (ministers) had the task of preaching. Because they were lay men and had their own farms to take care of, not every preacher spoke every Sunday. They were also responsible for local care of members; counselling, visiting the sick, and officiating at funerals and weddings. Their task was frequently difficult, often interfering with their farming operations, especially if they had no older sons or hired hands to carry on the farm work.

It was the duty of the deacons to identify and alleviate physical or financial needs in the congregation. The poor, sick and elderly came under their care.

The bishop, ministers and deacons formed the *Lehrdienst* (leadership circle, literally leadership service) in the Reinländer Church. The *Lehrdienst* was responsible for organizing the rotation of ministers, handling matters of discipline, and making recommendations regarding specific cases to the congregation. In general, it was the first body to discuss any important issues that confronted the church. All matters of principle had to be decided by membership (*Bruderschaft*) meetings in which the *Lehrdienst* usually would come forward with recommendations.

The Village School.

One of the most important institutions in the settlement was the school. These Mennonites had left Russia because they believed that it was essential that the church control its schools. They believed that forming the values and beliefs of their children was the parents' and the church's responsibility, and not that of the state. Each village thus had a school.

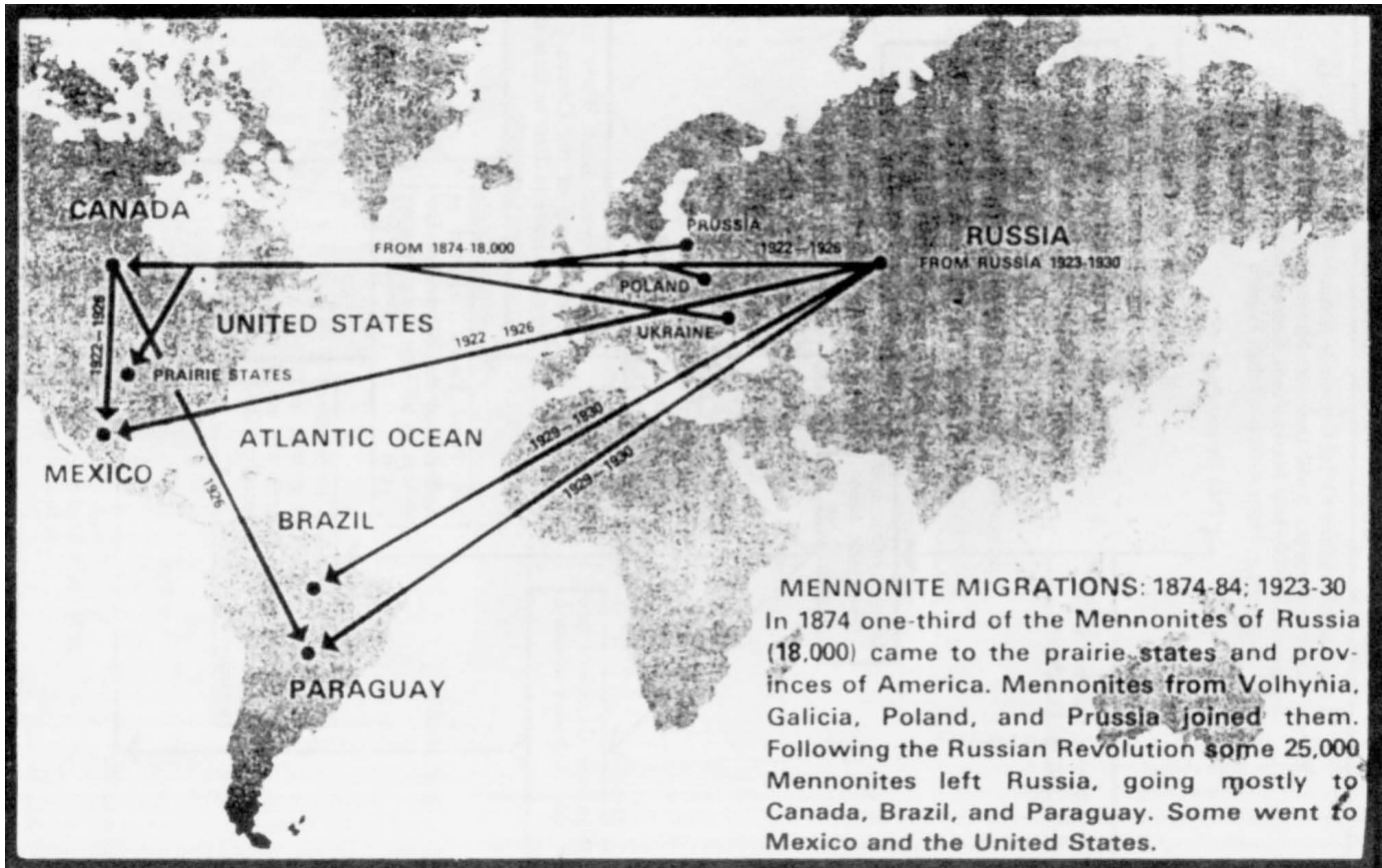
The architecture of the school building was developed in Russia during the 50 years prior to emigration under the school reforms of Johann Comies. A standard school building had emerged: a building divided into two sections with a hallway down the middle. On one side of the hallway lived the teacher and his family. Usually the living quarters had only two rooms, one that served as the kitchen, dining and living room, and the other as the bedroom. On the other side of the hallway was the classroom. It had a number of large windows on each side of the building so that the room was bright with natural light.

The school was an extension of a much larger educational process. The community saw the education in the school as integrated with the training in the home, the work on the farm, and the teaching in the church. The school was designed to reinforce the values of the home, the village, and the church. It provided the necessary tools to discharge the responsibilities to which as adults they would possibly be elected or appointed, e.g., bishop, minister, deacon, *Oberschultz*, *Schultz*, *Beisitzer*, *Brandvorsteher*, etc. Training which did not contribute to the discharge of these duties was considered superfluous and even harmful.

In order to prepare people for adult church and community membership, the schools taught the basic skills of reading, arithmetic, writing and penmanship (*Schönschreiben*). The school system consisted of four levels, each level determined by the reading curriculum. In the first level students studied the *Fibel*, from which they learned the alphabet, phonics, and spelling. In the second level the main book was the catechism. The students learned to read the catechism, thus increasing their vocabulary and reading skills. They also memorized the questions and answers of the catechism and in this manner received considerable religious instruction. It provided the young people with a common hermeneutic for interpreting the scripture.

In the third level students were required to read from the New Testament. This increased their vocabulary, but the method also indicated that the church considered the New Testament the norm for understanding the Bible. In the fourth level the whole Bible constituted the reading curriculum. It was not expected that a student would necessarily complete a level in one year. The four levels normally took about six to seven years to complete. Children thus were in school from age seven to about 13 years of age.

A broadening of the foundation curriculum depended on the creativity of the teacher. In the first few years after the founding of the West Reserve, there were some teachers who had had training in the Chortitza Zentralschule in Russia.



Mennonite Migrations 1874-78 and 1923-30. Courtesy of Mennonite Life/History and Events, page 148/East Reserve 125 Years, page 10.

As the years went on, fewer and fewer teachers had such training. This lack of training handicapped them, rendered them less able to continue the breadth of the education provided in the early years. Obtaining a higher education in Manitoba was out of the question, even for those who might have been inclined to study, since that would have been considered worldly.

The school year was relatively short. It offered some diversion from the heavy farmwork at home, however. Recesses and any other free time was spent in playing group games. Organized group sports like baseball and football were not accepted or known in the early years.

Teacher Training.

The lack of adequately trained teachers to staff the large numbers of schools in the Reinländer and Bergthaler Church villages resulted in a proposal to found a teacher training school after the pattern established in Russia. The principle group promoting this idea was the Bergthaler Church. When such a teacher training school was established in 1889 in Gretna, the first teacher was Wilhelm Rempel, a teacher in the village of Reinland. He, however, felt inadequate to head up the teacher training program. The school was closed for a year, to reopen in 1891 under the leadership of Henry H. Ewert. Ewert was recruited from Kansas by the Manitoba Department of Education, in co-operation with the Mennonite School Society (Bergthaler), which was in charge of the teacher training school in Gretna.²⁸

It should have been possible for the Bergthaler and Reinländer churches to co-operate in this teacher training school venture. They both had similar needs for teachers and used similar educational systems. They both were familiar with this pattern of a secondary school from Russia. However, co-operation did not materialize. The mission efforts of the past number of years had strained the relationship between the two groups. Besides, the Bergthaler had gone to the Manitoba government for help in getting a teacher. The Reinländer group felt this kind of alliance with worldly authorities could threaten their whole educational system. In addition, the new teacher was from Kansas, and represented the Menno-

nites in the US who were seen as more worldly, Pietistic, Revivalistic and Separatistic by the Manitoba Mennonites.

Thus it happened that the Reinländer Church's school system did not develop a teacher training school despite the fact that these same people had supported such a school in Russia. The lack of a teacher training institution meant that after a number of decades there were fewer teachers who had had any training beyond the village school. Most of the teachers were undoubtedly very capable, but the exposure to a wider sphere of interest was absent, and gradually the standards deteriorated.



The "International" docked at Upper Fort Garry (Winnipeg, Manitoba) on August 1, 1874 ("The Forks"). This was the first ship load of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Western Canada, 55 families of the Kleine Gemeinde and the first ten Old Colony families. Photo courtesy of Peter S. Koop, Steinbach/East Reserve 125 Years, page 11.

The Waisenvorsteher.

One of the unique institutions developed by Russian Mennonites was the *Waisenamt* (orphans bureau). Its principle function was to protect the estates of orphans, widows, and widowers. Because these estates had to be invested in order to gain a return, the *Waisenamt* also became a lending institution and served the func-



Arrival in Manitoba, August 1, 1874. Photo courtesy of Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, Volume One*, page 182/East Reserve 125 Years, page 11.

tion of a Credit Union.

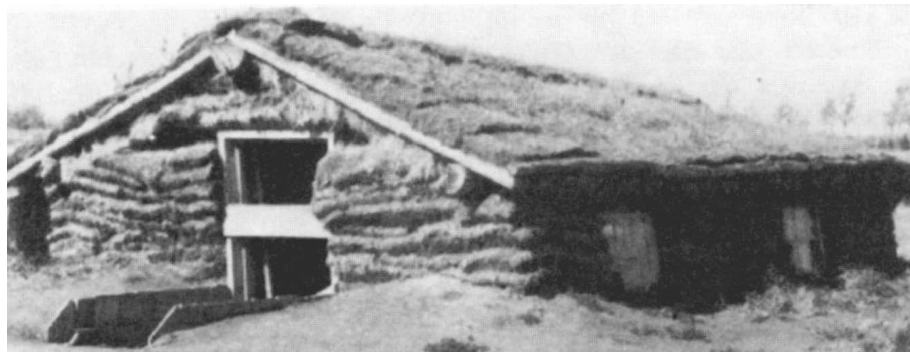
The Reinländer Church had one *Waisenamt* for all of its members. Two *Waisenvorsteher* with equal authority, who were responsible for administering the fund, were elected by the church. The monies from the various estates which the *Waisenamt* held in trust received five percent interest per year²⁹ This money was in turn loaned out at 6 percent interest per year, and the 1 percent difference was used to service the fund.

In each case where one or both parents died, two people, called *Vormünder* (one who speaks for others), were appointed to handle the arrangements of the estate. The *Vormünder* were elected by the village. The regulations regarding the manner of handling the estates emphasized that the two *Vormünder* had to be of exemplary character. For the *Vormünder* this responsibility involved a considerable commitment of time and effort, since they were required to meet once a week, on Monday, to review the cases under their care. All decisions, were reviewed by the village government. The contracts they arranged were also signed by the *Schultz* and *Beisitzer*.

Upon the death of either a father or a mother, the remaining estate was carefully appraised by the *Vormünder*. A statement listing all assets was drawn up, signed by the *Vormünder* of the village, and verified by the *Schultz* and *Beisitzer*. Another contract was drawn up, which was usu-

ally designated as a *Theilungs-Kontrakt* (a contract dividing up the estate). It named all the children, listed the monetary value of the estate, and designated all children equally as heirs. The remaining parent was not an heir, but was declared the *Schichtgeber(in)*.³⁰ This meant that he or she had the responsibility to provide for the children, and to take good care of the estate until the children became adult. All of this was of course under the supervision and authority of the

made no distinction between boys and girls in terms of their eligibility to inherit. It also made no distinction between men and women. If either died, the property was placed in trust on behalf of the children. The whole process was administered by community leaders, duly elected to this task. Their terms of reference were carefully, and in great detail, drawn up in the "Rules and Regulations concerning *Waisenämter*."³¹



The Semlin. This semlin was built as a demonstration for the Steinbach Museum by museum founder John C. Reimer. Photo courtesy of Blumenort, page 45/East Reserve 125 Years, page 11.

Vormünder, and eventually of the *Dorfsamt*.

The *Schichtgeber* (male or female) were also assigned various specific responsibilities. When the heirs became adult, their *Schichtgeber* (in) had to provide them with some basic tools for life. For boys these included one horse, or \$150.00, one chest of drawers, one heavy coat, one light coat, two dress outfits, twelve shirts, five pil-

Relationship to the Government.

The Reinländer Church believed that Christians should be separate from the world. This included separation from governments. The church operated according to the principles of the Bible. All areas of life, economic, civil, and social should be brought under the control of the church. Governments operated according to secu-



A more elaborate Sarais, built circa 1875, by an Old Colonier in the West Reserve, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Frieda Klippenstein, *Neubergthal...Landscape History (Parks Canada, Winnipeg, 1997)*, Illustration 22/Preservings, No. 16, page 137.

lows, two feather ticks, one Bible, one *Gesangbuch*, and one catechism.

In addition the *Schichtgeber* had to pay 5 percent per year interest on the estate of the heirs from their fifth year of age onward. Until the children were five years of age the *Schichtgeber* could use the estate free of charge.

The arrangements made under the terms of this *Waisenamt* were remarkable. The *Waisenamt*

lar principles.

Thus all Reinländer villages refused to organize their schools under the Protestant denominational system established by the Manitoba School Act of 1871. This system was in effect up to 1890. Since the Reinlaender schools were not under government control, the Manitoba government's revisions of the Manitoba School Act in 1890 and 1896 did not affect them signifi-

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cantly. They believed that any kind of government control over their school system would jeopardize their ability to pass on their faith to the younger generation.

Another major area in which the Reinlaender Churches came into contact with the provincial government was in municipal responsibilities.³² It has already been mentioned that the *Obervorsteher* and the *Schultz* of each village were responsible for drainage, roads, and bridges in the area of the Reinländer villages.

In 1879 the provincial government, in the Municipal Act, established municipalities throughout Manitoba. Each municipality had a reeve for the whole municipality and councilors for the various wards. These officials were elected in regularly scheduled elections. Their duties were also to build and maintain roads and bridges, and to dispense charity to the poor.

For Mennonites this law represented a dilemma. Should Mennonites dismantle their municipal system and elect officials under the Manitoba government municipal system, or should they retain their own structure? The Bergthaler and Kleine Gemeinde groups on the East Reserve dismantled their own systems, and operated within the government's municipal system. The Bergthaler on the West Reserve did the same. The Reinländer, however, refused to give up their municipal organization. They were in principle opposed to being yoked with a government. They also wanted their civil and church lives integrated into one whole system. So they refused to vote in any municipal elections, or hold the office of reeve or councilor.

Thus in the Reinländer village area two local governing systems existed up to the time of emigration to Mexico in the 1920s. A fairly harmonious relationship developed between these two systems. The Reeves and the councilors were Bergthaler Mennonites who lived within the Reinländer village areas, or former Reinländers who had joined either the Mennonite Brethren, Sommerfelder or Bergthaler churches. Any Reinländer who ran for municipal office was warned, admonished, and asked by the church to give up his office. If he refused, and in this manner defied the brotherhood, he was excommunicated. Usually he would then join one of the other churches, Bergthaler, Sommerfelder or Mennonite Brethren.

The Reinländer "Gebietsamt" (municipal office) developed its own taxation system. This taxation system functioned alongside the government system, and complemented it. The

Reinländer taxes went for a much broader range of purposes than did the government taxes. The tax records for the whole "Gebiet" (municipality) began in July 1875, the date of the founding of the settlement.³³ The record lists each village, the name of each villager who paid taxes, and how much he paid. This was totalled up at the end of the year. The year's record concluded with a brief statement on disbursements.

A portion of the money each year was used to pay for expenses related to operating the central Gebietsamt office. There are numerous entries for the *Obervorsteher*; Isaac Müller's, travels to Winnipeg. The reason for these frequent trips is not indicated, but likely involved negotiations with government officials.³⁴

The largest payment each year during the 1880s and 1890s was repayment of two loans, one from the government for \$100,000.00 and one from the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario for \$20,000.00. These loans were necessitated by the severe economic stress of the first few settlement

years. The settlement is identified as the North-West settlement. Beginning in 1905, payment entries are included from the Swift Current settlement. The Reinländer community exercised a fairly extensive system of mutual economic support.³⁶

Economic Developments.

The original settlers all received 160 acres.³⁷ As in most villages, there was very little mobility, so farms tended to stay in the same hands. However, some families were more successful in farming than others. Some people moved to the new reserves in the Hague-Osler and Swift Current settlements in 1895 and 1905. Gradually the initial equality gave way to considerable inequality. In 1922, when land was sold to move to Mexico, in some villages the amount of land owned by the villagers varied from 40-640 acres.³⁸ This disparity created problems in a closely knit community in which so many of the relationships were based on the principles of equality.

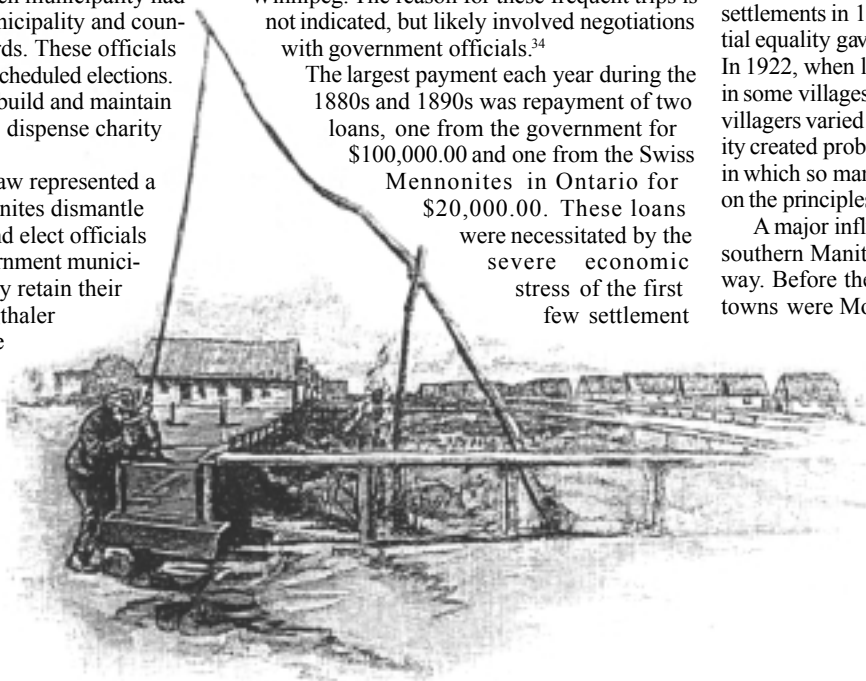
A major influence on the life of the villages in southern Manitoba was the coming of the railway. Before the railway came, the two nearest towns were Mountain City at the edge of the

Pembina escarpment, and Fort Dufferin or West Lynn on the Red River. Both were some distance away from the land settled by the Reinländer Mennonites. The village of Reinland, situated on the Post Road, provided many of the functions of a small town. Travel to the commercial centers on the Red River was along the Post Road by horse and buggy or wagon. Because of this tedious means of transportation, travel was curtailed, and the villages were isolated. Contact with the outside world was at a minimum. This helped to keep a distance from the outer world.

Then in 1882 the Canadian Pacific Railway was strung across the West Reserve, one spur running south from Rosenfeld to the Interna-

tional Boarder, and the other west from Rosenfeld through the northern end of the Reinlaender church region, about thirteen and a half miles north of the International boarder. The CPR established depots and refueling stops every five or six miles. The towns of Gretna and Morden arose as the first major commercial centers, one at each end of the Reserve. The third center was Plum Coulee, located more in the centre of the Reserve. Later the towns of Winkler and Altona were established, with Rosenfeld and Hordean being the last towns to be developed. The outside world had suddenly come to the isolated Mennonite communities.

The towns situated on the railway lines quickly became both commercial centers and points of acculturation. The selling of farm products and the purchasing of the necessary goods was greatly facilitated. From the standpoint of



The village well. A typical street scene of an Old Colony (Reinländer) village in the West Reserve, Manitoba, possibly Blumenort. Around 1880 Professor George Grant, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario, sent his students across Canada to write the stories and gather illustrations of its people. These articles were then gathered and published in Grant, editor, Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is (Toronto, Belden Bros., 1882), Two Volumes, pages 319-234, courtesy of Jake K. Doerksen, Ile des Chenes. J. B. McLaren was a Master's student, chosen to document the story of the Mennonites, newly arrived in Manitoba. Included in his article, published at pages 318-324, were six woodcuts by artist W. T. Smedley depicting scenes from the West Reserve, all of which are reprinted in this book.

years, and were guaranteed by the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario.³⁵ The payments on the principal and some of the interest of their portion of the loan were made annually by the Reinländer settlement.

Through this central treasury the settlement was also able to support needy settlements. New villages were exempt from paying taxes for the first number of years. According to the records, some new villages may have been exempt for up to 20 years from paying *Gebietsamt* taxes.

The Reinländer church in Manitoba also provided assistance for the establishment of new settlements in Saskatchewan. When the new reserve in the Hague-Osler area was negotiated and opened up for settlement, finances were provided by the Gebietsamt in the Manitoba Reinländer settlement. Every year, beginning in 1895, payments by Hague-Osler settlers are

the Mennonites this access to commercial links was a mixed blessing, since the easy accessibility to the outside world made it more difficult for the church to mold the values and lifestyle of the community. New ideas and new values were inevitably going to change the communities. Both those who accepted the new and those who resisted it were going to change.

W.W.I Tensions.

Canada declared war on Germany and Austria on September 1, 1914, two days after Great Britain declared war on Germany and Austria. Very early the Canadian government passed the War Measures Act, calling young men to volunteer for her army. Although Canada did not impose military conscription until 1917, it was considered the patriotic duty of Canadian young men to enlist in the fight against the enemy.

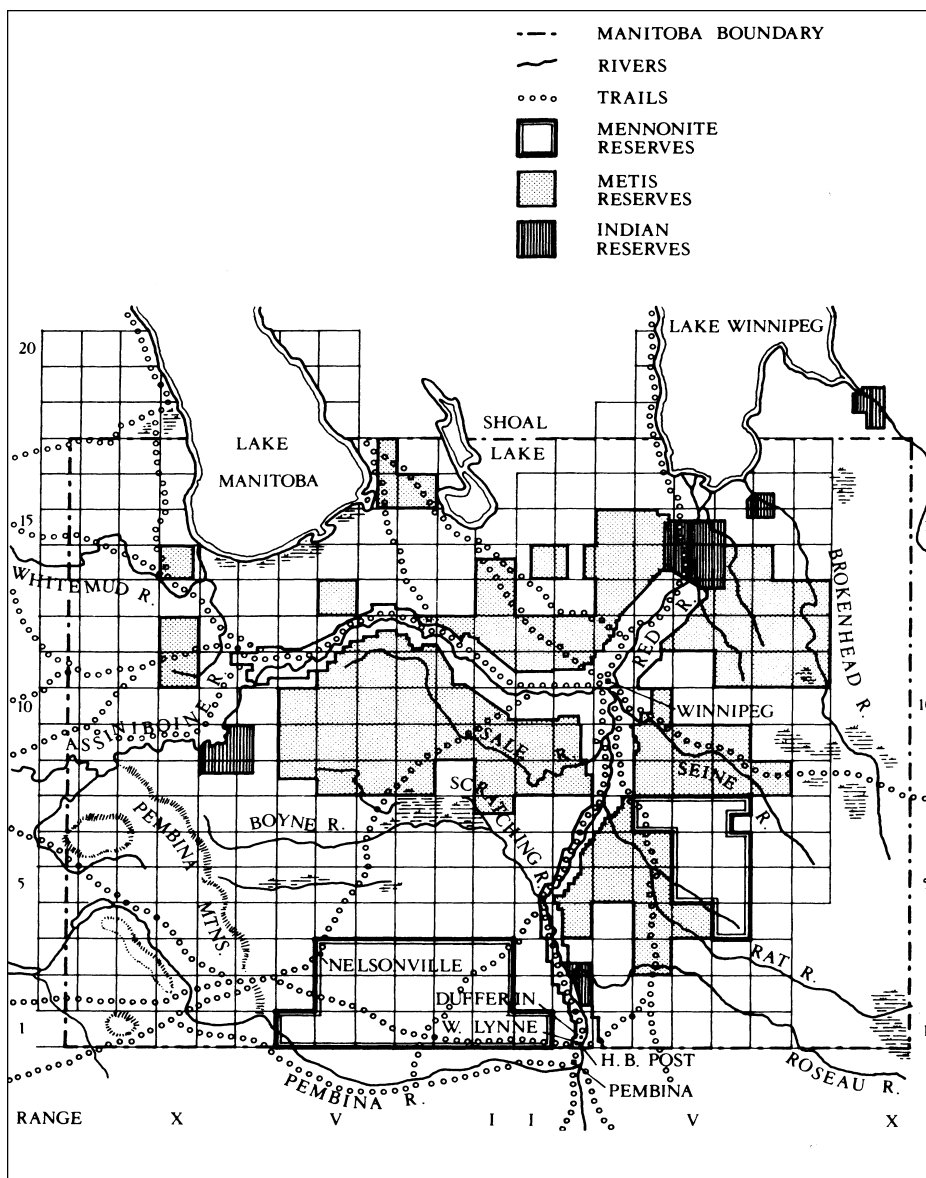
The Reinländer people were at first not greatly affected by these developments. The leaders viewed the war with concern, but felt that the Order-in-Council of 1873 would be honoured by the Canadian government, and that Mennonite men would be exempt from military service.

The Mennonite churches did, however, have to face the pressure of negative public opinion. Mennonites were, after all, a German-speaking minority in a country that was at war with two German-speaking countries. The Winnipeg Free Press³⁹ articulated the anti-Mennonite feelings in articles and editorials. Since Reinländer Mennonites did not read the Free Press, the immediate pressure came from non-Mennonites who resided in the railway towns of Plum Coulee, Winkler, and Morden. The latter town especially became a centre for anti-Mennonite sentiment.

In December 1916, the Canadian government called for the registration of all male adults in Canada between the ages of 16 and 65. The National Service cards were available at post offices and were to be filled out and sent in during January, 1917.⁴⁰

This move alarmed Manitoba Mennonites, and representatives were sent to Ottawa to speak to federal government officials. The Reinländer Church was represented in these meetings by its Aeltester, Johann J. S. Friesen. The delegation was assured by Prime Minister Borden that Mennonites would continue to be exempted from military service. Mennonite men were advised to register and identify themselves by writing "Mennonite" across their registration card. The registration was for purposes of establishing the manpower available for agricultural productions, they were informed. After some hesitation, the Reinländer Mennonites did register. In gratitude for their exemption from military service, the Reinländer Church made donations to the Manitoba Patriotic Fund, which was designed to help war victims, orphans and widows.⁴¹

In August, 1917 the government of Prime Minister Borden passed the Conscription Act. The act allowed exemption from military service, but disfranchised all conscientious objectors. Not being able to vote in federal and provincial elections was not a serious loss for the Reinländer church members, since they did not vote in federal or provincial election.⁴² Other Mennonite



The Province of Manitoba, 1875, showing Rivers, Trails and Reserves, as published in A. Ens, Subjects or Citizens The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870-1925 (Ottawa, 1994), page 15.

groups were more seriously affected by this action.

What affected the Reinländer Mennonites more than the registration and the Order-in-Council was the new school legislation passed by the Manitoba government. In 1916, in response to anti-pacifist and anti-Mennonite sentiment, Manitoba Premier T. C. Norris's Liberal government campaigned on the promise to create a school system in which the spirit of nationalism, love for king, flag and navy would be taught more thoroughly.⁴³ Norris promised to abolish the bilingual schools established in the 1897 Laurier-Greenway compromise, and to demand instruction in English only.

After his election, the Norris government passed the School Attendance Act. On March 10, 1916. The School Attendance Act made English the sole language of instruction in all public schools, and made attendance in a public school mandatory for children between the ages of seven and fourteen, unless a satisfactory private educa-

tion was provided.

The Act presented a hardship for the farmers who needed their sons for work on the farms even at the age of twelve or thirteen. It also made Mennonites aware that the days of their private schools were numbered. For the time being, they continued to conduct their schools according to their conscience and tradition, as they always had conducted them since their immigration into Canada. Although for some time no drastic changes were forced upon them, they were uneasy. They feared that changes could happen which would take from them their most cherished right: the right to educate their children.

In a brief separate from the rest of Mennonites in Manitoba, the Reinländer Mennonites appealed to the Norris government that they be allowed to conduct their own schools. All to no avail. Knowing that public opinion was on its side, the Norris government refused to change its legislation, but did not enforce it strictly for more than two years after its passage.

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With the return of the war veterans in 1918, the public pressure against pacifist Mennonites escalated. Canada Clubs and returned soldiers led the opposition to pacifist groups until in May, 1919, the Canadian government in an Order-in-Council closed Canada's doors to further immigration by Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors.

End of Community.

After the Manitoba government passed the School Attendance Act, many of the Mennonite Public schools reverted to private status, because Mennonites felt that the government was violating the terms of the Privilegium of 1873 in which they believed that Mennonites had been given control over their own schools.

In March 1916, the Department of Education appointed John F. Greenway Supervisor of School Attendance. In October 1917 he was appointed as special trustee of districts attempting to revert to private school status. In 1918 the Manitoba government acted more aggressively. Greenway was appointed trustee of all the private schools. From 1918 to 1920, by special Order-in-Council former Mennonite public schools which had reverted to private status were taken over by J. F. Greenway.

In 1920, all the private Mennonite schools which had not ever registered as public schools were taken over by Greenway. This included the Reinländer schools. Since the Reinländer Church was unwilling to change their private schools into public schools, the government organized ten public schools in the Reinländer region. Some of these one room schools were designed to serve two or even three villages. All were given Anglo-Saxon names. On February 21, 1920, the following new public schools were created: Thames - #1991 Bergfeld; Mersey - 1997 Chortitz, Osterwick; Birkenhead - 1996 Neuendorf, Hochfeld; Snowden - 1995 Reinland, Schoenwiese, Rosengart; Exeter - 1994 Rosenort, Kronsthal, Neuhorst; Grimsby - 1993 Blumengart; Meath - 1992 Reinfeld, Friedensruh; Clyde - 1990 Rosenfeld; Barker - 2058 Sommerfeld; Wells - 1998 Gnadenthal.⁴⁴

In most cases the villages were not willing to give up their school buildings for use by the public school, so the official trustee, Mr. J. F. Greenway, made loans on behalf of the villages to erect new school buildings. The loans had to be repaid by the respective villages.

Since the Reinländer people did not send their children to the public schools thus forced upon them, the parents of the children faced threats of fines and imprisonments, penalties that had been part of the School Attendance Act of 1916. The

fines were, however, not implemented in 1920 and in the two years following, because the whole Reinländer Mennonite Church was actively pursuing emigration possibilities.



Photograph of the windmill at Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba, built by Johann Bergmann, in 1877 or shortly thereafter. The individuals on the platform are believed to be the Mr. and Mrs. Jakob Giesbrecht, the second owners of the mill. Photograph courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland (Altona, 1974), page 130. The windmill is part of the village scene drawn by W. T. Smedley in the early 1880s and published in Picturesque Canada (Toronto, 1882). Courtesy of Jake Peters, Winnipeg, "Pioneer Windmills," Preservings, No. 16, page 124.

Exploring Emigration.

By 1919 the Reinländer Mennonite Church felt that the Manitoba government was not interested in negotiating with them, but was intent upon destroying their school system. The government wanted to foist upon them a system which would teach their children national values and militarism. They sensed, correctly, that the issue was not one of quality of education but rather of values.

In the summer of 1919 the Reinländer Church met and decided to investigate emigration possibilities. They selected two delegates, who, together with Saskatchewan Reinländer Church representatives, journeyed to Ottawa, and then on to Latin America.⁴⁵ In Ottawa they made one

final futile attempt to get the federal government to intercede on their behalf, and then proceeded to Argentina, Brazil and a number of other Latin American countries. None of these countries were willing to grant them the privileges they were looking for.

Upon the delegates' return from this fruitless journey, the Reinländer Church investigated settlement possibilities in Quebec, Mississippi and Mexico. In each case, they presented to the respective government six conditions that would have to be met before they would consider settling in this region. They requested that they and their children be exempted from military service, have the right to affirm instead of taking an oath, be granted religious freedom, have complete responsibility for as well as control of their schools, have freedom to administer their Waisenamt, and have control over the disposition of all colony lands by their society.⁴⁶

In May 1920, the Reinländer agreed to purchase land in Mississippi and move there, but in July a delegation on the way to Mississippi was refused entry into the United States. The Reinländer leaders considered this a sign that emigration to Mississippi was not advisable, and the plan was cancelled. However, land agents throughout the western and southern United States continued to try to get some settlers onto their land through attractive individual offers.

In 1920 the Hague Reinländer Church in Saskatchewan investigated settlement possibilities in Mexico which were fruitful. Mexico had just gone through a revolution, and the government was eager for settlers. The Manitoba Reinländer delegates failed to get their papers in time to accompany the Saskatchewan Reinländer delegation to Mexico. The delegation was able to see the Mexican President A. Obregon, and received from him a letter granting any Mennonites who would settle in Mexico exemption from military service, the right

not to take the oath, religious freedom, the right to operate their own schools, and the right to organize any economic institutions they wished. This provided the opportunity which the Reinländer had been waiting for. Plans for emigration began shortly after the delegation's return.

A New Homeland.

In September 1921 land was purchased in the Mexican state of Chihuahua near Cuauthemoc. In anticipation of the move in the coming summer, the Reinländer that winter attempted to sell their land as a block in order to gain the necessary money to pay for the 155,000 acres which had been purchased in Mexico. The Reinländer



1898. A windmill of the new style with a fan-tail in Reinfeld, east of Winkler. The photo also shows the unique beauty and efficiency of the "Strassendorf" village transplanted by the Old Coloniers from the steppes of Imperial Russia to the Canadian prairies, becoming a paradigm of religious faith and life, enabling the community to make immense strides economically within a few years. Courtesy of Jake Peters, Winnipeg, "Pioneer Windmills," Preservings, No. 16, page 124.

Church was unsuccessful in its attempt, but some individual villages listed their land with A. C. D. Pregitt, realtors from Morden, in December, 1921. On the second of May, 1922, they finalized the land sale to Monteith, Fletcher, and David, also of Morden, who were purchasing the land for 28 dollars per acre.⁴⁷ Monteith, Fletcher and David agreed to pay the full taxes for the year, and to allow renters to take off the crop in 1922. Residents were given the right to vacate over the next few years.⁴⁸

In preparation for emigration, the Reinländer Mennonite Church drew up a new set of church membership books. Only those who were emigrating were enrolled in the new set of books. The majority of Reinländer left for Mexico in 1922. Some moved in 1923 and others followed in 1924.

Conclusion.

With the migration 42 years of history came to an end. A community in which deep religious commitment had shaped the social and economic fabric, had decided to move in order to preserve the integration of faith and life. A community which believed that its children were its future, was willing to emigrate in order to retain control of its children's educational system. A community which had gradually seen the world encroach upon it, had decided to sacrifice a dearly won settlement for difficult pioneer conditions. A community which had seen the disrupting influence of wealth and economic disparities grow, decided to re-establish greater equality in a new settlement on marginally arable land. And so they left their pleasant farms for an uncertain future.⁴⁹

The migration also divided the Reinländer community. A minority could or would not migrate. They remained in Manitoba, without leadership, and without the community organizations which had sustained them up to this time. They also had to face an uncertain future.

About Author:

This article is a slightly revised version of an earlier article by Professor John J. Friesen, "Gnadenfeld 1880-1924," in Redekopp, J.P., editors, *Gnadenfeld 1880-1980* (Altona, 1982), pages 1-26.

The author John J. Friesen is a Professor of History and Theology at Canadian Mennonite University, 500 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg. He is currently on sabbatical and completing a popular history of the Mennonites in Manitoba.

Endnotes:

1 J Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth Century Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1987), 174 pages, provides an excellent survey of the early Anabaptist Mennonite movement

2 A major recent study of the origin and history of Mennonites in Danzig-West Prussia is Horst Penner, *Die ost- und west-preussischen Mennoniten* (Weierhof, Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, e V., 1978)

3 For a discussion of the development of hymnody in the early 18th century among Danzig-West Prussian Mennonites see the article "Gesangbücher" in *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, Vol II, pp 86-91 by Christian Neff, and the article "Hymnology" in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol II, pp 875-879 by Cornelius Krahn. It is quite likely that this early German language Prussian Lutheran and Pietist hymnody influenced the hymnody of the Reinländer Mennonites in Manitoba

4 See H G Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* (Danzig: Selbstverlag der Danziger Mennonitengemeinde, 1919), for further information about the church buildings, and the language changes. Also see Horst Penner, *Die ost-und*

west-preussischen Mennoniten. It should be noted that the emigrants to Russia in 1788 had used Low German for about a century, and thus were fluent in it. The transition to High German as their language of worship had not been fully made by the time they emigrated. Thus, throughout their stay in Russia, and even when they emigrated to Canada in the 1870s, they were most fluent in Low German

5 A German translation of this document which was originally drawn up in Latin is included in Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten* (Marienburg, 1863), pp 80-82

6 The text of the earliest petition of Danzig-West Prussian Mennonites to the Russian government, together with the Russian government's response, is contained in Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten: Versuch einer Darstellung der Entwicklung derselben* (Rosenthal/Chortitz, n p n d) pp 24-32. An extensive discussion is found in Peter M. Friesen's *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (1789-1910) (Fresno: 1978). Peter M. Friesen was a strong supporter of Separatist Pietism. He evaluated history from this perspective

7 A detailed discussion of the Chortitza settlement includ-

ing the problems of the early pioneer years is found in D H Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*.

8 For a detailed discussion of the founding of the Bergthaler settlement see William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publication, 1974). No comparable study has been made of the Fürstenland settlement

9 See Gerhard Wiebe, Aeltester of the Bergthal Church, *Ursachen und Geschichten der Auswanderungen der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika* (Winnipeg: Nordwesten, 1900)

10 A perceptive and analytical study was made of this tension among the Russian Mennonites between the "conservers" and the "progressives" by the British anthropologist Dr James Urry in his book *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, 1989), 328 pages, the most authoritative history on the first century of the Russian Mennonites currently available

11 For copies of the letter by John Lowe, and of the revised official version of that letter which was accepted by the Order-in-Council, see William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, pp 85-

91. For further discussion about the early Manitoba settle-

Old Colony Mennonite Gemeindebücher

Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde/Old Colony Church Gemeindebücher (Church Registers) 1875 to 2000,
by Bruce Wiebe, R.R.#1, Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.

Introduction.

A renewed interest in the history of the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde (Alt-Kolonier) is rising among descendants of that denomination founded in 1875 in Manitoba under Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) of Rosengart, formerly Fürstenland, Russia.

Of the 4000 men, women and children who pioneered the prairies of the Pembina Valley there are today estimated to be 150,000 descendants spread geographically from the Prairies of North America to the mountain valleys of Northern

Mexico, the Belizean jungles, the Bolivian forests, and the Argentinean Pampas.

Their tradition of independent self government which was transplanted from Fürstenland and the Chortitza Colony, was continued in Manitoba under Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller. The meticulous record keeping of this civic authority had its counterpart in the Gemeindebuch, recording births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths, which was maintained by the Deacon, Minister, or Aeltester.

It is to these Gemeindebücher (church registers) that many descendants are now turning as a

starting point in researching their history. In the long standing tradition of the Old Colony people, these records have been maintained with great accuracy and care. The following survey of the various registers with a description of contents will assist those who are researching their family histories.

Membership List, 1875-80.

The earliest register for the Reinländer Gemeinde probably begun in 1875, after the arrival of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), can-

Endnotes: Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde

ment arrangements see E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd, 1955) and Adolf Ens, *Mennonite relations to Governments, Western Canada 1870-1925* (University of Ottawa, 1994), 266 pages

12 A number of lists are available of Mennonite immigrants into Canada beginning with 1874. All the immigrants who arrived by ship in Quebec were entered on ship lists. These lists are available in microfilm form and have been published in John Dyck, ed., *Bergthal Gemeindebuch* (Steinbach, 1993), pages 253-333, together with the 1881 census records for the East and West Reserve, identifying each family in their village of residence

Jacob Y. Shantz also compiled a list of immigrants in the 1870s. This is published in Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Need to Brothers in Need* (Newton, 1987), pages 106-7, 242-3, and 287-8

13 For a detailed discussion of the boundaries of the "West Reserve", see John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlement of Southern Manitoba* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000), 37ff, and Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens, The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa, ON: Ottawa University Press, 1994), 27ff

14 See Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland, An Experience in Community* (Winkler: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976) for a description of the earliest developments in the village of Reinland. His discussion includes the developments also for the whole region (Gebiet), not only for the village of Reinland

15 See Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?* pp 35-38

16 Frank Brown, *A History of the town of Winkler, Manitoba* (Winkler: Frank Brown, 1973), p 12, states: "The line (CPR) from Winnipeg to Manitowish, between which two points Winkler is situated, was placed in operation on December 10, 1882"

17 *Der Nebraska Ansiedler*, February 1880, p 21. The table of information is also included in Peter Zacharias, *Reinland an Experience in Community*, p 147. The data compiled by Peter Wiens is reprinted under the Adolf Ens article, "Another look at the rejected conservatives, cf. page 31

18 "Aufschreibe Buch der Geborenen, Gestorbenen, Getrauten der Dorfschaft Gnadenthal, 1884", CMCA, vol 2198. The Register Buch für die Dorfschaft Gnadenthal, 1896 may have been drawn up after some people had emigrated to the new Hague-Osler settlement. A number of the families from the 1884 *Aufschreibe Buch* are missing, and new names appear. A high percentage of these new Wirtse are older than the ones which are omitted. This may indicate that well-to-do farmers used this opportunity to increase their holdings

Each year the herdsman confirmed the contract by signing with an "X" after his name

21 "Kontrakt vom Schullehrer mieten" CMCA, vol 2198

All contracts begin the year with the month after seeding time, and end with seeding time the following year. Each contract was signed by the teacher, the Dorfsvorsteher and two, sometimes three, Beisitzer

22 "Theilungs-Verordnungen Gnadenthal" CMCA, vol 2198. This is a 21 page document detailing the operation and responsibilities of the various people responsible for handling the estates

23 "Brand-Buch für die Dorfschaft Gnadenthal im Jahre 1917" CMCA, vol 2198. The Brand-Buch included one page for each resident on which his assets were listed

24 There were also non-religious reasons for emigrating from Russia. At least one-third of the Bergthal colony was landless, about average among the Mennonites in Imperial Russia. More land was a practical necessity and this need was met by emigrating to Manitoba. Even in Chortitza and Fürstenland there were numerous landless people. The need for more land was rooted in the Mennonite's understanding that the preferred lifestyle was to be a Wirt in a village with sufficient land to raise a family and to help children start farming

25 In Danzig-West Prussia, before emigration to Russia, ministers had been called Lehrer (teachers). This designation was gradually supplanted in Russia by the term "Prediger" but reestablished by the Old Colonists in Manitoba

26 Some Mennonite settlers established villages in Kansas, but the villages were abandoned fairly soon. See Henry C. Smith, *Story of the Mennonites*, 5th edition, revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981), pp 447-450

27 For a discussion of the earliest Mennonite missionary activities in the West Reserve in Manitoba see Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, pp 103-115, and John A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), pp 153-156

28 Even within the Bergthaler Church only a minority supported the establishment of a secondary school whose principal function would be to train teachers. In 1891 the majority of the Bergthaler Churches' members separated and organized the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, with Abram Doerksen from the village of Sommerfeld as the Aeltester. See Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, pp 90-91

29 "Theilungs-Verordnungen Gnadenthals", p 20 CMCA, vol 2198, states that the payment of the estates are to include five percent interest

30 In cases where both parents had died, another couple was given the responsibility of "Schichtgeber". An example of this is the "Theilungs-Kontrakt" dated 27 October, 1919, which dealt with the case of the estate of the widow Mrs. Johann Penner. Abram and Margaretha Friesen, Schönweise were assigned the responsibility of "Schichtgeber" CMCA, vol 2198

31 "Theilungs-Kontrakt", March 1915, CMCA, vol 2198

32 See the following studies regarding the development of

municipalities in Manitoba: Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, pp 80-109, and Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?* pp 66-44

33 "Anschreibe Buch des Bezirks Amt zu Reinland, Der Schlussrechnung vom 6 ten Juli 1875 bis 11 ten Januar 1978", CMCA, vol 2198

34 *Ibid.*, p 109. Other expenses were for labourers hired at Emerson for work and repair on the church buildings and the "Amtshaus"

35 *Ibid.*, p 109. Summary of the payments to the government and to Swiss Mennonites in Ontario up to January 1888

36 *Ibid.*, p 128. The record indicates that the village of Neuanlage, presumably in the Hague-Osler settlement, owed the Manitoba Reinländer Church \$200.00 for the purchase of one section of land as of June 1, 1895, and an additional \$233.75 as of June 1896

37 The Reinländer Church extended help beyond its own fellow believers. In the same "Anschreibe Buch" on page 218, there is an entry which reads as follows, "Kollekte für die Nothleidende in Russland 1921 28 Dezember, zusammengerechnet, \$3,778.32"

38 List of land in Gnadenthal, dated Gnadenthal, 8 April 1922 CMCA, vol 2198

39 Adolf Ens, in an unpublished paper "The Mennonites as Reflected by the *Manitoba Free Press* 1910-1929" (University of Ottawa, 1973)

40 For discussion of the influence of the First World War upon Mennonites in Manitoba, and in particular, Reinländer Mennonites, see Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), pp 365-418, and Adolf Ens, *Citizens or Subjects?*, pp 171ff

41 A number of receipts from the Canadian Patriotic Fund for donations by people from Gnadenthal are still extant, CMCA, vol 2198

42 For a general survey of this era see W. L. Morton, *Manitoba A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1961), p 329-379

43 The *Manitoba Free Press* ran a large type headline in May 22, 1920, in which it stated, "One King, One Flag, One Fleet, One Empire for God! For duty! For Empire!"

44 See Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?* p 131

45 H. Leonard Sawatzky, *They Sought A Country. Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p 31

46 Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?*, pp 199ff

47 CMCA, vol 2198. The handwritten document, in Gothic script, begins with the following sentence: "Nachfolgend ist die Vereinbarung wegen dem Landhandel zwischen Monteith, Fletcher und David als Käufer und die Dorfgemeinschaft Gnadenthal als Verkäufer niedergeschrieben"

48 *Ibid.*

49 Isaak M. Dyck, *Auswanderung der Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde von Canada nach Mexico* (Cuauhtemec, Mexico, 1971, 2nd edition, 1971) discusses the reasons for emigration to Mexico. Among other reasons he also suggested that emigration had become necessary because too many people had become too rich in Manitoba. A pioneering start was necessary in order to purify the community



Russian and German Seals of the village of Michaelsburg, part of the Fürstenlandt settlement in Imperial Russia. The seals symbolize the orderly and democratic governance instituted in Old Colony settlements. Michaelsburg was located in a picturesque setting on the Dnieper River, some 30 kilometers north of the main Fürstenlandt settlement. Old Colony boys later recalled having taken their horses to the river for washing. Copies of seals courtesy Bruce Wiebe, Winkler.

not be located and may have been lost.

However, a list of family names from the period 1875 to 1880 is extant, which may have been the index to the Gemeindebuch started in 1875 with the arrival of the Old Colony people in Manitoba. The list contains 959 household heads, the maiden names of spouses, birth dates and church numbers. At least 56 of the couples listed do not appear in the Old Colony church register of 1880, but do appear in the Sommerfelder or Bergthaler Registers.

A few additional birthdates are recorded for persons who came to Manitoba from Russia, but died before the church register was started.

1880 Gemeindebuch.

The register published in 1994 as the *Reinländer Gemeindebuch 1880-1903*, was begun after an October, 1880 brotherhood meeting held in the worship house at Reinland, Manitoba. A decision was made at this meeting that all who wished to remain with the church should re-register.

Mennonite genealogists now have access to this valuable resource in a format that is legible and well indexed. As the title implies, this is the register of the church known formally as the "Reinländer Gemeinde", but in everyday usage always referred to as Altkolonier (Old Colony).

The origins of the families recorded in this register are in 19th century Russia in the oldest Mennonite Colony, Chortitza, and its daughter settlements of Gerhardsthal, Fürstenland, Yasykovo and Nepluyeva. Families that migrated to Manitoba in 1875 and subsequent years, and were part of the group which looked to Elder Johann Wiebe of Rosengard in the West Reserve and formerly of Fürstenland, Russia for leadership, are recorded.

The volume was organized by village of residence of that time. The last page recorded the page number of entries pertaining to various villages. This is most useful today in determining where an ancestor resided. Typical information provided is birth, baptism, marriage, and death dates for parents' and in most cases names of their respective parents as well. In the case of immigrant families, the latter did not emigrate, but the date is useful in tracing the family into Russia. The register continues with information about children including birth

and baptism dates, and dates of death for those who died without having married. For those who married, the spouse's name and reference page number are recorded.

If families moved to Saskatchewan, or in some cases the Dakotas, this is duly noted. Those who left for other congregations are similarly recorded.

This volume records families formed by marriages prior to 1903. Thereafter a subsequent register was kept until 1930. Although new family entries ceased in 1902, the information about those already recorded in the first register was continued until 1922 in Manitoba, when the church leadership and a significant number of members moved to Mexico. The register was continued in the Manitoba Colony for another six or seven years.

The 1880 church register, as published, is copiously cross-referenced between parents and children in the same volume, and to the same family's entries in the Swift Current and Hague settlement registers for those who moved to Saskatchewan. Page reference numbers in subsequent registers for children who married after 1902 in Manitoba or Mexico have been added. With this information one is now able to trace related families who migrated to Latin America.

Also included in the new publication are church membership statistics for the years 1881 through 1904, a list of ministers, and identification of families who arrived after 1880.

Although composed mainly of names and dates, this church register reveals information about infant mortality rates, ages of baptismal candidates, ages at marriage, village settlement patterns, families who founded daughter settlements, emigration to Mexico, etc.

1880 Settlement Registers.

In 1880 Peter Wiens (b. 1820), Reinland, Secretary for the Reinland Gebietsamt, under the direction of Vorsteher Isaak Mueller, completed an internal settlement census for the West Reserve, listing family units with names, birth dates, and village lot numbers recorded by village. This census was published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in 1998 as Section One of the *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve*, pages 7-55.

This work has been made even more helpful by the addition of several other sources. Section Two consists of a reproduction of taxation assessment records of the Reinland Gebietsamt, mostly for the year 1881, again by household heads within each village. Information given includes assessed value of buildings, cultivated acreage, livestock numbers, individual farm implements, total assessment, taxes due, and a cross reference to the village lot number. For most villages, a sketch is included showing location of lots and names of owners. This is a valuable addition to our knowledge of settlement patterns.

For those unfamiliar with the West Reserve, a helpful map showing orientation of the villages themselves is included (pages 60-61).

A summary of the Reinland Gebietsamt tax assessment data as of December 20, 1879, was compiled by Gebietsamt Secretary Peter Wiens and published in the *Nebraska Ansiedler*, February 1880. This helpful data is republished in the



The seal of the Reinländer Mennonite Gemeinde (Old Colony Church). A window into the past. This seal confirmed official decisions of the Reinländer Church. Documents bearing this seal are still in existence today. Photo courtesy of John Dyck, editor, *Reinländer Gemeindebuch* (Winnipeg, 1994), page 4.

1880 Village Census, at pages 62-63 (this chart is also reproduced in this book, see page 31 cf). From these sources one obtains a view of agricultural progress in the Colony as a whole and the individual's economic situation four years after arrival of the first settlers on the Reserve.

Section Three is the section most readers will consult first. It is an alphabetical listing of the families in Section One. To this has been added much data which will assist in family research: Lot number and village, homestead location (quarter, section, township range), month and year of arrival in Canada and name of ship, reference to church registry, names of parents and cross reference to them if included in this census, further genealogical data for several generations of ancestors where this information was available, colony and village of origin in Russia, reference to published family histories, notes concerning transfers to other churches or migration to Saskatchewan or Mexico, and some photographs of early settlers. Very helpful is an index to this Section by maiden name of spouses. Till now, there has not been a comprehensive overview of the West Reserve, but here it is found in one volume.

Section Four of the book profiles administrators and church leaders of the settlement.

The fifth section reproduces the 1891 Federal Census for the Mennonite West Reserve. By this date, many Bergthal Colony descendants were residents on the West Reserve and are therefore recorded as well. An informative inclusion is the country of birth of each person and their respective parents.

The final section of the book is a listing of Mennonite immigrants arriving on passenger ships landing at Quebec between 1881 and 1896.

The 1881 Federal census for the West Reserve and the ship records for Old Colony (Reinländer) families arriving in Quebec City between 1875 and 1879 have been published by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society in 1993 in the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series, thus making the earlier genea-

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logical and historical data for the Old Colony Church relatively complete.

Church Lists, 1888.

Also acquired were two lists of early church members in Manitoba. They date from 1888 and include names, birthdates and church numbers recorded by West Reserve villages. One of the lists has some additions to 1894.

West Reserve, Manitoba, 1903.

The second church register consisting of 343 pages covering about 1000 family units has now been photocopied. It begins in Manitoba and continues in the Manitoba Colony of Mexico. It includes families formed by marriages beginning in 1903.

Data is only recorded after 1923 for those families who moved to Mexico. After 1930 no further entries were made in this book.

Manitoba Plan, Mexico, 1931.

In 1931 a new register was begun in Mexico for all families in the Manitoba Colony. It was again organized by villages. The register photocopied includes all families formed by marriages

up to and including 1942. Occasional entries were made thereafter for births, baptisms and deaths.

The final two pages of the register contain total church membership statistics for the years 1935 through 1942. About 1600 families are documented.

The originals of these documents are in the possession of the current church Deacon. Subsequent church registers including families formed by marriages until 1975 in the Manitoba Colony Mexico have also been copied, about 3000 more families.

The 1931 Manitoba Plan church register has been entered on a computer file by genealogist John Wall of Morden, Manitoba.

Hague-Osler.

This Old Colony church register for the Hague Osler Gemeinde is in the possession of the Deacon at Hague, Saskatchewan, and has not been available for photocopying although an index of household heads has been provided.

Swift Current, 1904.

A new register was commenced in the Swift Current, Saskatchewan settlement about 1904. Recorded are all families that came from Manitoba as well as families formed by marriages till 1923 in Saskatchewan.

Thereafter the register was kept for the Swift Current Colony in Mexico and included families formed by marriages up to and including 1951. Due to lack of entries thereafter, it is assumed that all families were rewritten in a new book at that time. The register consists of 410 pages recording about 1300 family units.

The previously uncopied records of the the Swift Current Gemeinde remained in private hands in Mexico when the church leadership moved to Bolivia in 1967.

Durango, Mexico.

The first volume of data for the Old Colony Gemeinde at Durango, Mexico, commenced with the first immigrants of 1924 and continued till 1951, 546 pages in total. The Deacon had this register as well as a subsequent one in his possession at time of copying. Subsequently the church leadership has left and the location of these originals is presently unknown.

Nord Colony.

The church registers of the Gemeinde known as "Nord Kolonie" northeast of Rubio, near Cuauhtemoc, containing 995 families have also been copied. The originals of this document are now in private hands.

Indexes.

Alphabetical indexes to the recently acquired registers have been prepared by John Wall of Morden, Manitoba.

These Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Mexico church registers of the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde (Old Colony) were photocopied in March 1991 and are now available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Copies.

The 1880 Manitoba church register was photocopied by Peter Goertzen of Winnipeg in September 1977. Other church registers, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Manitoba, Swift and Nord Colonies, Mexico, were photocopied by Bruce Wiebe of Winkler in March 1991. Henry Bergen, Alymer, Ontario, formerly Durango, Mexico, copied the Durango register after requests by Bruce Wiebe to the church leadership.

Sources:

John Dyck and William Harms, editors, *Reinländer Gemeindebuch* (Winnipeg, Man., Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1995) 525 pages, \$25.00.

John Dyck and William Harms, editors, *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve* (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4, 1998), 500 pages, \$30.00.

John Dyck, editor, *Bergthaler Gemeinde Buch* (Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, 1993), 439 pages, \$20.00. This book was reprinted in 2001.



Enclose an additional \$3.00 postage and handling per book with all book orders.

Old Colony Church, Manitoba Plan, Mexico, 1931 church register, computer file, available from genealogist John Wall, 252 Birchwood Drive, Morden, Manitoba, R6M 1K1.

Namen der Personen		Geboren im	
No.	nach dem Tag der Trauung	S.	M. J.
1	Johann Wiens geboren 1865 Juli 9 mit	1879	April 15
2	Maria Wiens Kinder vorher Joh	1879	Feb 19
3	Johann Wiens	1886	April 16
4	Maria	1877	Feb 16
5	Anna	1867	Sept 7
6	Katharina	1872	Feb 13
7	Jacob	1873	April 15
8	Katharina	1877	April 11
9	Philipp	1879	April 17
10	Maria	1886	April 9
11	Johann Wiens geboren 1874 Jan 31 mit	1880	Sept 3
12	Maria Wiens	1815	Feb 15
13	Kinder vorher Joh		
14	Johann Wiens	1844	April 15
15	Katharina	1879	Sept 29
16	Barbara	1853	Juni 22
17	Jacob	1846	April 19
18	Jacob	1846	Jan 6
19	Maria	1844	April 14
20	Jacob	1856	April 26
21	Steffan	1860	April 9
22	Maria	1851	April 24

The 1880 Reinländer Gemeindebuch is one of the most important genealogical records in Western Canada, as it provides the data base for the genealogy of some 150,000 descendants of the Old Colony Church. A copy of the bottom half of page 74 illustrates how the book was compiled in accordance with ancient Mennonite traditions. Family No. 650, is that of Peter Wiens (b. 1820), from Kronsthal, Imperial Russia, the gifted administrator and recording secretary of the Reinland Gebietsamt, who compiled various tax assessments and census records under the administration of Vorsteher Isaak Mueller. The note added to his entry "Ausgegangen" denotes that the family later departed from the assemblies of the Reinländer Church.

W17 HILDEBRAND, Isak	1828 Nov 15	Isaac Hildebrand
		Katharina Petkau
BERGEN, Catharina	1834 Sep 29	Isaac Bergen
		Sara Siemens
Homestead - NE-15-2-5W	R165-1	Ship: Peruvian Jun 1878
Children:		
Catharina Hildebrand	1864 Apr 15	
Helena	1866 Nov 15	
Isak	1869 Feb 4	
Jacob	1871 May 14	
Cornelius	1873 Sep 4	
Anna	1877 Mar 7	
Comments: From Neuendorf, Khoritza where Cornelius was born. Katharina Petkau		

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Part of page 226 of the "1880 West Reserve Census" showing the Isak Hildebrand family, Waldheim, W.R., Manitoba, 1878. The book combines the data of the "Settlement Registers" with annotations adding genealogical and historical information as well as photographs of the pioneers. The publication of "1880 Village Census", Volume Two of the West Reserve Historical Series, is the third component now covering the entire Mennonite immigration to Manitoba of 1874-80. The Bergthaler portion is contained in the Bergthaler Gemeindebuch, Volume Two of the East Reserve Historical Series, and the Kleine Gemeinde portion in "The Genealogy Register" of Aeltester Peter Toews, in Profile 1874, Volume Four of the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series. From Preservings, No. 12, page 105.

Old Colony Mennonite Singing

Old Colony Singing: Old Songs in a New Land: Russian Mennonite Hymns Come to Manitoba,
by Wes Berg, Professor of Music, University of Edmonton, Alberta.

Introduction.

Migration brings with it disruption. The old way of life is left behind and the new land forces adjustments. Furniture, agricultural implements, even clothes are turned into cash because they are both too bulky to take along and may not be appropriate in the new surroundings.

The items that are taken if at all possible are those items that record a family history—photographs, a family Bible, and other memorabilia—and those items that support or help maintain a faith and a culture—portable musical instruments, a hymnal, important devotional literature, and other artifacts that play a role in the ritual life of the people.

The other things that are taken along are less tangible, stored as they are in the minds of the people: social and technical skills, languages, oral histories of family and tribe, folk tales and sayings, and music, the music of every day and social occasions, and the music of worship.

And these also begin to change almost immediately in response to a new environment: new words are added and new ways of thinking and responding to the environment creep in; the folk tales and family histories incorporate new elements, new melodies are sung and often the styles of worship change in response to new surroundings and influences.

Old Colony Hymns.

But not always. In the hymns sung by the Old Colony Mennonites we can see a deliberate and mostly successful attempt to preserve the old in the face of the new that has persisted for more than a century, through subsequent migrations to very different surroundings, and most recently in the encounter with the powerful forces of North American popular culture.

In this paper I will argue that the hymns sung by the Old Colony Mennonites at the end of the twentieth century still sound very much like the hymns their forefathers were singing in 1874 when they came to Canada. I will then try to place their singing in the larger context of the music of the Germans from Russia in an attempt to understand the origins of this ancient singing style.

There were two ways of making music in the churches of the Russian Mennonite colonies in 1874. One was the way of singing chorales brought from Prussian Poland, using a *Gesangbuch* without notes, with melodies sung from memory and developed in an oral tradition for almost a century in Russia.

The evidence for this way of singing in Russia is indirect, through the comments of men like Heinrich Heese and Heinrich Franz Sr., but their comments resemble those of other critics of the Old Way of Singing (or to use the Mennonite term, the *oole Wies*) in other places and times.

Like those other critics they complain about the slow tempos, melismatic distortions of the original melodies, and the strident tone quality that characterizes this musical style.



The signature photograph of the Old Koloniers arrival in Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, 1922, then only a dead end railway stop in the Bustillos Valley. Note the teams of horses, wagons and tractors which have been unloaded from the train. Photo by W. Schmiedehaus, courtesy of Schmiedehaus, *Die Altkolonie-Mennoniten im Mexiko*, page 60.

Choralbuch.

The way of singing more familiar to most of us was just beginning to take hold, thanks to the introduction of the Franz *Choralbuch* into schools, where young people learned to sing in four-part harmony according to Ziffern, and thanks to the Mennonite Brethren revolution, which was beginning to introduce a new, up tempo kind of music to the churches of Mennonite Russia.

Johann Cornies suggested the use of Ziffern in schools as early as 1846, the monophonic version of the *Choralbuch* was published in 1865 expressly for use in Russian Mennonite schools, and choirs began to appear in Mennonite Brethren churches in the 1870s.

Reinländer, 1875.

These were the two ways of singing in the church that were brought to Manitoba in 1874. In Volume I of *Mennonites in Canada* Frank Epp describes what happened in Manitoba in this way. “Bishop Johann Wiebe and his ministerial colleagues were determined to go back to the *Kirchengesang nach alter Sitte* (church singing according to the old tradition).

This meant not only avoiding hymnbooks with notes but also abolishing the books with Ziffern (numbers to indicate pitch) which had become commonplace in Russia.” He goes on, “There was consequently much unhappiness and dissension.” The larger portion of Manitoba Mennonites followed the more modern style of music in varying degrees, moving on to hymnals with notes, a new hymn repertoire, and the introduction of instruments and choirs.

But I want to explore the church music of the spiritual descendants of Bishops Johann and Gerhard Wiebe, now known as the Old Colony Mennonites, who decided to preserve their old songs in a new land as one of the most visible symbols of their commitment to a pure life untainted by conformity to the world.

The desire to maintain traditional ways and avoid worldly influences subsequently took the Old Colony Mennonites from Manitoba to Saskatchewan in 1895, from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico in 1922, from Saskatchewan to the Fort Vermilion area in Northern Alberta beginning in 1934, from Mexico to British Honduras in 1958, from Mexico to Bolivia in 1967-68, and more recently from Mexico and Central America to isolated areas of the United States and Canada. We know about their music from the work that Charles Burkhart did for his Masters thesis in Mexico in 1950, from the field work I did in the La Crete area several years ago, and a few other recordings and transcriptions.

Confirming the Tradition.

My examination of the hymns of the Old Colony Mennonites as they are sung today suggests to me that they continue to be sung in a manner very similar to the way they would have sounded 125 years ago when they first arrived in Manitoba and before that for a century in Russia. There are at least three observations that lead me to this conclusion.

The hymns that Burkhart transcribed in Mexico in 1950 and the hymns that I have collected forty-five years later are very similar in style, with no discernible evidence of “contamination” by such things as either evangelistic hymns or the popular musics of this century and no apparent stylistic changes in almost half a century. The only concession to modernity seems to be the fairly recent practice of singing only two or three stanzas of each hymn, which serves to shorten the worship service very considerably, since many of the hymns contain a dozen or more stanzas.

The setting in which the hymns are sung has not changed in any discernible way: the church buildings I have visited are more austere versions of the church building at the Steinbach Museum.

I have seen a booklet of transcriptions in

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Ziffern by a songleader from Saskatchewan in the 1930s that again suggests that the tunes have not changed appreciably since those transcriptions were made.

The coherence and uniformity of the Old Colony repertoire over the past fifty years, in the face of the enormous pressures of the sounds of evangelical religion and popular culture, suggest to me that the developments of the much more isolated period from 1874 to 1949 would have been consistent with those that have been observed from 1950 to 1999. This is not to say that the tunes have not changed. The fact that singers in La Crete will say that the tunes from Burns Lake are *fesunge* (sung out of shape) indicates that the tunes do develop and change, but it is an internal development based on the principles governing the evolution of melodies in an oral tradition rather than change in response to external forces.

Origins of Tradition.

One of the questions I get asked about Old Colony Mennonite hymns is, “Where do (or did) they come from?” My answer is always that they don’t really come from anywhere in the sense that they were borrowed intact from some source. Rather, these hymns have developed in ways that have been seen elsewhere, in settings, to quote Wolfgang Suppan, a German scholar interested in oral traditions in sacred music, “wherever notation had not stabilised melodic repertoires or where melodies and texts previously fixed in notation were returned to the freedom of an oral tradition.”

Similar traditions have been identified by various researchers in English parish churches in the early eighteenth century, in the churches of the Pilgrims in New England in the decades after their arrival in North America, in the singing of the Southern Baptists of this century and in the singing of the Old Order Amish, all settings where musical literacy for one reason or another was not a part of or had disappeared from the culture.

There are some early nineteenth century treatises that shed some light on the state of church music in the Lutheran churches from which the Mennonites borrowed many of the hymns in their Gesangbuch. They contain transcriptions of melismatic hymns sung by congregations of the time and were included by the authors as examples of melodic corruption, of how the chorales should

not be sung.

But they do show that there was a tradition in German and Prussian Lutheran churches of the kind of melismatic singing that we find later in the songs of the Russian Germans and the Russian Mennonites. The church music reforms of the early nineteenth century in Germany were directed against such practices, among others.

One of the spokesmen for the reformers was Johann Ernst Häuser, whose treatise was published in 1834. The final section of his book provides specific instructions on how the musical efforts of organists, song leaders, and congregations might be improved. Like Kessler and Natorp, two other reformers of that era, Häuser deplores the state of congregational singing in many churches, using similar adjectives—bawling, decorating, flourishes, slow and uncertain—in describing what needs to be improved.

He has no patience with the departures from the purity of the original chorale tune, citing the many passing tones, mordents, and gracenotes that infest congregational singing, all of which are to be purged through the proper education of organists, song leaders and members of the congregation themselves.

Häuser’s criticisms are similar to those made by church music reformers in other places and at other times. His perspective is that of the musically literate, historically aware musician who views adherence to the original creations of composers as one of the important duties of the conscientious church musician. Furthermore, like other critics of this kind of singing, Häuser is offended by the sounds he heard in the congregations he visited.

I have argued that a comparison of Old Colony Mennonite hymns and singing styles with manifestations of similar styles of melodic evolution and singing styles in English parish churches, the New England colonies, Old Baptist churches of the southern United States, and the Old Order Amish suggests that this style, including the vocal quality of the singing, represents an elemental form of music making in societies where, to return to Suppan’s statement, “notation had not stabilised melodic repertoires or where melodies and texts previously fixed in notation were returned to the freedom of an oral tradition,” or, as Nicholas Temperley puts it, “In places where congregations are left to sing hymns without musical direction

for long periods, a characteristic style of singing tends to develop.”

Häuser’s caustic comments notwithstanding, the singing of the Germans from Russia as reported by Georg Schünemann, a German ethnologist who recorded songs sung by soldiers in a World War I prisoner of war camp, represents one more piece of evidence in support of this more positive view of such traditions. Schünemann describes an intense, penetrating, drawn out manner of singing in which beauty of tone and regularity of rhythm are not qualities that the singers seem to be aware of or interested in.

His words accurately describe the singing of the Old Colony Mennonites as well. He attributes some of these qualities to the fact that Germans in Russia may have absorbed them from their Russian neighbours; I am inclined to agree with a number of more recent scholars when they reject this idea. The Old Colony Mennonites have been removed from Russian influences for more than a century now and still sing in this way, suggesting that cultural or geographical boundaries do not necessarily determine where this kind of singing will occur

Conclusion.

I was aware of Old Colony Mennonite singing when I was growing up: my father would make us laugh by launching into a nasal braying when it was mentioned and my mother tells the story of going with a friend to a funeral in an Old Colony church and getting an embarrassing fit of giggles when the singing started.

Since getting to know the remarkable skills of the Old Colony Vorsänger, however, and experiencing the reverent atmosphere and powerful, strangely beautiful sound of the singing in an Old Colony Mennonite congregation, I have been trying to argue that this is a kind of music making that has its roots deep in the human psyche, and that has wide geographical and historical associations and precedents.

Rather than regarding it as singing gone wrong, which is the impression one gets when reading its detractors, it might be more useful to see it as a reversion to a form of musical expression that provides important insights into the way human beings make music.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 44-45.



A two-horse team with a one-bottom plow in the region of the famous boundary stone (“Grenzberg”) between the two mother Colonies in the Bustillos valley in the State of Chihuahua. This is how many pioneers in the Manitoba and Swift Plans started out. Photo and caption courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, title pages.

“Poor and Simple?”

“Poor and Simple?": The Economic Background of the 1874 Russian Mennonite Emigration to Manitoba"

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

Introduction.

Only recently I read again the infamous words that the 1870s Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba “consisted primarily of Chortitza people, descendants of those poor and simple pioneers who in the previous century had left Prussia for Russia.” This statement was originally made by historian Frank H. Epp in 1974 in *Mennonites in Canada*, Volume One, an official history commissioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

The implication is almost racist in scope, implying that the dregs of Mennonite society emigrated from Prussia to Imperial Russia in 1788 and then perhaps to Bergthal or Fürstenland in the 1830s and '50s, and then again to Canada in the 1870s with resulting impoverishment of genetic, spiritual and socio-economic values.

“This statement....by historian Frank H. Epp....is almost racist in scope,”

Conventional historiography holds that the 1870s emigration was largely the flight of the landless and conservative, rigidly opposed to theological or social change, often derisively referred to as the “Kanadier”. Simultaneously, it was claimed, those remaining in the homeland were the landowners, the educated and cultured, who embarked upon a golden era once the other elements were removed. The purpose of this paper is to present economic data pertaining to the groups who settled in Manitoba in 1874 and, thus, to provide an alternative interpretation of the socio-economic background of these immigrants. That revisionist interpretation suggests that the immigrants were not poorer than the Mennonites who remained in Imperial Russia, and arguably much more economically secure than the large percentage of those that remained landless in Russia after 1880.

Russian Mennonite Society.

It will be helpful to refer to the economic structure of Russian-Mennonite society. It is documented that the mother colonies--the Chortitza Colony (founded in 1789) and the Molotschna Colony (founded in 1804)--moved quickly from full and egalitarian land ownership to the development of a large landless class.

By 1867 only 38 per cent of families in the Molotschna and 40 per cent in the Chortitza Colony belonged to the full-farmer, landowning class.

In spite of the emigration of one-third of the populace to North America and a great deal of land purchasing, the situation in Imperial Russia did not improve. P. M. Friesen provides a valuable sketch of the situation as of 1910, stating there were 4000 Vollwirten among a population of 80,000 to 100,000.

In 1886 8449 Mennonites in Hanover, Douglas and Rhineland Municipalities occupied 1470

farm units with an average of 161 acres each in the West Reserve and 197 acres each in the East Reserve. Starting in the 1880s newspapers such as the *Rundschau* regularly contained appeals for help from impoverished Mennonites in Russia, pleas which were invariably responded to favourably by their co-religionists in Manitoba.

These figures simply do not support the thesis that the 1870s emigrants were of the landless class. Clearly further consideration is required to determine the socio-economic status of these emigrants. My intention is to deal specifically with the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), Bergthaler and Fürstenländer, the three founding denominations of the Mennonite community in Western Canada.

Bergthaler.

In many ways the Bergthaler were the most representative of the Kanadier as their emigration represented the exodus not only of an entire Gemeinde but of a complete territorial community.

In his study *Unsere Kolonien* Alexander Klaus provided data for 1867 that showed that with regard to average farm size and percentage of farmers who were landowners, Chortitz, Molotschna and Bergthal were very similar. For example, the number of landowning farmers was between 36 and 40 per cent for all three colonies.

As might be expected the Molotschna ranked first in terms of cultivated land per family, underscoring the predominance of its grain growing economy. At the same time these statistics are deceiving as allowance must be made for the 29,000 desjatien which were held in the land reserves of the Molotschna Colony and unavailable for settlement by the landless.

A greater percentage of Bergthal's land was in hay field and meadow indicating a degree of spe-

“...the Bergthaler were the most representative of the Kanadier..”

cialization in the sheep, dairy and beef industries. This made the Bergthaler ideal settlers for Manitoba where the primitive economy and climate at the time were not suitable for commercial wheat growing as was the case along the northern perimeter of the Black Sea.

Kleine Gemeinde.

Compared to the Bergthaler, the KG represented the emigration of a complete Gemeinde or Christian Community, which however, had been a minority of three per cent in the Molotschna Colony since its founding in 1812.

The KG had a reputation of possessing successful farmers and craftsmen, even as the model farmers of Johann Cornies. Peter M. Friesen, for example, the protagonist of conservative Mennonitism in Russia, granted that “The yards, fields, gardens, and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies.”

The Borosenko Colony was representative of the KG practice of purchasing or leasing of large blocks of land for resettlement purposes during the 1860s. The KG portion of Borosenko had been established in 1865 with the purchase of 6137 desjatien for 184,110 ruble. It has been reported that 120 KG families settled in the Borosenko area, an estimated 90 families in six Borosenko villages. Each family had an average of 68 desjatien, more than double the 20 to 25

“The KG had a reputation of possessing successful farmers and craftsmen, even as the model farmers of Johann Cornies.”

desjatien per family of the Molotschna and Chortitza Colonies.

Ironically some of the immigrants may have been considered “poor and simple” because they were victims of a “buyers market” once they announced plans of migrating to Canada in the 1870s. Although initially advantageous, the movement to new settlements outside of the mother colonies proved disastrous when the bottom fell out of the property market in 1874.

Heartlessly, all organized land purchases for the landless were suspended during the emigration period. This in spite of the fact that a number of choice properties such as the entire Bergthal Colony were sold at very low prices to non-Mennonites.

American newspaper reports indicate that many Russian Mennonite immigrants had been forced to dispose of properties normally worth from \$6,000.00 to \$7,000.00 for as little as \$2,000.00 and even as low as \$1,000.00. A farmer with a farm worth \$6,000.00 and \$1,000.00 of debt, for example, would have been considered well-to-do.

Attention Readers:

“Poor and Simple” is a summarized, revised version of a paper entitled “Emigration for Principal or Profit? Socio-Economic Consideration of the 1870s Russian Mennonite Emigration to Manitoba,” published in D. Plett, editor, *Pioneers and Pigrims: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas in 1874 to 1882* (Steinbach, 1990), pages 261-268, and presented at “Khortitza '99,” May 26-30, 1999, Zaporozhe, Ukraine, and again at a conference “1874 Revisited”, October 1-2, 1999, University of Winnipeg, Manitoba. A more detailed footnoted version of this paper under the new title, “**Poor and Simple?": The Economic Background of the 1874 Russian Mennonite Emigration to Manitoba,**” is published in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 18, May, 2000, pages 114-128.

Part One: Historical Background

Now such a farm was sold for \$2,000.00, with barely \$600.00 left over after paying the family debt of \$1,000.00 and the travelling expenses estimated at \$400.00 per family

Clearly it is unfair to credit the financial difficulties faced by some of the immigrants to their "poor and simple" ancestry when falling land prices during the emigration years put many families in an economically vulnerable position.

"The poor Anwohner were certainly not included among the immigrants...."

Fürstenlandt/Reinländer.

The third and largest branch of the 1870s emigration movement were known as the Fürstenländer. This was a misnomer as only a third of this 3,200 member migration group came from Fürstenlandt, the majority were from the Chortitza mother colony. They will be referred to as the Reinländer Gemeinde, the name chosen in Manitoba to denote the combined Fürstenländer and Chortitza Colony denomination (in common parlance soon the "Old Coloniers").

The Fürstenlandt "...villages were located in a fertile region where plenty of fruit was growing, their holdings were only about 140-157 acres." It was a leasehold settlement with a total of 11,413 desjation divided into 154 full farms of 52 to 58 desjation each.

Virtually the entire colony, some 200 families, emigrated in 1875. Accordingly the ratio of full farmers was in the range of 75 per cent, almost twice the average in the mother colonies. The average land holding per family was in the range of 54 desjation per family compared to 24.5 desjation in the Molotschna. The value of a leasehold farm would be less than a freehold, but the difference is not necessarily that great since the tenant farmer still owned his own buildings, equipment, livestock. Any differential in value would be at least partially offset by the fact that the average Fürstenlandt farm covered twice the amount of ground.

Emigration Data.

The poor Anwohner were certainly not included among the immigrants as a minimum of resources, estimated at between \$200.00 and \$400.00 per family, was required for transportation and shipping costs. This was beyond the means of most Anwohner and labourers unless they belonged to a denomination such as the Bergthaler or Kleine Gemeinde which had resources to assist the less fortunate.

This is confirmed in an article from the *Winnipeg Standard*, presumably from early 1877, stating as follows: "The emigrating class...are neither the rich nor the poor, but are an intermediate body, who are, however, by no means destitute. Mr. Hespeler estimates that the sum brought into the province by the Mennonite immigration is \$500,000 dols...."

A listing of the amounts of cash brought along by the various immigration parties sheds light on the economic status of the Reinländer. Some rough mathematics quickly reveals that the cash brought

by the Kleine Gemeinde per family was around \$1,000.00, that of the Bergthaler \$500.00 and that of the Reinländer, \$300.00.

By calculating backward, and estimating \$300 worth of tools and effects brought along, it appears that the average Old Colonist emigrant cleared \$1000.00 after paying the debt on their Wirtschaft, namely a pre-emigration net worth of over \$2000.00.

It has been established that the Bergthaler immigrants were of average and the KG of above average financial standing. A comparison of their wealth in Manitoba should define the relative position of the Reinländer people

According to Peter Zacharias, author of the

"It was Johann Wiebe and his Fürstenländers who had the foresight to select the downs between the Red River and the Pembina Mountains...which turned out to be some of the best farmland in the whole Province of Manitoba...."

reknown *Reinland* history, no oral tradition of a differential between the Reinländer and Bergthaler existed to his knowledge.

Observations.

In concluding my presentation, I make several observations relative to the 1870s immigration.

1) It was Johann Wiebe and his Fürstenländers who had the foresight to select "the downs between the Red River and the Pembina Mountains...which turned out to be some of the best farmland in the whole Province of Manitoba" in the process establishing what was "really the first permanent agricultural settlement ever established in the open prairies of Western Canada...."

2) There is a commonality in that all three immigrant denominations had resettled within Imperial Russia in the decades prior to 1874. The re-settlement process taught the emigrants valuable lessons in the science of establishing "frontier"

"...all three...denominations had resettled within Imperial Russia... Evidently it gave the conservative Mennonites a broader world view..."

communities and exposed them to a host of ethnic and cultural realities in "new" Russia. Evidently it gave the conservative Mennonites a broader world view than many of the so-called "progressive" pietist Mennonites in the mother colonies.

3) In the course of duties during some five years as editor of *Preservings* I have researched the economic background of at least two dozen families of Bergthaler and Old Colony background. These families invariably traced their ancestry to 1789 Chortitza immigrants of the Vollwirt class, not infrequently above average in terms of prop-

erty. Although the topic is in need of focused research, the evidence gathered indicates that these immigrants typically were the descendants of well-to-do farmers in the Vollwirt tradition, with the resources and entrepreneurial ingenuity to pursue re-settlement and/or emigration as a strategy to perpetuate that tradition.

Conclusion.

The foregoing data raises serious questions regarding the view that the Kanadier who left Russia during the 1870s were in some way "poor and simple". On the whole they were financially in the median range among the Russian Mennonites. Certainly they were not a lower socio-economic caste, as the statement by historian Frank H. Epp has frequently been interpreted.

The unquestioned acceptance of Molotschna Pietist Triumphalism in our historiography and culture has seriously undermined the Mennonite community. It has influenced the way that reformed and/or liberal Mennonites (typically those that

"The unquestioned acceptance of Molotschna Pietist Triumphalism in our historiography and culture has seriously undermined the Mennonite community."

adopted Separatist Pietist and/or American Revivalist religious culture) have treated their conservative co-religionists, often with barely concealed disdain, and encouraged aggressor denominations in the pursuit of their shallow filio-pietistic agendas. Even worse, often times the descendants of the Kanadiers themselves have started believing these unsubstantiated characterizations, resulting in a negative view towards their faith and culture.

In a paper chiding descendants of the Kanadier for interpreting events with the benefit of hindsight and projecting later values and concerns back into history, James Urry concludes that "Explanations of the 1870s migrations must be multi-focal. There is no simple, single reason for the emigration although the reforms of the Russian State, especially in its military reforms, must be seen as the major catalyst which unleashed the pent-up tension and differences between Mennonites and the Russian State, and between Mennonites and Mennonites, which led to the great parting of ways of the Russian Mennonites."

I conclude with a further quotation by Dr. Urry, "the real economic issue is the complex one of capitalizing/liquidising wealth in Russia, transferring it across the oceans and then reestablishing a self-sustaining community in Canada--Makes a car salesman look small, and I doubt if they needed a lawyer."

In considering the remarkable achievement of the transplantation of the conservative Mennonite communities from Imperial Russia to Manitoba and their subsequent growth and prosperity within a few years, the 1870s immigrants should be regarded as anything but "poor and simple."

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 15-16.

A Second Look at the Rejected Conservatives

“A Second Look at the Rejected Conservatives,” by Dr. Adolf Ens,
reprinted from *Mennonite Reporter*, November 25, 1974, pages 36-37, Special Centennial edition.

Not so long ago, just the idea of a lecture in history would have been considered insufferably boring. My mother used to refer to that kind of digging around in the past as “den äwatoojaschen Schnee äwadälkleiwen.” (And with that quotation, I have identified my “Muttspröak,” for no self-respecting Molotschnaer would say “kleiwen!”)

As an “Ooltkolonia,” even though not a very good one, I may be excused for wanting to take a second look at the “rejected conservatives.” Let me explain a bit first.

I think it is not an unfair criticism to say that we, the “enlightened” Mennonites have tended to look down just a bit (sometimes more than just a bit) at those of our brethren whose ideas we felt we could dismiss by calling them “conservative.”

They went to Canada in 1874 when we, who stayed in Russia, were just entering our most prosperous half century. They moved to Mexico, when we had made our peace with the “national” school system. They left Canada because of its intolerance, just when we were coming into Canada as the haven of liberty from our own oppressed state in Communist Russia.

And we continued to look down just a bit at them, on the conservatives. When they returned from Mexico to Manitoba, we call them—what is the term in southern Manitoba?—“Oh dee, dee tjemt von süden von Fargo.”

And when they move into Bolivia or to British Honduras, we say: “They are still trying to run away from the world.”

To check that kind of attitude on our part, it is

“...we, the “enlightened” Mennonites have tended to look down...at those of our brethren...we could dismiss by calling them `conservative.’”

sometimes helpful to try to interpret the history of these “conservatives” from the inside: to see their past as they themselves tend to see it, and to see the rest of society, the world, as they tend to see it—and us.

I am not sure that I can do that, but I thought it might be a little easier if I began with the historiographical assertion which one William Fehr expressed in Bolivia in 1972: “Wie Ooltkolonia haben noch emma veropp musst!”

It sounds a bit “äwabrässtig,” I know, but when your work with it for a while, it begins to make some sense.

Walter Schmiedehaus, the late German consul in Mexico, in his story of the Mennonites in Mexico entitled *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*, surveys the whole long history of Mennonite migrations: from the Netherlands to Prussia, then to Russia, on to Canada, and from there to Mexico.

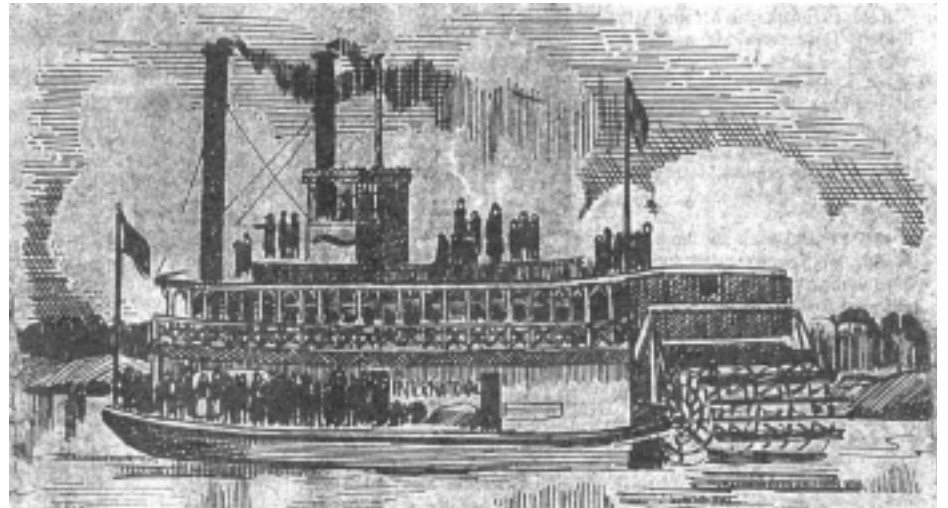
He points out that in all of these migrations we

never once had a closed resettlement of the entire Mennonite population of a given area. Always only a portion of the Mennonites packed up and left. And then Schmiedehaus makes this thought-provoking observation.

“Zum Wanderstab in der grossen hier behandelten Bewegung griffen immer nur diejenigen, die man wohl als die Glaubensstärksten

derers on the earth.

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out...; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents, for he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builders and founder is God,” (Heb. 11:8-10).



Sketch of the S. S. International steaming up the Red River, artist unknown. Photo courtesy of the George and Dorothy Unger, The Family of 3.8 Jakob Stoesz and Anna Wiebe 1834-1996 (*Goshen, Ind.*, 1996), front cover. *The first ten Old Colony (OK) families arrived at the Forks in Winnipeg on August 1, 1874.*

und Kompromiss-losesten unter den Mennoniten anzusehen hat.”

Not the term “conservative” describes the key characteristic of those who are most ready to migrate, but rather the term “Glaubensstark”—faithful. And “uncompromising”—but that one is more readily interpreted negatively, just as the term “conservative” is.

Schmiedehaus goes on to philosophize that everything has an end, and that consequently the time will come when the last Mennonite migration will have taken place, when finally there will be no place left in this shrinking world as a place of refuge.

The “conservative” Old Colonists, according to Schmiedehaus, have always been “the spear-

“When they returned from Mexico to Manitoba, we call them...`Oh dee, dee tjemt von süden von Fargo.’”

head of the wandering pioneers of the faith.”

Physically, geographically they—the conservatives—have always led the way in Mennonite migrations, sometimes by 50 years. And being physically in the vanguard of migrations has produced in these people or perhaps maintained is the more correct word, the sense of being pilgrims and wan-

The Biblical sense of pilgrimage, so forcefully portrayed by the writer to the Hebrews, was a strong characteristic of the Anabaptists in the 16th century. And while we, the liberated and enlightened Mennonites of the 20th century have a tremendous mobility, it is an individualistic one which has much more in common with the secular North American racing after economic advantage, than it does with the biblical call to be a people of God in an alien world.

The Old Colonists much more naturally continue to consider faith and conscience, rather than material considerations, as vital in deciding when and whether to move.

“Jesus said, ‘When you are expelled from one city, move freely to another,’” wrote the Rev. Johann P. Wall of Hague, Sask. to the Hon Arthur Meighen in September of 1918, “and we must follow the precepts of Jesus our Master no matter how hard it must be for us to leave our dearly loved country Canada, and see whether there is another corner where we could live in accordance with our faith.”

A year later Wall experienced something of the cost of being pilgrims when, as member of a land-seeking delegation to South America, he had to write the bereaved family of his name-sake in Hague, telling them that father, and husband had passed away in Brazil and that they had buried him in Curitiba.

Years later Ohm Isaak (Bishop Isaak Dyck of Manitoba colony in Mexico) found his text in the



Old Kolonier homesteaders in the West Reserve. Photo courtesy of Manitoba Mennonite Memories 1874-1974 (Winnipeg, 1974), page ix. G. F. Gailbraith paid the following tribute to these tenacious pioneers “...a clear conception is presented to the mind of the splendid prosperity reached by the Mennonites since that summer of 1875, when strangers to the country and poor in worldly goods, they located to the forlorn, treeless prairie of the reserve. Their record is a glowing tribute to the fertility of the Manitoba soil as well as to the thrift, industry and enterprise of the men who cultivated it. The Mennonite reserve is now [1900] a great garden farm. You can stand on a raising ground in August and where, 25 years ago, nothing was in sight but waving grass, the view now comprises many happy farm homes and miles and miles of yellow waving grain....” Gailbraith, *Men. in Man.* (Morden, 1900) page 35. The drawings on this page are from *Picturesque Canada*, (1882), page 323.

verse of the hymn which reads:

Dies Leben is ein Wanderstab
 Geleite Jesu unsre Schritte
 In dieser Welt in dieser Zeit
 Bis wir in heilger, selger Mitt
 Bei dir einst stehn in Ewigkeit
 Dann ist die Wanderzeit erst aus
 Wenn wir gekehrt ins Vaterhaus.

Migration, at least the readiness to take the pilgrim’s staff and to begin all over again with the pioneer’s hardships, was a fact of life inseparable from faithfulness. And so it is not surprising that on the recommended reading list of Old Colonists in Mexico a book called *Wandelnde Seele: die Pilgerreise zur seligen Ewigkeit* stands in fourth place, immediately after the writings of Menno

“Not the term “conservative” describes the key characteristic of those who are most ready to migrate, but rather the term ‘Glaubensstark’--faithful.”

Simons and Dirk Philips and *Martyrs’ Mirror*.

When the Old Colony Mennonites of Manitoba began to look for settlement possibilities elsewhere in 1919 and 1920, and sent delegations to Argentina and Brazil, to Mississippi and Alabama, to Quebec and to Mexico, the *Manitoba Free Press* did not take these efforts very seriously. As late as August 1920 it doubted “whether any substantial number even of the Old Colony Mennonites are

prepared to join the exodus from the pleasant and fruitful lands of Manitoba?”

“The good bishops,” said its lead editorial on August 24, “have acquired considerable proficiency in one of the characteristic arts of the North American continent--that of making a strong bluff on a poor hand” (Hardly an appropriate metaphor for a group that considered card playing a worldly form of amusement!)

Together with many others, the *Free Press* had convinced itself that, since the Mennonites were not a nationality, therefore it was true of them as of the French Canadians who were wont to say: “Canada is our home, we have none other.”

The emigration of some 6000 to Mexico showed how wrong the *Free Press* estimation was, not so much of the degree to which Canada had indeed become ‘home’ to these Mennonites, but of how far from ultimate such a bond to an earthly home was when basic principles of the faith were involved.

Now we may say from our present perspective: Agreed, the principle of being pilgrims on this earth is sound. But were there really reasons strong enough for the emigration of 1922? That depends on how the issues were seen. Obviously, most of those of us who stayed thought that the reasons were not strong enough. But here too, a second look at our rejected conservatives is in order.

Some, I suspect, are now daring me under their breath, to say that in the field of education too, the Old Colonists have led the way! Well, I won’t say it quite that way.

The *Manitoba School Act* of 1890, which stirred up such a bitter and prolonged controversy extending far beyond the borders of the province,



was itself the result of agitation from the outside. The Orange Order of Ontario, stirred to vigorous activity by the passage of the Jesuits’ Estates Bill in Quebec, carried its anti-Catholic campaign into Manitoba.

The Greenway government responded by replacing the two sets of denominational schools, which had served the province since before its entry into Confederation, with one set of secular schools. Or, at least, that was the goal. Protestant protest was so strong that they were modified from secular into “non-denominational” schools which in fact suspiciously resembled the old Protestant ones.

The French Catholics fought this change in the courts and in the legislatures. The Mennonites seem to have protested less; the one group because it had never received government support for its schools in any case, or was ready at moment’s notice to revert to private school status; the other group maybe because the obliging new Department of Education, under the new “non-denominational” system, provided them with a Mennonite inspector and a Mennonite normal school (while at the same time taking away the French Catholic inspectors and normal school).

In any case, the compromise worked out by the former Attorney-General of Manitoba, Clifford Sifton, just before he became federal Minister of the Interior in the new Laurier government in 1896, postponed the crisis as far as the Mennonites



Another W. T. Smedley sketch, presumably also of the village of Reinland, W. R., but from a greater distance. The scene focuses on a young Old Colony woman herding the village cattle with the windmill visible in the background. Photo courtesy of Reflections on our Heritage, page 181. These drawings by W. T. Smedley are the earliest images of the Reinland Winkler area. Drawing courtesy of Picturesque Canada (1882), page 323.

were concerned.

That crisis came at a time when, unfortunately, there was even less of an atmosphere to make educational decisions on the basis of educational principles. The distinguished historian, O.D. Skelton, has made the pungent observation about the so-called Manitoba School Question that it was not really an educational question at all.

Rather, he said, it was “an occasion for stirring the religious convictions and religious prejudices of thousands, and of demonstrating how little either their education or their religion had done to make them tolerant citizens.”

When the second, and for the Mennonites deciding, phase of the school issue was precipitated at the mid-point of World War I, there was even more prejudice and intolerance in the air than there had been in 1890 and the immediately following years.

The bilingual schools which had functioned as legal public schools since the 1897 compromise legislation, were abolished in 1916, and a compulsory attendance Act required that all private schools must meet the public standards with respect to curriculum and language.

The west was approaching the peak of its pro-British patriotism. Anti-German propaganda was intense and passionate. English Canada was getting angrier by the day about the half-hearted participation of Quebec and French Canada in the war. German was an enemy alien language. Pacifists were parasites on society.

The “liberal” *Free Press* carried on an intense and sustained campaign in this charged atmosphere to abolish once and for all bilingual and separate schools, and to make English the one and only language in Manitoba’s schools. And the “Liberal” government of T.C. Norris legislated these “national” schools into being.

The debate between the conservative Mennonites and the government and press did not get into full swing until 1918-20 when the new laws began to be enforced, partly as a result of pressure by the returning soldiers. It is amazing to read this

debate, to note the contrast between the carefully and calmly stated Mennonite position and the far from objective response by the “liberals” both in the press and in the government. Consider these points:

“...the so-called Manitoba School Question...was “an occasion for stirring the religious convictions and religious prejudices of thousands,...” O. D. Skelton.

a) Who has responsibility for the education of children?

Church and parents, said the conservative Mennonites. McLeod & Black, Morden Barristers representing the Mennonites, articulated this Old Colony position succinctly:

“To conduct and teach a school as his fathers did is to the Mennonite a fundamental religious principle...; with him it is a pure matter of conscience and duty....”

“The children are the children of the state of which they are destined to be citizens,” countered the *Manitoba Free Press*, “and it is the duty of the state to see that they are properly educated.”

When Ontario first introduced public education in the 1840s, it was careful to point out that in doing so the state was acting ‘*in loco parentis*’: it did not presume that the state had a fundamental right or duty to educate the children. But now the *Free Press* asserted as one of the “state’s prime functions that of seeing that children are suitably educated to discharge the duties of citizenship. This is a point upon which the modern democratic state cannot compromise.”

The government obviously thought so too. And what was meant by “duties of citizenship” in that immediate post-war context one could readily conjecture.

(b) What about the Language of instruction?

tion?

The conservative Mennonites have frequently been accused of making the German language a major issue. This claim is difficult to document. “What is involved is nothing less than the whole question of whether or not the school children of alien stock are to be given an education in English,” said the *Free Press* in its editorial and the government in its legislation. The Old Colony position paper of 1919 to the Manitoba government does not mention language.

When school officials pressed Bishop Johann Friesen on this matter, he replied: “Language is not the issue with us, but we could impossibly allow our children to be educated under the flag and under the militarism”

There was reason for fear. Sir Rodmond Roblin, whose Conservative government had earlier decreed that all schools must fly the Union Jack, had said in the legislature: “What we need is to get the youth filled with the traditions of the

“The west was approaching the peak of its pro-British patriotism. Anti-German propaganda was intense and passionate.”

British flag and then, when they are men...they will be able to defend it.”

So Ohm Isaak Dyck was not far wrong when he wrote that the basis of the public schools during the War could be placed under the title:

“Ein König, ein Gott, eine Flotte, eine Flagge, ein allbritisches Reich. Simpatie, Selbstaufopferung fürs Vaterland.”

In fact, that was almost a paraphrase of the large headline which the *Free Press* carried on Empire Day in 1920 over a full page feature article:

“One King, One Flag, One Fleet, One Empire. For God! For duty! For Empire!”

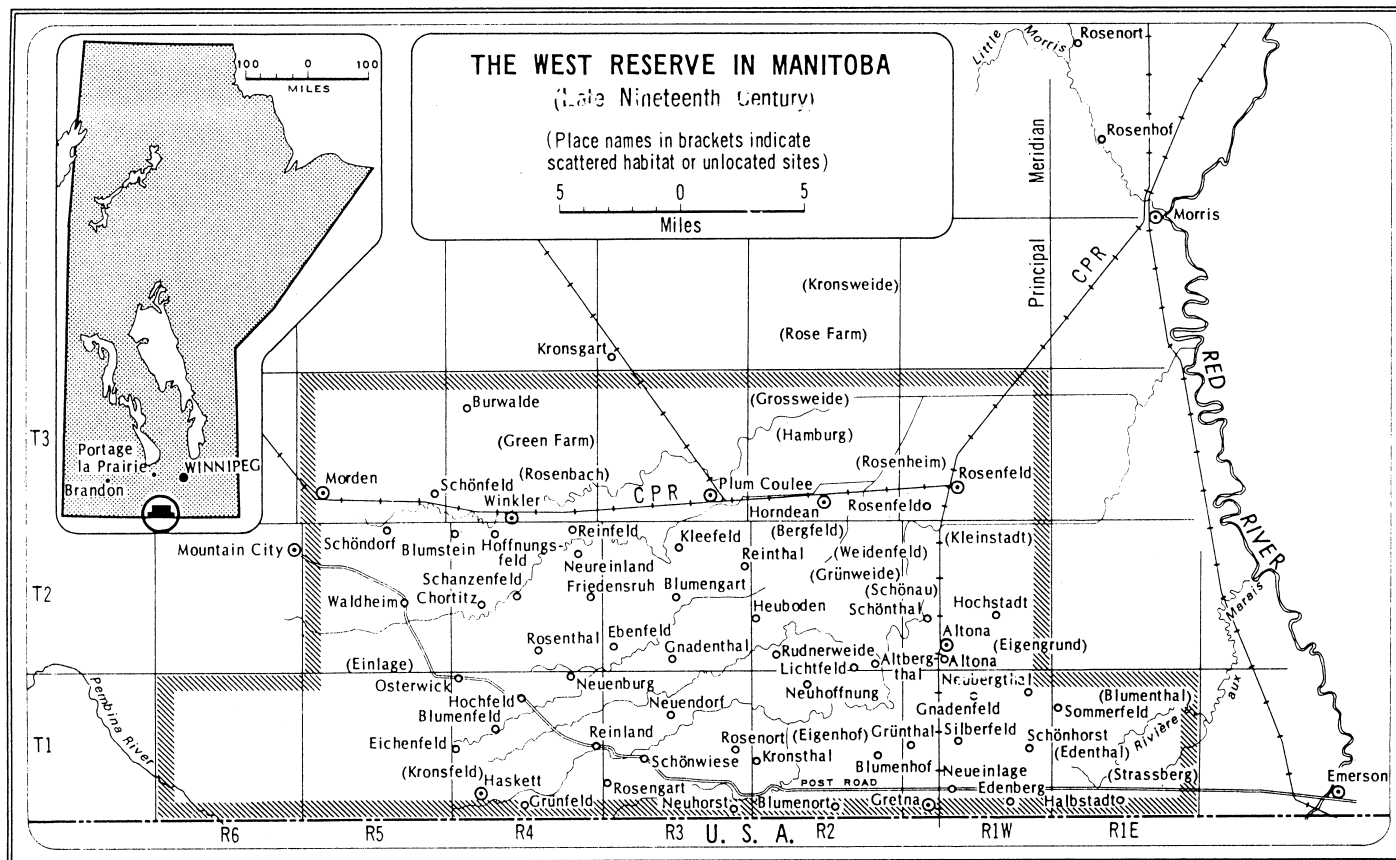
We would be inclined to share the Old Colo-

“The Old Colonists however, felt it the `duty on our conscience to teach them both religious and secular truth as part of one whole.”

nists’ hesitation as to whether the cultivation of that kind of patriotism was a proper function of the schools.

(c) **Content of curriculum.** The *Free Press* stoutly defended the right of the government to insist not only on English as the language of instruction, but also on the content of the secular curriculum. In this, it maintained, “there is no attempt to interfere with the Mennonites in the exercise of their religion.”

The *Free Press* and the government thus neatly separated secular truth from religious and thereby felt free to determine the educational curriculum. The Old Colonists however, felt it the “duty on our conscience to teach them both religious and secular truth as part of one whole.”



Map of the West Reserve established in 1875. Courtesy of Frank Epp, *Men. in Man. 1786-1920* (Toronto, 1974), page 221. The Old Kolony settlement in 1875 extended west of a line between Blumenhof in the south and Plum Coulee in the north. Reinland, located centrally on the Post Road which traversed the enclave, was the "capital" of the OK community.

Panorama - Fürstenlandt Villages,



A panoramic view of the four central Gross-Fürstenlandt villages located some 20 kilometres southwest of Nikopol, Imperial Russia, founded 1864. View to the northeast. In the foreground, right hand side, is Alexandertal (23 farms), and behind it is Rosenbach (18 farms). In the centre (page 6) is Georgthal (30 farms) with the cross street, left hand side, in the direction of Olgafeld (28 farms), immediately to the northwest, left side off photo. Olgafeld is completely gone other than the cemetery and perhaps the village street. To the rear, left side, is visible one of six Kolkhos barns, probably built in the 1930s, most of which are now empty. The area is very fertile with hot house tomatoes and cucumbers ready for market by early May. The fifth village, Michaelsburg (35 farms) was situated some 10 kilometres north, at a picturesque spot within sight of the majestic Dnieper River, some 5 kilometres wide at this point. Of Gross-Fürstenlandt Jakob D. Epp wrote on October 24, 1867, "This settlement is solidly established and prosperous with many fine and expensively built homes".

Der Nebraska Ansiedler

den Interessen der deutschen Bevölkerung des Westens gewidmet.

Jahrgang 2. No. 9. Lincoln, Neb., Februar 1880. Ganze No. 21.

Kaufas.		Nachweis wie viel Dörfer, Wirthe, Seelen, ackerbaufähiges Land, Maschinen, Wagen, Pflüge, und viel gerneht in 1879.																		Preis der Gegenstände, als							
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Peter Wien 6
Reinland, den 20. Dec. 1879.

Chart of village population, livestock, acreages, etc. as printed in the Nebraska Ansiedler February 1880. The chart shows the phenomenal success of the OK-ers. They already had 12 steam driven threshing outfits in 1879, when this technology was largely unheard of. Their co-religionists in Imperial Russia only mechanized to that extent in the closing years of the century. Reprinted courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1974), page 147.

Then do it in your private schools, said the *Free Press* in effect, which you are permitted to maintain as long as they meet the language and curriculum standards set by the government.

The Sommerfelder appealed directly to the government (13 January 1920) to be allowed to place their schools under government standards and supervision, but were turned down.

"It was no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy the private schools once and for all," wrote E.K. Francis, "It was part of a consistent national policy aimed at the assimilation of ethnics to safeguard national unity and cultural uniformity"

(d) The Old Colonists pleaded for an evaluation of their schools on the basis of its products, and the society which their schools produced.

"We take care of the poor, the sick, the suffer-

"It was no more a question of educational standards which prompted the authorities to destroy the private schools once and for all," wrote E.K. Francis,..."

ing, the feeble, the weak-minded...we are little or no expense to the government in the administration of justice;...courts...jails. We would ask you to kindly make an independent and unprejudiced investigation into the social, economic and moral conditions of our community and base your opinions of us and our school system on the facts as you find them."

The government refused to accept any such

20 km. Southwest of Nikopol, Ukraine.



-Diaries of Jakob Epp, page 237. None of these houses remain. During my visit of May 19, 2000, we were informed that the Mennonite buildings (housebarns as well as schools and churches) had been taken apart by the Wehrmacht in 1944 to construct defensive works. Rev. Jakob Epp provides a detailed description of the election and ordination of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) as Aeltester of the Chortitza Gemeinde at Fürstenlandt (pages 299-300). The core group of the Reinländer Gemeinde of Manitoba, 1100 souls, came from Fürstenlandt. While the Bergthaler under Oberschulz Jakob Peters transplanted their civil administration to the East Reserve, the Fürstenlander under Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller transplanted their civil administration (Gebietsamt) to the West Reserve (Francis, page 84). Photo by Delbert Plett, May 19, 2000.

practical criterion and insisted that its academic curriculum was the only acceptable test of whether or not a school was satisfactory.

The *Free Press* warned that the Mennonites should not “be allowed to assume that it is their right to maintain colonies in which children shall be allowed to grow into manhood without the advantages which others enjoy, and in ignorance of the language of the country.”

Two decades later Robert England, who had earlier been one of the teachers sent into non-English districts to help Canadianize those communities, wrote: “Thoughtful students are now beginning to realize that the herding of children into the classrooms and the making of a gap between the so-called practical knowledge the child gains in his environment of farm and community and the literary education he receives in the classroom is a sin against the true spirit of culture.”

Measured by this criterion, the Department of Education in 1916 was a greater sinner against culture and civilization and education than were the conservative Old Colonists whom it was trying to

“Unfortunately, that kind of arrogant aggression is still being carried on by education departments....”

convert from the error of their ways.

Unfortunately, that kind of arrogant aggression is still being carried on by education departments and unfortunately still being resisted and opposed by too few communities—including some Old Colony settlements in the Peace River area and some Indian communities in the north.

On these four points it seems to me that there was so much substance to the conservative position, that a second look may help us to gain a better perspective on our own educational efforts: Who has primary responsibility for the education of our children, the parents or the state?

Is the school properly a place of indoctrination—regarding the British flag, Canadian nationalism, or the English language? Or is it a place in which to search for integrated truth that ties in with daily life?

Is the assimilation of all ethnic and religious groups into one 100 percent Canadian body (whose identity our scholars are still looking for) the goal of education? Or is learning tolerantly to live together with those of differing backgrounds and convictions the aim?

Since the encounter over education brought various groups into direct contact with the governments, one cannot help but observe another aspect of the rejected conservative position which deserves reconsideration. That is, its attitude to government.

The almost total refusal of Old Colonists to participate in government (they did not even vote in municipal or school board elections) has been interpreted as such an extreme separation of church and state as to be impracticable in modern democracy. Yet three points may be briefly noted:

1. The Old Colonists were very clear in their conviction that government was of God and therefore to be prayed for, supported, and obeyed as far

as was conscientiously possible. Their faith was not in the person of the Minister or in the party in power but in government as such (a position certainly closer to the ideal of the Canadian constitution than was the actual practice of the political parties at the time!).

“Believing as we do that the word of the government is inviolate because the government is ordained of God,” says the preamble of the Old Colony brief to the Manitoba Government of 1919. The “progressive” Mennonites, in their brief a few years earlier, instead began: “The majority of the Mennonites so far have put their confidence in the Liberal party.”

It may make more worldly sense to take the latter position, but there is something very powerful in approaching a government with the conviction that it has a divine duty to keep its promises and to do justice.

2. If a government legislated in a way contrary to their religious convictions, the conservatives used every legal means to right the wrong. The 1917 School Attendance Act was taken through the courts all the way to the Judicial committee of the Privy Council in London.

Their options included conscientious refusal to comply (“civil disobedience” was the name under which another group of minority Christians, the American Blacks, popularized this approach half a century later) and, as a last resort, emigration. (The Roman Catholics had the tenacity to fight discriminatory legislation in the courts.)

The “progressive” Mennonites, faced with adverse legislation said that “they would not like to be betrayed by the Liberal party. If they were betrayed, they would feel so offended that they would cease to support the Liberal government.”

3. The simple biblicism of the conservatives is clearly reflected in their dealings with government. Their letters to cabinet ministers are full of scripture references.

They do not, however, reflect sanctimoniousness or surface religiosity, but rather a conviction that their readers would take the biblical injunctions as seriously as they did. On one occasion at least, the tables were turned as a government representative used scripture to bring the Old Colonists around to his point of view.

When the Canada Registration Act was passed in 1918 as a follow-up on the conscription bill of the year before, J.C. Locke, K.C., was appointed superintendent of registrars for Manitoba. Within 48 hours of this appointment, a Mennonite delegation had visited him indicating their opposition to this registration. Locke tried every form of persuasion that he could with them, but to no avail.

Then he was invited to attend a “Bruderschaft” in Reinland on June 13 at which delegates from Saskatchewan would also be present to discuss and decide on the registration, set by the government for June 22.

The brotherhood meeting was over before he arrived, but the bishops and leading ministers were waiting for him at the Peter Harms residence.

Here Locke was informed that they had decided not to register but wanted an opportunity “to point out that we are not deliberately defying the Dominion Government.” Locke explained the act and its purpose to them. He threatened them with

fines and imprisonment.

Bishop Johann Friesen responded, “We do not blame you for doing your duty. If we don’t register, any man of us whom you want will report to Mr. McLeod’s office at Morden on the morning of the 23rd ready to go to jail...and we will bring our bank books, the titles to our farms and lists of our stock.”

At this point Locke changed tactics, picked up the large German family Bible on the living room table, painstakingly read for them the opening verses of Luke, and then translated them into English.

Looking up at them he asked, “You say the Lord told you this morning to not to register?”

“Yes.”

“That was not the Lord,” responded Locke. “The Government is only asking from you the same thing that Caesar Augustus asked the earthly father and mother of our Lord to do, and they did so.”

The Mennonites “Ohms” were so impressed that another “Bruderschaft” was called, which unanimously decided to cooperate with the registration.

I have been amazed at some of the insights of our ‘conservative’ brethren in the course of my recent study of their Canadian experience. The tragedy is that they were not permitted to carry them out, or were unable or unwilling to do so. Our increasing separation from them has cut us off from the benefit of their convictions and them from the help we might have given them in implementing these convictions.

Perhaps a hard second look can help to reverse some of our negative attitudes towards these rejected “conservatives.”

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 3-8.

About the Author:

The above article, “A second look at the rejected conservatives,” is based on an address presented by Adolf Ens at the Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg in March, 1973. Ens is a Professor of History and Theology, recently retired from the faculty of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.



Dr. Adolf Ens, Professor of History, at retirement dinner, May 15, 1999. Photo by Aiden Schlichting Enns, Canadian Mennonite, June 21, 1999, Vol. 3, Number 13, page 4, reprinted in *Preservings*, No. 15, page 83.

Evangelicals Denigrate Conservatives

Evangelicals Denigrate Conservatives Mennonites - Understanding the Conserxctive Wing of the Mennonite Chuteh, by Dr. David Schroeder, 745 Conventry Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3R 1B8, Retired Professor of History and Theology.

Introduction.

We have not done well in understanding the more conservative wing of the Mennonite churches, such as the Sommerfelder, Reinländer, Chortitzer, Holdeman and Old Colony Churches.

These denominations have been branded as ultra conservative, traditional, backward, anti-educational, non-evangelical, unsure of their salvation, pessimistic, non-joyous, and generally looked down upon. But none of these things apply in the pejorative sense in which they are intended. In fact, when we see the success they have in retaining their family members for the faith, the other churches can well take a lesson from them.

It is painful for the members of the conservative churches to be regarded as non-believers by their more evangelical sisters and brothers. When persons came to our yard to evangelize us, my father would say, "If that is where you want to begin, you might as well leave now!" They left, but they did not know why my father had refused to talk to them. It was simple. They had refused to regard him as a Christian and that was an insult. But this happened time and again. When other churches accepted as members, persons that had been disciplined by these churches, without talking to their leadership, they were again saying that they did not regard them as Christians. Many similar incidents could be cited.

Salvation.

One of the basic misunderstandings between the conservative and the more evangelical Mennonite churches is their understanding of salvation. In the evangelical churches it is customary to emphasize the past tense of salvation (I have been saved) whereas the conservative churches have in the past emphasized the future tense of salvation (I trust I will be saved). Both are biblical. In fact the Bible can speak of having been saved (past tense), being saved (present tense) and will be saved (Future tense).

"It is painful for the members of the conservative churches to be regarded as non-believers by their more evangelical sisters and brothers."

My mother would always speak in terms of hoping to be saved. What this emphasized was the keen awareness of the possibility of becoming unfaithful to Christ sometime in the future and of becoming an unbeliever even after having been committed to Christ. Her assurance was that if she remained faithful to Christ to the end of her life she would receive the crown of life as the Word of God indicated (Revelation 2:10). Her joy of salvation was in Christ, not in herself.

Untold damage has been done to the conser-

vative church members by the evangelical churches by branding them as unbelievers. Seldom, if ever, did the conservatives seek to defend themselves. They knew that they loved the Lord and were seeking to serve him. That was enough. They were willing to suffer any derision that this might bring. They *could* have defended themselves by referring to Revelation 2:26 and 3:21 as well as 1 Peter 1:3-5 but they were never asked. It was assumed that they were not Christian.

I have seldom found as deep, as simple and as trusting a faith as I have found amongst the members of these Conservative churches. The other churches and church members owe them an apology and need to respond to them as brothers and sisters. Only then can we learn from each other.

Christian Formation.

What may have contributed to this misunderstanding is the conservative churches' emphasis on Christian formation rather than on conversion or education. In "formation" you are inducted into the world in which you live. You are made to see that this is the way the world is and it is not any other way. You are inducted into God's world and you need to learn to live a God-fearing life. The church is there to help you to know how to live in God's world. You are not converted into this world nor educated into it – it is now and will always be God's world. But we need the grace of God to live a life pleasing to God and this is where we need each other's help. This is where the church comes into its own.

"Untold damage has been done to the conservative church members by the evangelical churches by branding them as unbelievers."

By telling the story of God's people (both Old and New Testament) the church becomes a part of the People of God and becomes a part of the ongoing work of God in the world. In this view of the Church there is only one world, God's world. In the evangelical tradition it seems at times as if young people are seen to be in Saan's world until the time of conversion. In reality, however, even in their disobedience to God they are in God's world.

The Conservative churches (see endnote) have very successfully practiced Christian formation. An Amish Bishop asked one of the Old Colony Bishops in Mexico how many of their youth joined the church. He volunteered that in the last twenty years some 80% of the Amish youth had been retained by the church. The Old Colony Bishop thought a bit and said "I think we do better than that!" Which of the evangelical churches could say this?

Formation, in the sense in which the Conservative Churches practiced it, is difficult today even for them. So many things that do not come from the family or the church impact on our lives that it is difficult for persons to receive this unified view of the world. But if it were possible, formation is a much deeper and more permanent shaping of our lives than education.

Character Formation.

In the conservative churches the emphasis is placed on character formation rather than on doctrines and ethical rules. Christians are expected to follow Christ (discipleship) and manifest the character of Christ in their lives. What you believe (doctrine) and what you do or do not do (ethics) has to be in harmony with your commitment to Christ.

In the conservative churches basic beliefs were recalled every year when the Catechism questions and the Articles of Faith were presented, recited, read and commented on every spring. The members of the church accepted these beliefs without question. Being Christian, however, was not determined by which precise doctrines you accepted or whether you attended a dance, went to a show or even had a smoke. You were judged on your Christian character

"...some 80% of the Amish youth had been retained by the church... Which of the evangelical churches could say this?"

Christian character formation had to do with helping each other to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-26) in your lives. The beatitudes of Jesus (Matthew 5:1-11) also were a guide for Christian character. To be a follower of Jesus meant to become Christ-like in your character.

The main instrument of character formation was the telling of stories. There were stories of exemplary behaviour and stories of human folly and failure. Through the stories you learned to know what it meant to love, to forgive, to be honest, kind and trustful. It was and still is a very effective way of helping people become Christian in character.

The focus was on who we are as followers of Christ - on *being* rather than on believing or doing. What was said and done was seen as coming from the same person, from the same being.

The Community of Faith

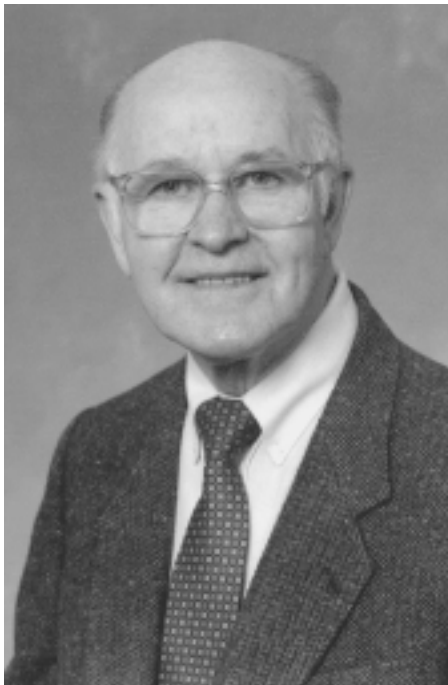
The conservative churches also give attention to the church as a community of faith. All who belonged to Christ belonged to the church. Since Christ is head of the church, decisions on how members of the church are to live in the world are made corporately as a church. The church is a

corporate community making decisions for all its members through the Bruderschaft.

The point is that it is the *church* that determines what it means to live in the world without being of the world. It is the church as a corporate body that determines the life-style of its members. Economic, educational and social decisions are made in essence by the church. This is in direct opposition to the individualistic view of salvation and practice in evidence in much of the evangelical world where every Christian does as he or she pleases.

People may differ on whether those decisions have always been the right ones. The church is not perfect. People may question whether it is really wrong to use rubber tires on farm tractors, refuse to use electricity or wear certain kinds of clothing, but the principle of the Church as a community of faith making corporate decisions on how to live in the world is commendable. All that is needed is for the Church to make the right decisions. To honour the church as church has yet to be learned by the evangelical churches.

Because the church as a corporate body speaks to issues that confront people daily, there is more of a reliance on the church and a dependence on the church in the conservative churches. Persons are socialized away from an individualistic approach to questions. It is this that the more evangelical, individualistically oriented churches and persons can hardly understand. They do not understand the loyalty of the members of the conservative churches to their church. They are the church as a corporate community. They do not stand alone.



David Schroeder, retired Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 600 Schafesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Education

The Conservative Churches have not been against education as such, as is most often suggested. They have in fact valued education as so important that it needs to be under the governance of the church and in the language of the people. They have also objected to having education for its own sake. They have insisted that the educational level needs to be appropriate to the needs of the members of the church at any given time. Again persons may argue that that judgment is not always appropriately made, but the principle is appropriate and remains.

When Provincial Departments of Education insisted on educational requirements that the church did not judge to be appropriate and when it was required to be in the English language, the conservative churches objected. They sought to keep education under the guidance of the church or else tried to find another country that would allow them this freedom.

The Mennonite Churches that accepted the Governments' role in setting standards and requirements for education have been quick to point out what the conservative churches lost through what they have regarded as an inferior education. These critics, however, have paid little attention to what they themselves may have lost as a church through the educational system of the land. To what extent has the country in which they lived assimilated them?

Language

The Conservative Churches have to a great extent kept to the Low German language. They have had their Sunday worship in High German but it has not become their conversational language. They have also learned English and Spanish in order to converse with people in the land, but neither is their language of choice. This is because the Low German language is so well suited to them as persons, their approach to things and their emphasis on formation.

The Low German language is a strong verb language. It can be used to describe any kind of *action* (count the number of ways in which you can say it is raining); it can be used to tell stories such as they use in character formation. High German and English are noun languages. In them you can describe *things* to your hearts content. In English and German you can philosophize and theologize with great precision, but the conservative churches have shown little interest in such theological hair-splitting.

The conservative churches would have benefited from having the Low German language as a written language. They would even now be helped by using the Low German language in their schools and in their worship. They would then be able to express themselves in their home language and they would be in a position to produce some excellent literature. Maybe this is why the United Bible Society has decided to publish a Bible in the Low German language spoken by the Old Colony people in Mexico. Language is important and the conservative churches knew this.

Humility

What shall we say then about humility? Others have often made fun of it. But it is in perfect harmony with the conservative view of salvation as future and a person's place in the community of faith. The individualism and aggressiveness expressed by evangelical Christians is seen as

“The Conservative Churches have.... valued education.”

hubris, or spiritual conceit. It is in their minds in conflict with the Gospel. It conflicts with the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22ff.

The Conservative sense of humility comes from their sense of being under the lordship of Christ exercised through the community of faith.

State and Society.

The church takes precedence over the state. Ultimate allegiance belongs to Christ and the Church, and not to governments. Governments, when they fulfill their God-given task, keep order in society. The Church in the conservative churches speaks for the people to the powers that be. The church reserves the right to encourage its members to obey or disobey the governments, depending on what demands the government makes on them. Governments often seek to use the divide-and-conquer method against them because this is how they pit people against each other in the rest of society. But it has seldom worked.

The members of the conservative churches are prepared to suffer for the sake of Christ wherever the society or governments do not accept what they feel to be the right thing to do under God.

The conservative churches have seen it as their call to address issues of justice, morality, and spirituality in the church and in that way to make their witness to the larger society. It is in their community of faith that they seek to structure life in such a way that it represents the reign of God in the world. The Waisenamit is a good example.

Criticism.

Those who have been critical of the conservative churches have been critical about the particular judgments made by the churches about how to live in society. But there is little reason to be critical about their theology. The evangelical churches also have a theology to which members are not true. It would be well if we ceased throwing stones in each other's direction. It would be much better if we would learn from each other and help each other to be more faithful.

Endnote: This is indicated in Aeltester Abraham Doerksen's list of sermons and sermon schedules. See "Sommerfelder Sermons and Literature" a paper delivered by David Schroeder at a conference sponsored by the Local History Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, November 4, 1995.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 15, pages 47-48.

A History of Christianity

“A History of Christianity,” by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Many Christians lack a knowledge of church history and often make important decisions regarding church affiliation and theological affinity unaware of the historic teachings and origins of various denominations and confessions.

This is particularly true of some Mennonites who have confused the name of the so-called Evangelical movement or “Evangelicalism” with the word “Evangelical.” The word “Evangelical” means “pertaining to or in keeping with the Gospel and its teachings.” This statement essentially defines traditional Mennonite or Gospel-centric faith. In contrast “Evangelicalism” is the name of a specific American ethno-cultural-religious movement with roots in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In order to understand its spiritual ethos and how Evangelicalism is different from conservative Mennonite faith, it is necessary to look back at the history of the Church of Christ since the Reformation, and prior to that, to the days of the Apostles.

The Apostolic Church.

The history of the Christian church commenced with the birth of Jesus Christ. His advent heralded the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and the covenant which God had made with the patriarch Abraham. Jesus Christ was the Messiah and long awaited

Redeemer who would bring salvation to His people.

The dispensation of grace inaugurated by the advent of Jesus was manifested by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem on Pentecost. With this blessing the church grew with new congregations in Judea, Samaria, Damascus, Antioch and Cyprus.

The Apostolic Church was a suffering, persecuted church. The early church espoused and practised a simple Christianity. “Profoundly loyal to Christ, it conceived of Him primarily as the Divine Revealer of the knowledge of the true God, and the proclaimer of a ‘new law’ of simple lofty and strenuous morality.”

The Patristic Church.

The early church was also known as the “patristic church”, pertaining to the church fathers and their writings. It grew inwardly through the development of doctrine and organization. Self-seeking and false claimants to divine guidance soon arose who misled the church. Two of these movements were Gnosticism and Montanism.

Such adversity underlined the need for the establishment of sound doctrine. This occurred in three ways: 1) By referring back to the teachings of the Apostles who knew Jesus best; 2) By the development of the New Tes-

tament canon which showed that Jesus was to be understood in light of the history of Israel and prophetic prophecy (The canon of the New Testament or books written by the Apostles took 200 years to clarify); 3) By the development of the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds which were short summaries of the faith.

The creeds and the doctrines of the trinity and Christology were developed by a series of councils: Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). The Church Councils also excluded the life and ethical teachings of Jesus from the creeds of Christendom creating a theological orientation making it difficult for subsequent generations to recognize this part of Christ’s redemptive work (J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in the Face of Postmodernity*).

Augustine (354-430), the last and most important of the church fathers, defended the church against those who were denying the concept of original sin. An ascetic ideal of Christian perfection had developed in Monasticism based on abstinence and voluntary poverty. In contrast, Augustine developed the view of Christian grace, namely, that God forgives sinners fully. He established the theology and direction for the church for most of the Middle Ages.

The Fall, 333-1517.

The year 313 marked an important change for the early church. In that year the Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan whereby Christianity was recognized as a law-



The Apostle Paul beheaded in Rome on Nero’s orders, 69 A.D. Courtesy of Thielmann J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians...from the time of Christ to the Year A. D. 1660 (5ed)*(Scottsdale, Pa., 1950), page 82.



St. Augustine, after a painting by Botticelli. Courtesy of B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History (Grand Rapids, 1978)*, page 37.

Part One: Historical Background

ful religion. In 380 A.D. Emperor Gratian made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Under Emperor Justinian (527-565) the church was elevated to the status of a department of the state. Justinian ruthlessly suppressed and persecuted non-Christians as well as those Christians whose beliefs differed from those prescribed by the state (Williston Walker, *Christian Church* (3ed), pages 141-4).

The rites and rituals of the "official" state religion were seen as normative and dissenters, including those who believed in and endeavoured to practice the teachings of the Bible and particularly the Gospels, were cruelly persecuted. Soon it became an honour to be a Christian and a requirement for state and military service.

The Catholic Church.

The New Testament Church now became the Catholic or universal church as opposed to small persecuted groups of believers. A powerful hierarchical structure developed under the five patriarchs, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. The church adopted many of the sacrifices, priests, altars, relics, images and superstitions of the heathen peoples it had converted to Christianity.

Gregory the Great was one of the leading Popes of the medieval church reigning from 590-604. He appointed heads of state, raised armies and made peace treaties. He sent forth missionaries resulting in the establishment of Christianity in the British Isles. The barbar-

ians of northern Europe were conquered and converted to Christianity over the second half of the first millennium. The Orthodox Church brought Christianity to Eastern Europe during the same time.

The growth of Islam in the seventh century was a major setback for Christianity. The followers of Mohammed conquered the eastern half of the Roman Empire as well as Africa, the homeland of Augustine.

Mohammed expansion eventually removed all the Patriarchs except those in Rome and Constantinople. The patriarch of Rome became preeminent. He was soon called the Pope and ruled as supreme head of the Christian church in western Europe. The doctrine of Apostolic succession held that the Pope stood in direct succession to the Apostle Peter to whom Christ had intrusted the keys to the Kingdom.

The forces of Islam also invaded Spain and France. They were defeated by Charles Martel (the Hammer) in 732.

When the Goths conquered Rome, the Pope turned to the Franks for protection, crowning Charles the Great as Emperor in 800 A.D. "The Roman Church became coterminous with the Holy Roman Empire," (*Handbook of the Denominations*, page 108).

During the years between 1096 and 1291 the Roman Popes used the Crusades as a tool to expand Christendom and to restore the church in the East. The papacy reached its greatest height under Pope Innocent III, who ruled from 1198 to 1216. Innocent tolerated no opposition from secular power. He excom-

municated the King of England in 1208 because he was insubordinate.

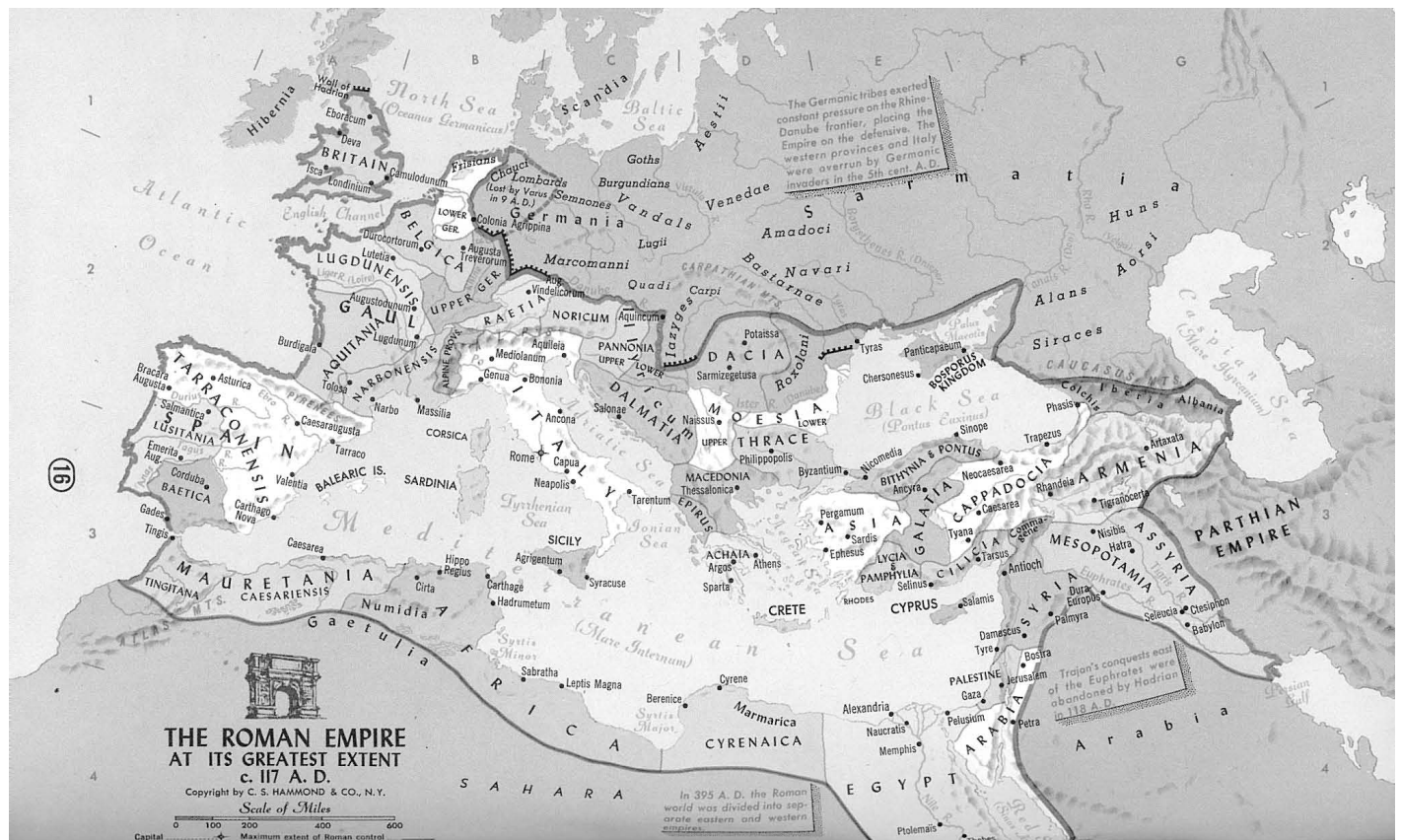
The Orthodox Church.

When Emperor Constantine moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium in 330 A.D. it heralded the most important split in the history of Christendom. The east was Greek, the west was Latin. During the last century of the first millennium Christianity spread to ancient Rus, an area including the modern states of Ukraine and Russia.

Certain eastern church bodies refused to accept the view of Christology as defined by the Council of Chalcedon (451) and were referred to as the Ancient Eastern Churches, including Syrian-Antiochian, Malabar Syrians, Armenians, the Copts of Egypt and the Ethiopians. Greek Christianity became the religion of the people of the Middle East and the Slavs. The Orthodox religion continued under the four ancient Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem and with the modern Patriarchs of Russia, Serbia, Romanian, Bulgaria, and Georgia, and recently America.

The Patriarch in Constantinople continued as head of the eastern or Orthodox Church. Various disagreements between the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople resulted in a formal split in 1054. The Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 seriously depleted its power.

With the advent of communism after the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Orthodox Church in the U.S.S.R. entered into a period



The Roman Empire at its greatest expanse, ca. 117 A.D. Map courtesy of Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary (Chicago, 1979), Map section page 16.

of extreme persecution.

The European and Asiatic bodies of the Eastern Orthodox Church have established dioceses in America, (*Handbook of the Denominations*, pages 108-110).

The Medieval Church.

The universal Catholic church had many genuine and devout Christian leaders particularly during the latter half of the Middle Ages.

Peter Waldo, a rich merchant in Lyons, France, believed that the church should be guided solely by the New Testament model. In 1176 he gave his money to the poor. His followers travelled around the country preaching and helping the needy

Dominic (1170-1221), a native of Castile in Spain, was the founder of the Dominicans, a Catholic Order which adopted the principle of mendicancy--the members should beg even for their daily food. "Always zealous for learning, it emphasized preaching and teaching, sought work especially in university towns, and soon became widely represented on the university faculties" (Williston Walker, *Christian Church*, page 233).

Giovanni Beradone (1182-1226) later known as St. Francis of Assisi was converted in "a gradual process". He gave his worldly possessions for the building up of the church. He preached repentance and the Kingdom of God. "He would imitate Christ and obey Christ's commands, in absolute poverty, in Christ-like love, and in humbled deference to the priests as his representatives." His followers founded the Order of the Franciscans, known as the Grey Friars in England.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-75) was an Italian



Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536), of Rotterdam, Netherlands. The most prominent writer and theologian of the Renaissance. Tolerance for other beliefs marked his teachings and influenced the Mennonites. Photo courtesy of Voolstra, From Martyr to Muppie (Amsterdam, 1994), page 6.

philosopher and a major theologian of the Roman Catholic church. He was a simple, deeply religious and prayerful man. *Summa Theologica* was his great work "reflecting a new period of Scholasticism...and marked the highest level of intellectual achievement of the Middle Ages" (Williston Walker, *Christian Church*, page 244). Aquinas revised Augustine. Aquinas' thinking was based more on Aristotle.

John Wycliffe (1320-84), professor at Oxford University, England, criticized the church for its wealth and secular power, advocating restitution of New Testament ideals of poverty and simplicity. He translated the Bible into English.

The Renaissance.

The Renaissance was the 15th century recovery of the knowledge and culture of ancient Greece and Rome. It came about through the increase in trade and commerce and first blossomed in Italy. Humanism was a way of thinking in which human interests, values and dignity predominated and was the life and breath of the Renaissance.

A renewed emphasis on education and culture diverted people's attention from the superstitions of the medieval world and reflected a new spirit of freedom and inquiry. The arts and sciences flourished.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) of Rotterdam, Holland, was a leading scholar among Christian humanists. He ridiculed the abuses of the Catholic Church, but believed that reform should come without destroying the Church. The tolerance of other religious views espoused by Erasmus had a strong influence in his native Netherlands and, later, on the Dutch Mennonites.

The writings of the Humanists made available the historical sources used by the leaders in the early church. It has been said that "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it." The invention of the printing press and production of the Gutenberg Bible in 1456 resulted in rapid dissemination of knowledge at a time of great spiritual hunger.

Eve of the Reformation.

By the 16th century the church had become a corrupt political power filled with immorality and greed. It had enormous wealth, owning three-quarters of the land in some areas.

Anything was available for a price, including ecclesiastical offices, dispensations, and divorces. The morality of the clergy was scandalous. Erasmus, the famous Renaissance scholar, made the charge that "many convents of men and women differ little from public brothels."

The sale of indulgences was practised. Indulgences arose from the belief that the church had authority to forgive sins but this did not include the power to release sinners from performing penance for their sins. Saints and martyrs supposedly had earned merits above their penances which the church now started to sell to others. Soon the practice became



John Calvin (1509-64), Geneva, Switzerland, the most influential of the Protestant Reformers. Courtesy of B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, 1978), page 196.

widespread.

Piety was separated from religion. It was taught that salvation came by virtue of the sacraments and a multitude of relics and rites. Excommunication was used as a tool of socioeconomic and political oppression and control. Heretics were brutally eradicated by the Inquisition.

Reformation, 1517.

In 1517 Martin Luther (1483-1546) a Catholic monk and doctor of theology nailed his 95 Theses to the castle door in Wittenberg, Germany. This act ignited the fires of the Reformation which quickly spread across Europe. Luther reformed much of northern Europe establishing the Lutheran Church. Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Zurich, Switzerland, was another major reformer.

John Calvin (1509-64) was the third great protestant reformer. He was born in Paris but in 1536 settled in Geneva, Switzerland. His emphasis on the providence of God revived the old Augustinian teachings of predestination. He taught that the standard for the Christian was the law of God which sometimes led to a works-righteousness as strict as that rejected in Catholicism.

The reformers sought to break away from the Catholic Church seeing it as fallen and the Pope as the Anti-Christ. The Protestant Reformation has been referred to as the Magisterial Reformation as the reformers did not believe in separation of church and state.

John Calvin affirmed that state and church should work together to implement Christian morality in society. Martin Luther taught it was the citizens' responsibility to obey the state in areas of morality and ethics. The church preached the Gospel.

Dissenters and minorities such as the Anabaptists were harshly oppressed and eradicated by both Catholics and Protestants.

Part One: Historical Background

Mennonites, 1525.

Anabaptism, the radical wing of the Reformation, was rooted deeply in the scripture. These were radical reformers who believed that the Protestant reformation had not completed the task of reforming the Catholic church. The radical reformers who separated from the church were frequently rebaptized and hence the name "Anabaptists".

There were many groups of Anabaptists in four or five geographical regions whose only commonality was a call for rebaptism. The Chiliasts or radical millennialists included Thomas Muentzer (1490-1525), who preached an earthly kingdom of Christ. Jan of Leyden established an earthly kingdom in Muenster. He was put to death in 1536. Other radical reformers included mystics and spiritualists such as Hans Denk and Sebastian Franck. The social revolutionaries included Balthasar Hubmaier.

The hated name "Anabaptist" was also used to describe another group of radical reformers. These were the nonresistant Christians whose vision was nothing less than the restitution of a New Testament type church, based on the Bible, of which peace was a major characteristic. The fundamental premise of the peaceful Anabaptists was that Christ had come to earth to establish a kingdom of peace. This spiritual kingdom would revolutionize all who accepted the call to take up the spiritual sword of truth, the Word.

The rebaptism of Conrad Grebel in 1525 in Switzerland is seen as the start of the movement. His followers were known as the Brethren. Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Dutch priest in Witmarsum, joined the movement in 1536 and soon became the most prominent leader of the peaceful or nonresistant Anabaptists. Hence the names "Mennists" and "Mennonites" arose.

Dirk Philips (1504-68), from Friesland, Netherlands, was a gifted theologian of the movement and the first Aeltester (Bishop) of the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde in Prussia. Jakob Hutter (d. 1536) was a major leader of the Hutterites in Moravia who differed from the Mennonites in that they practised community of property.

The Anabaptist reformers believed in the separation of church and state and that the teachings of Christ had precedence over the dictates of the state.

The magisterial reformation saw everything through the eyes of Augustine but the Anabaptists said this was wrong. Their view was that "we must set him aside and get to Paul and Jesus."

"The Calvinist-Augustinian conception of unconditional grace corresponded with a church which remained a community of righteous sinners, no matter how strict the exercise of discipline. A church like this could not define clear boundaries and isolate itself from the sinful world. But if the Anabaptists made a personal belief consisting of true penitence, conversion and rebirth, into a prerequisite for human salvation, then a church sharply di-

vided from the world would be created" (Sjouke Voolstra, "The colony of heaven..." in *From Martyr to Muppie*, (Amsterdam, 1994), page 24).

Exegesis.

Martin Luther had declared that Scripture alone was the authority for defining Christian faith, *Sola Scriptura*.

"Luther had a 'canon within a canon' which was orientated around the idea of justification by faith, whereas the Anabaptists focused on the Gospels, which are the source of discipleship," (J. Denny Weaver, e-mail, January 26, 2001).

Anabaptist Mennonites differed from Luther in their biblical interpretation or exegesis. They saw the bible firstly as a historical record with Christ as the cornerstone.

"Only Christ could be the foundation of Christian learning and practice. References to the theocratic Old Testament, separate from the fulfilment in the New Testament, could only lead to the sinful mixing of worldly and spiritual matters, of which Muntzer had been a shocking example," (Sjouke Voolstrar, "The colony of heaven," page 18). Hence the faith structure of the Anabaptist Mennonites can be characterized as "Gospel-centric".

Mennonite faith was more rational than emotional. "Simple obedience to biblical commandments led to a certain legalism on the one hand, and to moderate rationalism on the other..." (Sjouke Voolstrar, "The colony of heaven..." page 15).

Counter-Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation stimulated reform from within the Catholic church seen in the movement known as the Counter-Reformation.



Charles V (1500-58), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, led the Counter Reformation. He was a native of the Low Countries. Courtesy of B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, 1978), page 236.

Charles V (1500-58) was King of Spain and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1519 to 1556 and thus obligated to defend the Catholic Church. Charles was born in Gent, in what is now Belgium, and had grown up in the Netherlands.

In 1521 Charles V inaugurated the Diet of Worms which took a strict stand against Luther and the Reformation.

The Inquisition ferreted out heretics. The Jesuits, a religious order, were established to gain back lost ground. They were successful and recovered Poland and Austria for Catholicism. Later they also evangelized South America.

The social and political forces brought into conflict by the Reformation were not resolved until the middle of the 17th century. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 established a relative peace between Catholics and Protestants in Germany. Discontent and conflict, however, continued to simmer. Finally the Thirty Years War broke out in 1618 which was concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Many parts of the country had been completely destroyed. Famine, diseases and plagues followed. By 1648 Germany's population had been reduced from fifteen million to five million.

The borders of Catholicism and Protestantism were now established and permanent. The Protestant Reformation was complete.

In the Low Countries, the area of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands, the Calvinists formed the Reformed Church. In England they were known as the Puritans, in Scotland as Presbyterians and in France as the Huguenots.



William the Silent, Prince of Orange (1533-84), led the Dutch fight for freedom from the Spanish yoke. Courtesy of Voolstra, *From Martyr to Muppie* (Amsterdam, 1994), page 36.

The Low Countries.

The Low Countries played a significant role in the events arising from the Reformation. The territory had a tradition of toleration and local rights already affirmed by the teachings of Erasmus and the Renaissance.

However, the Catholic counter attack occurred here too and reached its zenith in the Low Countries, the Netherlands and Belgium. More than 18,000 martyrs were disposed of in Holland alone. By 1530 Mennonites had started their flight to Danzig on the Baltic Sea, establishing Holländer villages in the Vistula Delta.

In 1540 Charles V returned from Spain to the Low Countries to suppress the revolt. All of the southern Low Countries, today Belgium, was crown land giving Charles absolute power. Flanders in particular suffered severely and many Calvinists and Anabaptists fled to the northern Provinces, including Friesland.

The Low Countries were inherited by Philip II at the death of his father Charles V. Philip II determined to eradicate Calvinism and other dissenters and the persecution reached new heights. He appointed the Duke of Alva (1508-82) as Governor. Alva arrived in Brussels with a Spanish army in 1567 and hundreds of executions soon followed.

These developments were opposed by William of Nassau, Prince of Orange (1533-84), the hero of Dutch independence. He fled to Germany from where he organized resistance. In 1572 the northern provinces rose and recognized William as their leader. After several years of fierce fighting William was able to make a triumphal entry into Brussels in 1577.

In 1578 Alexander Farnese (1545-92), Duke of Parnese was appointed as commander of the Catholic forces. He was able to save the Catholic south, Belgium, for Spain. Thousands of Protestants left the south for the north and Catholics left the north for the south.

The seven northern provinces declared their independence in 1581 and Calvinism became firmly established with its first synod held in 1571. The Calvinist Church in Holland was known as the Reformed Church.

The peculiar customs of the Flemish ("The Reine") Mennonites from the south resulted in a formal spilt in 1567 with the Mennonites in the north known as the Frisians ("the Grobe").

Church of England, 1534.

England was unique in its experience of the Reformation developing differently than in continental Europe. In 1534 King Henry VIII declared that the King was the supreme head of the church and not the Pope. Thus the Anglican Church or Church of England was founded.

Limited reforms were instituted. Not everyone agreed with these changes. When Queen Mary ascended to the throne in 1555, she sought to reestablish Catholicism. The earlier reforms were again instituted under

her successor, Queen Elizabeth, and Catholicism was restricted to a small minority

Calvinism.

In England many Calvinist became Puritans. They sought to reform the Church of England. "Although the Puritans objected strongly to the Episcopalian form of church government and to many of the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, they were strongly opposed to separation from that church" (Kuiper, *The Church in History*, page 251).

The Congregationalists felt that reforming the Church of England was hopeless and separated from the Anglican Church. They believed that each local congregation should be an independent church body. Both Congregationalists and Puritans were Calvinist in doctrine.

In the "Long Parliament" of 1640 the Presbyterian Puritans finally seized power from King Charles, plunging England into civil war. The supporters of King Charles were known as "Cavaliers" because of their daring horsemanship and the practice of wearing long flowing locks. The Puritans under Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) wore their hair closely cropped and were called "Roundheads" and Cromwell's forces as "Ironsides".

After the death of Cromwell in 1658, Charles II was brought back to England restoring the monarchy and Anglican Church in 1660. The Puritans, against their will, were now also outside the church, and persecuted. "The Covenantors, as the Scottish Protestants were called, were hunted with bugles and bloodhounds like so many deer." Among the multitude in England who suffered was John Bunyan, author of the famous *Pilgrims Progress*. Another Puritan of high rank was the blind John Milton who wrote the epic poem, *Paradise Lost*.

William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, of the Netherlands now became the champion of Protestantism against King Louis XIV of France. William was married to the daughter of James II, who was conspiring with Louis XIV to restore Catholicism to England. In 1688 William of Orange crossed the sea from Holland eventually defeating his father-in-law James II. His men were known as "Orangemen".

William and Mary were crowned as King and Queen of England. A measure of toleration was instituted for Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist and Quaker dissenters, who numbered about ten per cent of the population (Kuipers, *The Church*, pages 251-257).

Colonial America.

Catholicism was brought to South and Central America with the Spanish and Portuguese explorers, colonists and priests.

The Anglican Church was transplanted to Colonial America by the English settlers who founded Jamestown in 1607.

In the face of persecution in England the Congregationalist sought a new home in the

New World in 1620. Known as the Pilgrims they crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the "Mayflower" and established the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. The Pilgrims established Congregationalism in America.

The great migration of English Puritans began in 1628 with the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1628. Eventually the Plymouth Colony provided the model of church polity for all New England.

In 1623 the Dutch established a colony known as New Netherlands, renamed New York after being captured by the English in 1664. The Dutch Reformed Church was thereby transplanted to the New World. Dutch Mennonites were part of this migration and are referred to in New Amsterdam as early as 1652. This first attempt, however, did not result in a permanent Mennonite settlement in North America.

The Catholic Church came to North America with the establishment of Maryland around Chesapeake Bay.

In 1681 Pennsylvania was granted to William Penn who granted religious freedom in the colony. It became a home for many religious dissenters including Quakers, German Lutherans and Reformed as well as Swiss and South German Mennonites including the Amish. The Mennonites and Amish were assisted in immigrating to the "new" world by wealthy Dutch Mennonites, the ancestors of the Old Colony Mennonites.

The Baptist movement was begun in England by Anabaptist refugees from Holland. Roger Williams (1604-83) in Rhode Island, was the founder of the Baptist movement in the United States which was strongly Calvinistic.

The Anglican Church in the Colonies was renamed the Episcopalian Church after the American Revolutionary War of 1776. Two-thirds of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence were Episcopalians.

Arminianism.

Arminianism developed within the Dutch Reformed Church. Dutch theologian Jakobus Arminius (1560-1609) departed from Calvinist teaching by asserting that even though individuals were predestined, or chosen for salvation, they must still choose to accept God's election.

Arminius "denied the total inability and depravity of man" somewhat like Pelagius who "taught the essential goodness of man...against whom Augustine had defended the doctrine of man's total depravity."

Arminius also taught that it was possible to fall from grace. These teachings caused an uproar and were rejected by the Calvinist Synod of Dort (1618).

Pietism.

Pietism was a 17th century renewal movement which arose in the midst of rigid orthodoxy within the Reformed and Lutheran Churches. Pietism was a reaction against this cold and inactive religion.



Jakobus Arminius (1560-1609), Amsterdam, espoused the teaching of free will, similar to the teachings of Menno Simons, the great Dutch Reformer. Courtesy of B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, 1978), page 267.

Early Pietism emphasized renewal through small “colligia pietatis”, small pietistic groups which met for prayer and Bible study. It was a warm devotional religion. Historical pietism was not separatistic. Philip Spener (1635-1705), August Frank (1663-1727), and Count Zinzendorf (1700-60), were the prominent early leaders of the movement.

Some aspects of early Pietism were comparable to the warm and spiritually embracing faith of the Waterlander Mennonite denomination in 16th century Holland whose writers such as Pieter Pieters (1574-1651) and Jan Philipsz Schabaelie (1592-1656) are widely read among conservative Mennonites. But in Mennonite theology, inward or emotional gratification came about as a result of “Nachfolge” or discipleship, whereas in Pietism, the inward emotional life became the objective in and of itself, (Friedmann, *Theology of Anabaptism*).

But Pietism also had a dark side, it “...too was one-sided. It was ascetic, and emphasized severe self-denial....Pietism was critical and uncharitable; it condemned as irreligious everyone who was not a pietist. It denied the name of Christian to all those who could not tell a story of conscious conversion through an intense struggle,” (Kuiper, *Church in History*, page 274).

Millennialism.

Millennialism is the belief in a thousand year reign of Christ based on Revelations 20:1-10 (also referred to as “Chiliasm” drawn from the Greek). Eschatology refers to the study of “the last things”.

Apocalypse, usually referring to end times, actually means revelation. An Apocalyptic outlook is also catastrophic “in that it holds that this historical conflict will be settled

by battles and disasters in which evil will be defeated.”

There are three different interpretations of Millennialism: pre-, post-, and amillennialism, referring to the point in time when Christ will return. Premillennialists believe that Christ will return before the millennium. Post-millennialists believe He will return after the millennium.

Amillennialists do not interpret Revelations 20 literally, “...rather the glorious new heaven will immediately follow the present dispensation of the kingdom of God.” The Catholic church and mainline Protestants hold to the amillennial view. Conservative Mennonites hold to a slightly different view that the thousand year reign was inaugurated by the birth or first advent of Christ and that believers are presently in the millennium. “The Peaceable Kingdom of Christ” by Aeltester P. J. Twisk (1565-1636) of the “Hard” Frisian Gemeinde at Horn, Netherlands, is the classic statement of this interpretation.

From the earliest recorded history, various religious cultures have focused on endtimes predictions, sometimes known as prophecies. Christianity was no exception and numerous cycles of chiliastic fervour mark its history through two millennia.

“Hippolytus (170-236) interpreted the Antichrist allegory as being one of the Roman emperors--Nero or Domintan--or any of a number of heretics.” In 950 a monk called Adso gave a detailed description of the Antichrist who would “reign for three-and-one-half years, persecuting and killing Christians before God comes to judge the world.”

In the evening of December 31 in the year 1,000, crowds of people filled the square in Rome, “When the fatal hour struck the crowd became transfixed barely daring to breath” (Kyle, *The Last Days*, page 45).

Apoclypticism remained a potent force throughout medieval times returning periodically to capture the popular imagination. During the Reformation the Protestant reformers held the Pope to be the Antichrist.

In Münster, Anabaptist revolutionaries seized the city establishing a “New Jerusalem”. They believed the end of the world was at hand and that they needed to violently introduce the reign of Christ. The insurgents were slaughtered and Münster became a permanent warning among conservative Mennonites against the dangers of the millennial apotasy.

The Great Awakening.

The Great Awakening, a major revival in England, was started under the preaching of Evangelist George Whitefield (1714-70), a strong Calvinist. He made seven trips to America between 1738-70. Highly emotional preaching was practised. For the first time in history, great emphasis was placed on the concept of an emotional climactic conversion experience, the beginning of the “born again movement”.

At the same time Evangelist John Wesley

(1703-91) became even more influential, founding the Methodist denomination in 1784. Wesley also preached the belief in a second experience called sanctification. A sanctified person was said to have become sinless. He was known as the founder of the “Holiness Movement.” Wesley accepted Arminianism and parted company with Whitefield over doctrine. Circuit riding became a common form of preaching and Wesley’s slogan was “all the world is my parish.” He sided with the Royalists in the American War of Independence.

The Salvation Army, founded in 1878 by William Booth (1829-1912), was an offshoot of the Methodist denomination.

The Age of Reason.

The Great Awakening was followed by a sharp decline in spiritual life. This was partially the result of English Deism and French Rationalism. Many of the leading men in America, including Benjamin Franklin (1706-90) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), were essentially Deistic.

Deism was the belief in the nature or existence of God based on the evidence of reason and nature alone. Thomas Paine (1737-1809), wrote the popular booklet, *The Age of Reason*, which espoused these views.

Paine, in turn, was influenced by the French philosophers, Voltaire (1794-1778) and Jean Jacque Rousseau (1712-78), whose exposition of reason over superstition greatly influenced the founding of the American Republic



Jan Philipsz Schabaelie (1592-1656), preacher of the Waterländer Mennonites, Alkmaar, Netherlands. In 1635 he published the classic Mennonite devotional work *The Wandering Soul* which has since appeared in numerous Dutch, German and English editions. Schabaelie wrote at least 20 major works, typical of hundreds of gifted educated writers of the Dutch Mennonite Church during its golden age, the spiritual and genetic ancestors of the Old Colony Mennonites. Photo courtesy of Voolstra, *From Martyr to Muppet* (Amsterdam, 1994), page 100.

as well as the French Revolution (Durant, *Rousseau and Revolution*, page 891).

“The Deists’ denial of Jesus’ divinity became the distinguishing characteristic of the Unitarian Church to which many educated 19th century New Englanders belonged.”

The frontier experience in America also resulted in low morality and religious indifference. At the time of the American Revolution in 1776 not more than eight per cent of Americans belonged to a church.

American Revivalism.

The 19th century saw a second great revival in America, referred to as “The Second Great Awakening”.

The revival started slowly in the east but gained fervour in the west.

Circuit riding was introduced to America by the Methodists. A preacher or evangelist would rotate among a group of local congregations strengthening and fortifying them. At various places they established classes with class instructors.

Camp meetings were held where several ministers from various denominations addressed the crowds from different stands. The meetings often lasted several days and nights. “Campfires blazed; there were long rows of tents. The preachers engaged in impassioned exhortations and earnest prayers. Swelling notes of music floated on the air as the thousands joined in the singing of hymns. Persons under conviction of sin, sobbed, shrieked and shouted,” (Kuipers, pages 357-8). Best known was the Cumberland Revival which reached its zenith in 1800.

The Methodists brought Sunday Schools to America as a pleasant way of instructing children. Sunday Schools had started as schools teaching literacy to children of the working poor in England in an age when children had to work in factories and coal mines. Later Sunday Schools became tools for child evangelism. Mennonites were at first opposed to Sunday Schools as they seemed to contradict the principle of adult baptism and they were originally used to spread false teachings in their midst.

Much of the fervour of the Great Awakening was separatistic. Several new denominations were formed: the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Christian Church and the Church of the Disciples. The Church of God, Anderson, Indiana (“Ovent Lichta”), broke away in 1881 over concerns about the doctrines of Holiness.

The denominations using revivalistic methods, including Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists, were successful in gaining many new adherents among the unchurched, as well as from existing churches. Separatism or sectarianism became one of the key characteristics of Protestantism in America.

The religious zeal surrounding revivalism resulted in the founding of missionary societies, missionary magazines and Christian schools and seminaries. The American Bible Society was founded in 1816 and the American Tract Soci-

ety in 1825. The goal was to spread the new teachings throughout the whole world.

These organizations and revivalistic techniques were used to propagate the theology and religious culture of the movement. Because of its revivalistic rituals, the religious culture which evolved from the Second Great Awakening was also known as American Revivalism.

Charles Finney (1792-1875), a Presbyterian evangelist and of Oberland College in Connecticut, was one of the important early leaders.

Billy Sunday (1862-1935), New York, was another prominent evangelist.

Revivalism also affected the Mennonites. In 1859 a Revivalist preacher John Holdeman (1832-1900), Wayne County, Ohio, founded the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, also known as the Holdeman Church. In 1860 John H. Oberholzer (1809-95) was one of the founders of the General Conference Mennonite Church at West Point, Iowa. They broke from the Old Mennonite Church favouring revivalistic teachings and methods but both denominations quickly attracted members from among the Russian Mennonites who emigrated to North America in 1874 and after.

American Millennialism.

While millennial expectations in Europe existed on the margins of religious thought, they were more central in the American experience.

The Puritans brought intense eschatological expectations with them to Colonial America. God had selected a chosen remnant to go to the new world to build the “New Jerusalem”. “Through the years Americans have tended to see themselves as the chosen nation and their enemies as demonic” (Kyle, *The Last Days*, page 78).

During the 18th century Apocalypticism waned and Postmillennialism gained strength combining with Perfectionism, a variant of the holiness teaching.

The Great Awakening had strong end-times expectations which some saw as a prelude to the millennium. Colonial Americans associated British fortunes with the forces of good while Catholic France was seen as the Antichrist.

During the Revolutionary War, eschatological views changed and Britain was seen as the Antichrist.

With the passing decades “Americans came to equate the kingdom of God with the political and moral destiny of America.” They claimed a “Manifest Destiny” which heralded territorial expansion to the west coast and south, seizing part of Mexico.

The Church of Latter Day Saints or Mormons started in 1820 when Joseph Smith was led by an angel to discover the Golden Plates. The Book of Mormon “established the Hebraic origins of the American Indians and supplied America with a Biblical past” (Kyle, *The Last Days*, page 84-5).

William Miller (1782-1849), Baptist layman from Low Hampton, New York, declared

that the return of Christ would occur on March 21, 1844. “Except for predicting the exact date of Christ’s return, Millerism did not substantially differ from its evangelical neighbours.”

Daniel 8:14 was the key to Miller’s eschatological predictions. Millerites identified both Catholicism and mainline Protestants as the Antichrist. “Some disposed of all their property as the day of expectation approached, gave away their goods, settled all their accounts, and waited prayerfully for the Lord to come.”

Many were bitterly disenchanted by the failure of their expectations. Others continued in small adventist groups. In 1855 a remnant established their headquarters at Battlecreek, Michigan, and in 1860 officially adopted the name “Seventh-Day Adventists”.

The Adventist faith, often coupled with Pentecostal or Perfectionist (Holiness) components, was significant in the formation of a number of new denominations. Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) was an Adventist who founded the Jehovah Witnesses. Of the churches arising out of the millennial expectations of the 19th century, they have been the most successful, numbering over 11,000,000.

Dispensationalism.

The “six day” or “creation day-world age” theory was a common form of Millennialism. “The notion, based on 2 Peter 3:8...links the seven days of creation with seven millennia of human history. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh...this approach prompted Christians to try to calculate the day of Christ’s return. A common element here was the belief that the world was about 5,700 to 6,000 years old” (Kyle, *The Last Days*, page 36).

English theologian John Darby (1800-82) and the Plymouth Brethren had an enormous impact on Protestant Fundamentalism. Darby divided the period of human experience into seven eras or time periods which he called dispensations. Hence the term “Dispensationalism” to describe his teachings.

Darby called the current period or dispensation, “the Church age”, a sort of parenthesis between the dispensations of the Old Testament and the reign of Christ on earth which would be implemented in some future mythical 1000 year reign. It would be inaugurated only after Christ’s Second Coming and headquartered in Jerusalem. “The church period would be marked by apostasy and the erosion of Christian morality. This period will be followed by an event called the Rapture or the Secret Rapture, when all saved Christians will ascend into the sky to meet Christ and to be safeguarded from the Great Tribulation, a time of violence and death that will eventually be succeeded by Christ’s triumphant thousand-reign on earth and his Last Judgement of humankind.”

According to Darby, Christ had offered His Kingdom to the Jews. They had refused to accept it, and therefore He now made it available to Gentiles (the rest of humanity). The four Gospels describing the life and

teachings of Christ were thereby deemed to apply only in this future age, i.e. they were dispensed with.

Darby travelled extensively in the United States promoting his new doctrines and converting many prominent leaders to his version of dispensationalism.

“By the 1870s the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-99) was preaching the premillennial return of Christ...His conversion to this doctrine may have been due to contacts with the Plymouth Brethren on a visit to England....He did, however, contribute significantly to the rise of dispensationalism” (Kyle, *The Last Days*, pages 104-5).

Most Evangelists following Moody adhered to Darbyite teachings including Billy Sunday, W. J. Erdmann, as well as leaders in the missions movement such as A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and Robert Speer of Presbyterian Missions.

Some 50 Bible Schools were soon established to promote the dispensational teaching of Darby. The most prominent were the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola), and the Northwestern Bible Training School of Minneapolis.

A series of Bible Prophecy Conferences from about 1875 to 1900 were important in spreading dispensationalist teachings. Soon Dispensationalism became more prominent than other forms of Premillennialism.

Separatist-Pietism.

In the meantime, European Pietism was evolving from a wholesome renewal movement within the state churches and becoming exclusionary and separatistic.

The radical Pietists came to regard the Lutheran and Reformed churches as being of the “beast”. The term “separatist” came from the notion that the “old” church was of the devil and beyond redemption. A new start had to be made by leaving the old and starting a new church which they regarded as the one and only “true” church. A program of religious ritual and legalistic rites was developed to induce the desired feelings of inward gratification.

The movement was profoundly influenced by Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), a professor in Württemberg, Germany, and by his disciple, Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), whose novel *Heimweh* set forth his eschatological beliefs. He popularized dispensationalist thought within Separatist-Pietism. He proclaimed that the “thousand year kingdom of peace would appear in the east either in 1833 or 36,” (Stumpp, *The Immigration from Germany to Russia* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1978), page 27-8.)

This date was later revised to 1881. As a result thousands of Germans moved to Imperial Russia at the end of the 18th and early 19th century. Separatist-Pietist missionaries such as Edward Wüst (1818-59) from Württemberg, Germany, attacked Mennonite

communities in Imperial Russia seeking to turn alienated young people and marginalized adults against their families and communities.

It was under these influences that the *Brüdergemeinde* (later Mennonite Brethren) was formed among the Mennonites in Imperial Russia in 1860. It condemned the “entire corrupt Mennonite brotherhood.” The larger *Kirchliche* (the Churched) mother congregations were also deeply affected and adopted much of Separatist Pietist teaching. As a result only one-third of Mennonites in Russia “took the pilgrims staff” in 1874 when the opportunity arose to emigrate to America since “Russia lay close to the ‘east’ and was thus the promised place of refuge whereas America, situated in the ‘west’ was doomed” (Urry, *None but Saints*, page 227).

At much the same time, Separatist Pietists in Germany and Scandinavia broke away from the state church. In these countries the Lutheran Church was called the Evangelical Church. Hence the Separatists there received the name, Evangelical Free Church, describing their historical origins.

The Swedish and Norwegian denominations of these Evangelical Free Churches were transplanted to America, particularly to Minnesota, with immigrants in the second half of the 19th century. By 1950 they had abandoned their ethnic character and amalgamated to form the Evangelical Free Church of America.

The Church and Slavery.

Slavery was brought to both North and South America by the explorers, colonists and even the church. Slavery was deeply entrenched particularly in the southern states where Negroes were imported to work the cotton plantations.

As early as 1663 “the reformer Plockhoy and his ‘25 Mennonist families’ from Amsterdam had rejected human bondage for their colony on the Delaware.”

In 1688, Garrett Heinrichs, Dirk and Abraham op de Graff, and Francis Daniel Pastorius, Quakers of Dutch Mennonite background, signed the first formal protest against slavery in North America (McMaster, *Land, Piety and Peoplehood* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1985), pages 42-43).

(Shortly after the immigration of Prussian Mennonites to Imperial Russia in 1788 and 1804, Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde denomination, together with others, refused to complete the purchase of the large Volenko estate because it included serfs or slaves this being “contrary to their confession”.)

In England, William Wilberforce (1759-1833), took up the fight against slavery, resulting in its abolition in the British Empire in 1833.

Growing anti-slavery sentiment resulted in denominational schisms in the United States. The most significant was the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 which held the view that slavery was

biblically mandated. It quickly became the largest and most powerful Fundamentalist denomination in America.

The victory of the northern states in the American Civil War 1861-66, decided the issue of slavery in favour of abolition. Nonetheless, apartheid remained strong in the former confederate states. Southern Baptists became the “bulwark of racism, opposition to integration, civil rights and secular culture.”

The Klu Klux Klan was formed after the Civil War. It was based on the belief in the racial superiority of white Protestant Anglo-Saxons. Racism manifested itself in thousands of beatings, torture, and lynchings of blacks, the majority of which went unpunished because of the prominent positions of Klan members in southern Society. Many Fundamentalist Christians played leadership roles in the KKK.

The power of the clan was finally broken with the ugly Stepanson affair in 1925 when a Klan leader raped and beat a white woman. According to a recent study 4742 lynchings of Negroes have been documented between 1882 and 1962.

In 1995 the Southern Baptist Convention apologized to African Americans for teaching racism.

American Fundamentalism.

American Fundamentalism evolved out of Revivalism around 1900 as a reaction against theological liberalism which was imported from Germany. Friedrich Schleiermacher was one of the prominent theologians of liberalism. Liberalism was a product of the European Enlightenment.

Under attack from Liberalism, Darwinism and the Social Gospel, Revivalists and Dispensationalists consolidated their forces and systemized their theology. In 1910 twelve small volumes were published under the title *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* and 2,500,000 copies were distributed. Each volume dealt with a particular teaching held to be fundamental to the faith, hence the name “Fundamentalism” arose to describe the movement, (Kyle, *Last Days*, page 105).

Consequently, Fundamentalism was highly doctrinal and legalistic. It was even more separatistic than Revivalism, its predecessor.

Protestant Fundamentalists held to a “flat” Bible which was then merely a “series of unrelated propositions and timeless allegories,” (J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist*, 119). As became evident with the unfolding of the history of American Fundamentalism, such an interpretation was open to proof-texting and the development of theologies around key verses and phrases.

In 1909, C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) popularized dispensationalism within American Fundamentalism with the publication of his Scofield Reference Bible. The annotations of the Scofield Bible quickly became foundational to the movement. By 1920 some 200 Bible Schools and many mission endeavours had been established to spread this apostasy around the world.

In 1929 J. Grescham Machen established the Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia as a protest against modernism at Princeton University, a bastion of the Presbyterian Church. In 1936 Machen founded a new denomination of dissidents, the Orthodox Presbyterians.

One of the manifestations of Fundamentalism was its endeavour to impose its moral and social values on society. Under pressure from Fundamentalists and others, many States enacted laws known as the "Blue Laws" which regulated various aspects of human conduct.

The attempt of Fundamentalists and others to stamp out consumption of alcohol resulted in Prohibition. This attempt at social engineering was to give the Mafia a product with which to build up its financial resources.

So deeply was Fundamentalism permeated by Dispensationalism that the belief in a literal six day creation became essential to sustain its theological motifs. Hence Darwinism or the teaching of evolutionary understanding of the origins of the earth and various species was viewed with great fear.

In 1925 John Scopes was brought to trial in Tennessee for teaching evolution in contravention of the state anti-evolution law. He was defended by the famous trial attorney Clarence Darrow against William Jennings Bryan, the state Attorney General, an avowed Fundamentalist. Scopes was found guilty but only after Bryan had taken the stand, making a fool of himself and fellow creationists. The power of American Fundamentalism was stunted with the critical examination and negative publicity of the Scopes Monkey Trial.

Fundamentalism impacted upon Manitoba Mennonites. In 1937 Fundamentalist ministers in the Sommerfelder Gemeinde separated to form the Rudnerweiders or Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church. By 1960 agitation by Fundamentalist ministers had resulted in the reorganization of the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde as the "Evangelical Mennonite Conference" leaving only the Mexican congregation in the conservative "Gospel-centric" tradition.

Pentecostal Movement.

The coalescing of various ideas such as the holiness teaching, dispensationalism, manifest destiny, creationism, anti-rationalism, crisis conversion and the missions movement within Fundamentalism gave birth to a powerful social and cultural force which could be regarded as the American tribal religion.

Pentecostalism with its focus on a bizarre heathen practice known as "speaking in tongues" was all of these and more. Speaking in tongues consists of the ability of an individual to spout forth unintelligible sounds at a moments notice. The practice was adopted from pagan and native religions and also found in Christian confessions such as Voodooism, see *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 57-60.

An elaborate series of rites and rituals evolved within Revivalism and Fundamentalism to induce the high state of emotional

fervour necessary for the required psychological manifestations. Hence the religious culture can be characterized as being "psycho-centric". These emotive practices were enhanced and magnified within Pentecostal religious culture to induce the hypnotic state most appropriate for the speaking in tongues manifestation, seemingly pushing to the edge of human sensual capabilities.

Divine healing is stressed although no medically proven cases are documented beyond what is found in other religious cultures, e.g. Catholics have their Lourdes and other religious places where many believers seek and find healing. Pentecostals, however, have incorporated miracle healing as a spectacular part of their worship ritual and proselytizing procedures.

The Pentecostal Movement was founded in the early years of the 20th century. Theologically it grew out of the second experience concept of Wesleyanism, but changed it into the concept of a second baptism. Pentecostals call it the second baptism of the Holy Spirit which they added to conversion experience, dispensationalist belief, as another requirement for salvation.

In 1906 the first Pentecostal congregation was founded in Los Angeles by William J. Seymour, a black holiness preacher. The movement was influenced by Charles Parham (1873-1929), a Methodist of holiness background who conducted a revival at Topeka in 1901. He also promoted speaking in tongues as a special sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and emphasized miracle healing.

A number of denominations quickly developed including the Assemblies of God, Church of God and Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ.

The Pentecostal religious culture seemingly appeals to a certain percentage of human beings who find it difficult to make their own decisions and to live a Christian life based on Scripture and rationalism. Pentecostalism has become an important version of Protestant Fundamentalism in America and elsewhere.

Evangelicalism.

By the 1950s Fundamentalism had become a synonym for bigotry and religious intolerance. In an effort to rid itself of these negative images, the more liberal wing reinvented itself as Evangelicals, hoping thereby to project a gentler, kinder and less categorical face.

American Fundamentalism placed a heavy emphasis on hell and damnation. The legalistic requirement of a "crisis" conversion experience represented a psychological aberration, an unhealthy swing from extreme desolation to elation. At its worst the Fundamentalist's view of God inspired anxiety and harsh intolerance of those not among the elect. These characteristics remain features of modern-day Evangelicalism, although in varying degrees.

In the meantime, however, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 gave new impetus to the propagation of dispensationalist teach-

ings. The big players in the electronic church "preached the pre-millennial message--Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Paul Crouch, and Rex Humbard... Venerable evangelist Billy Graham is a premillennialist," Kyle, *Last Days*. pages 117-8.

Gurus such as Hal Lindsey arose whose book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970, sold over 30,000,000 copies, propagating a form of Evangelical Zionism. One of his brilliant prophecies was the Russia was Gog, Izekeiel 38:15-16, the mighty empire which would attack Israel in the tribulation (pages 59-71). "Most people understood Lindsey to have predicted that the rapture would occur in or about 1988," (Kyle, *Last Days*, page 119). Deuteronomy 18:20-22 might well be considered regarding these would-be prophets.

Not to be outdone, TV evangelist Jack von Impe declared that the European Common Market would be the Anti-Christ, presumably because it had 10 member States or did at some point. In a new work of the genre, the *Left Behind* series by authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, these apocalyptic ideas have been turned into best selling fiction. These religious entrepreneurs have given new meaning to the adage that "religion is the opiate of the masses."

Since dispensationalists specifically take the Gospels out of current biblical teaching, the self-styled appellation "Evangelicals" to describe the religious culture seems rather optimistic.

The inerrancy doctrine of biblical interpretation, still the mainstay of most Evangelicals, could be described as "the flat bible with a twist". The method of exegesis is susceptible to proof-texting and the development of religious paradigms around key verses. This may in part account for the radical fringe of the movement which includes snake handlers, laughing Pentecostals, militant Orangement, murdering anti-abortionists, militia survivalists, gun-rights lobbyists, fanatical creationists, rabid homophobia, and cults such as those lead by Jim Jones and David Koresh.

The Bible School movement has grown and gained respectability. Originally instituted largely to propagate Darbyite-Scofieldian dispensationalism within the movement and abroad, many of these simple colleges have now grown into accredited and respected institutions of higher learning.

Evangelicalism has become big business. In recent years huge T. V. empires such as Jim Bakker's "P.T.L. Club", Oral Robert's "Its a New Day", Pat Robertson's "700 Club", and hundreds of lesser lights each one eager to increase its income and territorial turf, blanket television and radio with their programming.

Dynamic ministers are forming mega-churches with thousands of members. Mega ministries are often coached and guided by public relations experts who take polls about

Part One: Historical Background

what programs and teachings need to be offered to draw in the most number of people.

Although tarnished by the moral failures of Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and others (presumably brought on by the unwholesome Puritanical teachings of the movement), and by financial mismanagement and even fraud (as in the case of "Greater Evangelical Ministries" whose founder Evangelist Gerald Paine was indicted for conspiracy in 1999), the movement keeps growing in strength and militancy.

Through the preaching of Evangelists such as Billy Graham (although also a dispensationalist), they have succeeded in establishing themselves in American popular culture. However, according to a recent study by the Barna Research Group, California, there is no distinguishable difference in 70 moral behaviours studied (including divorce) between adherents of the "born again" movement and the general population (*Christianweek*, July 4, page 11).

Success theology is popular both in terms of church growth as well as in individual financial enrichment.

The Religious Right has developed a proactive social agenda. Evangelical activists are working in many areas of American cultural and social life to implement its platform and impose its values.

An active child evangelism movement promotes the teaching of Fundamentalist dogma in elementary schools. School prayer has become a rallying cry for the movement. In October, 2000, a controversy arose in Winnipeg, Canada, regarding the rights of an Evangelical organization to intercept young children on their way to school to obtain written consents required for such instruction to be implemented.

The creationist movement, bounded by the belief in a literal six day creation which serves as a concept platform for dispensationalism, actively challenges the teaching of evolution in schools and promotes the teaching of creationism.

In the southern U.S.A. there is a movement to implement Fundamentalist prayers at public events such as football games and other public events. This is a reaction to court rulings banning such prayers.

Although the Religious Right generally supports capital punishment, it has adopted the right-to-life (anti-abortion) movement as its own. As is common with one issue organizations, facts and strategies sometimes appear to be manipulated by some activists; anything to advance the cause.

Family values, at least those elevated by the movement, are promoted. Many organizations such as "Focus on the Family", founded by James Dobson, put forth a stream of literature and media programming, instructing adherents in everything from how to raise their families, to the superiority of the man as the head of the household. The impact on family values of three centuries of preaching separatism (sectarianism) and turning naive ini-



Hal Lindsey, one of the gurus of the Evangelical movement, whose most famous work, The Late Great Planet Earth has sold over 30,000,000 copies. The book is said to be filled with untruths. Photo cover of Lindsey, Planet Earth The Final Chapter (Beverly Hills, 1998), rear cover.

tiates against their families and traditional faith communities, is not addressed.

"Promise Keepers", a men's organization, encourages men to maintain the family altar, reminding them of their familial duties. Simultaneously other organizations actively oppose gay-rights and homosexuals are frequently demonized.

The mission movement, always strong in Revivalism and Fundamentalism, has grown immensely. "Go ye forth into all the world and preach the Gospel," has been adopted as the mantra of modern Evangelicalism, giving biblical mandate to the 19th century belief in the manifest destiny of America in world affairs and the unassailable superiority of its tribal religion.

Organizations such as the Christian Broadcasting Network speak of "blitzing the nation for Christ," meaning of course their dispensationalist's version of Christian truth. Other organizations meet regularly to lay plans to Evangelize the world by certain target dates. In other places such as Ukraine or Latin America, Catholics, Orthodox Christians as well as conservative Mennonites, are openly denounced as unchristian and their members targeted for conversion to Evangelical religious culture.

Neo-Justianism.

The new spirit of strength has been translated into strong political activity. Evangelical leaders such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell have taken the lead in organizing Protestant Fundamentalists as a potent political force. Falwell organized the Moral Majority, a political action group, in 1979, while Robertson formed the "Christian Coalition" 10 years later.

Robertson ran unsuccessfully in the 1988 Presidential election. Since that time Robertson and others have exercised their political power by endorsing or attacking political candidates based on their support or opposition to the religious and social beliefs of the Evangelical movement. In the 2000 election the Religious Right draped itself around Republican George W. Bush, the successful Presidential candidate, who presumably is now obligated to promote their agenda.

Some Christians are concerned that further success and advancement of its social agenda by the Religious Right will lead to a form of Neo-Justianism, where these teach-

Jerry Falwell, one of the leaders in the movement by the Religious Right to seize control of the political process. Photo courtesy of M. B. Herald, June 11, 1999 Preservings, No. 15, page 55.



ings would become more than just America's unofficial tribal religion. Regulatory restrictions and suppression of other religious confessions would be sure to follow, setting the stage for another Reformation and the need for another return to the biblicism of the early church.

If these things come to pass, Conservative Mennonites may again have to sacrifice their material and physical well-being for the sake of their faith, just as the Old Colony Mennonites did in the 1920s and as their spiritual and genealogical ancestors once did almost 500 years earlier during the Protestant Reformation.

Conclusion.

A knowledge of the history of Christianity is helpful for those who may wish to steady their course. The study of the Church of Jesus Christ enables believers to differentiate between "Evangelicalism" as part of an American ethno-cultural religious movement and "Evangelical" as in that which is articulated by Christ and the Gospels.

Those who despair in times of travesty, poverty and persecution have no other hope but Jesus Christ. The Reinländer Church organized under Aeltester Johann Wiebe in Manitoba in 1875 and its diaspora has come to know this hope.

One thing is certain, when the faithful are called forth who persevered in times of adversity and travail, Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, U.S.A., and Latin America will be over abundantly represented.

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Part Two: Aeltester Johann Wiebe

Biography of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart

“Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, Manitoba, Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Reinland (also known as the Old Colony Church)” as presented in the Reinland Community Centre, April 24, 1993, by Peter D. Zacharias, Box 65, Gretna, Manitoba, R0G 0V0.

Introduction.

David Harder, one of the most respected school teachers among the Mennonites in Mexico, first in the Manitoba colony in Chihuahua and later in Durango, wrote in his “Erinnerungen” of Johann Wiebe, a short tribute to the elder he loved and revered:

“Im Jahr 1875 scharten sich um ihn eine Zahl Gleichgesinnte und er führte sie aus Ruszlands fruchtbaren Steppen der lieben Heimat im festen Vertrauen auf Gottes gnädigen Beistand und Schutz herüber in Manitoba’s gesegnete Fluren. Und er, der treue Führer, ist nun am Ziele angelangt im oberen Kanaan bei seinem Herrn und Meister, in dessen Dienst er hier ergraute. Nun hat die eisige Hand des Todes das treue Auge geschlossen. Verstummt ist der Mund, der für jeden stets ein freundliches Wort der Liebe und des Trostes hatte, der so oft an heiliger Stätte ‘Tut Busze’ zu seiner Gemeinde gerufen hat.”

Translation: “In the year 1875 a number of like-minded people gathered around him and he led them out of Russia’s fertile steppes, our beloved home, in unshakeable confidence in God’s gracious help and protection, to Manitoba’s blessed prairies. And he, the faithful leader, has now arrived at his destination, in the heavenly Canaan to be with his Lord and Master in whose service here, his hair had grown gray. Now the icy hand of death has closed his faithful eyes.

“...the faithful leader [Johann Wiebe], always had a friendly word of love.... who so often, when at the holy place, called out, ‘Repent!’ to his congregation.”

His mouth is now silent, who always had a friendly word of love and comfort for everyone, who so often, when at the holy place, called out, ‘Repent!’ to his congregation.”

When I was doing research for the Reinland book in the mid-Seventies, I often ran across or deliberately looked for the name of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. It could not be otherwise because, whether one liked him or not, whether one agreed with his views or not, he was a most influential early West Reserve leader and his teachings, or what people interpreted to be his

teachings, still affect thousands of people today (probably myself included) in Canada, in Mexico and Belize, in Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina.

But it was not research that first introduced me to Aeltester Johann Wiebe. In long winter evenings when as a teenage boy who had al-

which he sought to point his people.

The Wiebe Family.

Who was Aeltester Johannes Wiebe?

Aeltester Johannes Wiebe came from a pioneering family. His great-grandfather Jakob Wiebe (1723-88) was a landowner in Prussia, listed in Mierau, 1776 Konsignation (census). Johann’s grandfather Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804) was a settler in Neuendorf, Chortitza or Old Colony (Alt-Kolonie) in 1789 at age 29 with his wife, nee Anna Fast and two children, where he was one of the more successful Vollwirthen with 9 horses, 13 cattle, 8 pigs, 55 sheep, 1 plow and 2 wagons (Abraham Wiebe, Family Book).

One of the children born to Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804) in what was then Imperial Russia (today part of the Ukraine) was Bernhard (1796-1852) who married Helena Wiebe. This couple became Johannes Wiebe’s parents. They, too, became pioneers settling in the new village of Neuhorst in 1823. In fact, Bernhard Wiebe served as

Schult or mayor of Neuhorst until 1847. For the intricacies of the Wiebe family connections to Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde and to Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, Molotschna, fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, see Henry Schapansky, “The Bergthaler Wiebes,” in *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 60-61.

I want to mention just three of eight children of Bernhard and Helena Wiebe.

1. The oldest child, Peter Wiebe (1818-81), became a deacon in the Bergthal Colony in Russia.
2. Abraham Wiebe (1831-1900) pioneered in Olgafeld in the new colony of Fürstenland. Only a few months after Fürstenland was founded, he was elected as a minister there. He later came to Canada and preached many sermons in the Reinland worship house. His son David was a long serving Ohm in the Manitoba Colony in Mexico (see *Preservings*, No. 13, 128-9, for a review of the Abraham Wiebe family book.)
3. But I want to focus on the second youngest child, Johann, the seventh child of eight, who became Aeltester Johannes Wiebe and who also settled in Olgafeld, Fürstenland.

Johann Wiebe was born on March 23, 1837, the year in which young Queen Victoria began



Western Canada’s oldest Mennonite church building, dedicated September 17, 1876. The photograph shows the building before the exterior was remodelled in the mid-1940s. Photo courtesy of Peter D. Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1974), page 188.

ready had the opportunity to read Smith’s *Story of the Mennonites* and a lot of *Steinbach Post*, when in those evenings I sat in the warm Väätüs of my grandmother who knew the catechism and it seemed even the “Glaubensartikeln” from memory - that is where the history of the “Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde” or the Old Colony history - that is where that history was translated into flesh and blood.

When my grandmother told stories so vividly and recalled the Aeltester, whom she revered as David Harder did, that is when I discovered Aeltester Johann Wiebe, the Johannes Wiebe whose name stood in my catechism right underneath the introduction to the articles of faith. That is where I first began to sense the impact of this man, this servant of God, the impact that he had not only on the thinking of many people, but also on their hearts.

Of course, he also evoked a lot of opposition. People with strong convictions always evoke lots of opposition. Ironically, it was at Reinland, the centre of the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde in the pioneer years, a village in which the Aeltester found love and support, that he also experienced some of the strongest opposition, not necessarily to him personally but to the way and to the direction in

the longest reign in British history. He died on February 21, 1905, at the age of 67, just a few years after Queen Victoria had died. So that was the time in which he lived. His wife's name was Judith Wall (see *Preservings*, No. 11, page 81).

Johann Wiebe was baptized by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck of the Chortitzer Gemeinde, i.e. the Old-Colony Gemeinde in Russia.

At the age of 28 Johann Wiebe was elected to the ministry. At 33 he was elected Aeltester of the Mennonite Church in Fürstenland, the young daughter colony of mother Chortitza. This far reaching event took place in Peter Loeppky's implement shed in the village of Georgsthal in the afternoon of September 13, 1870. Johann Wiebe was only 38 when he led the Fürstenland emigration to America.

Historical Interpretation.

History has not always treated Aeltester Johannes Wiebe and other pioneer church leaders of western Canada very kindly. They have sometimes been dismissed as simply narrow-minded, obstinate, tradition-bound vis-a-vis the so-called "progressive" Mennonites.

In history we cannot simply dismiss each other. We need to listen to each other's stories with respect and with an attempt to understand why others think and act the way they do and why we think and act the way we do. And we need to understand also what we have done to each other - both the good and the bad.

If we look back into our own histories, no matter of what particular background we are, I think it will cause us to realize that we have all hurt each other - sometimes grievously. Only when we acknowledge this and come to each other openly and freely can there be any healing in history. Otherwise getting together is futile.

One Mennonite encyclopedia article refers to "the extremely conservative Old Colony Mennonites led by Johann Wiebe". Now I do not consider "conservative" a bad word. Probably many people would consider me conservative and that's their privilege. But what do we mean by the word? By definition, it refers to keeping the status quo, to keeping things the way they

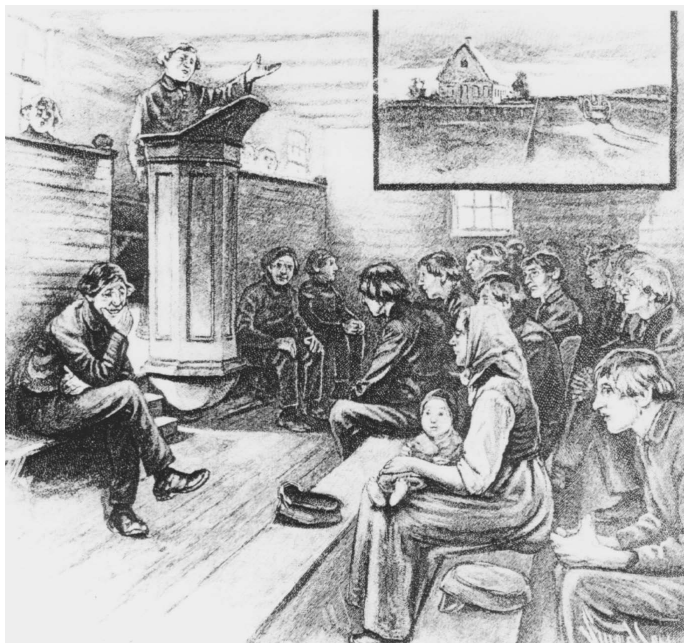
"Johann Wiebe was deeply disappointed in his old leader ... [Aeltester Gerhard Dyck]"

are, to the tendency to adhere to the existing order and therefore to oppose changes - conservative: to conserve. The least we can do is to attempt to see Aeltester Johann Wiebe as he saw himself.

Johann Wiebe, the Reformer.

First of all, Johann Wiebe did not consider

himself as a conservative. He saw himself much more as a reformer who sought to recover the New Testament vision of the church. The Aeltester, in a penetrating sermon entitled "Die Auswanderung von Ruszland nach Kanada



1880 drawing of a worship service in the Reinland worship house. The minister depicted may even have been Aeltester Johann Wiebe. The drawing was done by W. T. Smedley and was originally printed in *Picturesque Canada* (1882), page 322.

1875", preached probably in the very early 1880s, seeks to take his congregation's memory back to the migration movement and to examine its reasons.

The sermon's message is not: Let's keep it the way we have it.

Instead, Wiebe is saying in effect: Dear brothers and sisters: Things have got to change. We have gone wrong. And we must get back on track. We have gone wrong in Russia. We no longer confronted each other in love as brothers and sisters should. We no longer practised brotherly discipline. Instead we went the way of the flesh. We took disciplinary action that belonged to the state alone and used it against fellow believers. Wrongdoers, said Wiebe, were known to be whipped, jailed, put on a bread and water diet, fined, sentenced to wood chopping or ditch digging, but they remained in good standing in the church. The Scriptural three-fold admonition had gradually been abandoned, Wiebe felt. According to this the transgressor would first be confronted privately and secondly before one or two witnesses, and thirdly, before the congregation. The ban would follow, if necessary, but the ban would be applied in love, and following repentance, there would be a complete restoration, not just externally, but spiritually as well.

Now that may sound idealistic and in practice it, too, was subject to human abuse like all things are, but that does not distract from the Aeltester's motives. Johann Wiebe himself wrote:

"I must add that the ministers themselves could not grasp all these things when the conflict grew so intense, because this was to be an entirely different order from the one they were accustomed to in Russia. To deal with everything according to the Gospel was strange to some. Some said that we were introducing a new teaching when it was only the teaching of Christ which the apostles had received from the Lord more than 1800 years ago."

The Emigration.

Aeltester Wiebe's intentions were not to preserve the status quo, not to keep things the way they were. His intentions were to restore the New Testament Church as he understood that church. The receipt of assurances from the Russian government that arrangements for a forestry service could be made, albeit in uniform, in lieu of service in the military, placated many Russian Mennonite church leaders - they accepted it - but those assurances did not satisfy Aeltester Johann Wiebe. He saw that acceptance as but another sign of how far the church had drifted from its moorings in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before those government assurances the church in mother Chortitza, the Old-Colony, too, had

met to consider emigration. One contemporary source even states that a decision was made to send delegates to America. Be that as it may, an Old Colony delegation was never sent.

Johann Wiebe, who had looked so much to Chortitza for leadership before making the decision to emigrate, was disappointed. He made one final visit to Aeltester Gerhard Dyck, but to Wiebe's profound disappointment, Dyck's interest in the migration had waned. In fact, Dyck urged acceptance of alternative service as a reasonable compromise.

Personally, I've wondered about that last painful encounter between the two Aeltesters, the older experienced Gerhard Dyck, already 66 years old, accepting the principle of alternative service and counselling against emigration, and Aeltester Johann Wiebe, only 38, who in spite of the older man's advice, was to insist on going to America. Did the older consider his younger colleague, whom he had baptized and ordained, as rash and radical? I don't know, but probably not. Probably Aeltester Dyck took the middle more benevolent attitude:

Niemand verachte deine Jugend. (Let no one despise your youth...) - 1 Timothy 4:12

Even in its beginnings in the Anabaptist period of the 1520s and 1530s to which the Mennonite Church traces its beginnings, even then, practically all of its leaders were young. Menno Simons was about 40 when he finally left the Catholic Church to join the Anabaptists and he was one of the older ones. Many early Anabaptist leaders died in their '20s and '30s (and when I

read about these persons I am suddenly struck by the fact that they were a lot younger than I am now).

But be that as it may, Johann Wiebe was deeply disappointed in his old leader His whole trip from Chortitza back to Fürstenland, he writes, was spent in anguish of soul and in prayer. And the agony continued at home in the presence of his family until he finally found peace.

Aeltester Wiebe gathered the brethren at the Alexanderthal church, he writes (he probably meant the school since Alexanderthal did not have a separate church building), and eventually the emigration plans fell into place. Wiebe found it especially hard to say farewell (his farewell sermon reminds one of Paul saying farewell to the Ephesians). He found it hard to say farewell to those in the congregation who did not understand him and would not join him in the emigration. And especially, he found it hard to say farewell to the Amtsbrüder, to those in the Lehrdienst, his fellow ministers, who did not share his conviction about the necessity to emigrate. Not many members of the Lehrdienst of the Old Colony came to America. Not many - just some. And from Fürstenland - not many.

Organizing the Pioneer Gemeinde.

On June 3, 1875, Aeltester Wiebe and his family and a large portion of Fürstenland's families cast eyes on their home and villages for the last time and set out on their journey across land and sea. Some days after their arrival at Fort Dufferin, Wiebe held a Bruderschaft (already referred to earlier) where he was confirmed as Aeltester of the church that was so different from the one he had served in Russia. The new Gemeinde now included a large number of people, not only from his own Fürstenland

“Johann Wiebe...consider[ed] himself.... a reformer who sought to recover the New Testament vision of the church.”

colony, but also from the Old Colony. In fact the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde, as this church came to be called, eventually was referred to as the Alt-Kolonier or the “Old Colony Church” by many people.

Aeltester Wiebe considered it imperative that a Bruderschaft be held at the Fort Dufferin immigration houses before the move onto the prairies was made. There on the banks of the Red River, near the present site of Emerson, he gathered the diverse group.

There were unifying forces, of course. the immigrants were:

1. generally opposed to alternative service;
2. generally opposed to “Russification”;
3. generally wished to settle in villages (hamlet privilege);
4. favoured *en bloc* settlement;
5. desired freedom to have their own schools (this would put them in a collision course with the provincial government in later years);

6. wanted a total military exemption (loosely connected to the first point).

But Aeltester Johann Wiebe saw several reasons for the need to meet before settlement. Among the reasons were these:

1. should they be one church? - this was not a foregone conclusion; the fact that many came from Aeltester Gerhard Dyck's congregation



Rev. John D. Peters of the Sommerfelder Church stands behind the oldest Mennonite pulpit in Western Canada, the Reinländer worship house. Peter D. Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1974), page 214. It is tragic that Mennonite ministers have abandoned their Preacher's Rock and other traditional apparel.

was to become an ongoing problem for the new congregation;

2. would they be under one eldership?

At the Fort Dufferin meeting Aeltester Wiebe was confirmed as Aeltester of the one church. Isaak Müller emerged as the Vorsteher of the pioneer settlement. A unity, however short-lived, was established, an important factor in the formative years.

Worship House, 1876.

Aeltester Johann Wiebe, his wife Judith, and their family settled in Rosengart, a mile north of the United States border. During the winter of 1876 work was begun on the church building, the house of worship. The building will be 123 years old this year.

I wish that I could have attended the dedication of the house of worship on September 17, 1876. Its dedication was a time of rejoicing for

“A unity, however short-lived, was established, an important factor in the formative years.”

the young colony, for the young congregation and for the Aeltester.

People came from far and wide on horse-drawn vehicles and on foot.

The Aeltester, the ministers, the deacons and the Vorsänger gathered at the door. The Vorsänger announced the song: Walt's Gott in Jesu Christi Namen (*Gesangbuch*, number 89). The Vorsänger began the song and the congregation joined in until the swelling notes filled the air.

The first verse was sung, then the second, and then the third:

“Schliesz' auf, Jerusalem, die Thore und lass dein Volk zum Tempel ein, damit wir singen in dem Chore, denn dieser Ort soll heilig sein. Ach höret! hier ist Gottes Haus, drum zieht die Sündenschuhe aus.”

As the singing of the third verse began, the Aeltester opened the door of the thatched roof pioneer meeting house and entered. He was followed by the aged Jacob Wiens, born in Prussia, Gerhard Paetkau, Abraham Wiebe, the Aeltester's brother, Johann Friesen of Neuenburg, Cornelius Peters and the deacons Peter Klassen and Johann Enns. As the singing continued the whole congregation filed into the church.

The Aeltester preached the dedicating message; he spoke the blessing. The feeling of gratitude that prevailed was genuine.

Problems in the Gemeinde.

But problems loomed. The church and its Aeltester were challenged on several fronts. One major conflict swirled around the issue of hymn tunes. Some in the congregation wanted to return to the use of the old tunes used in Russia, but which were not necessarily even known to segments coming out of the Old Colony. Oral tradition (the “Volksmund”) indicates that Johann Wiebe did not want to return to the old hymn tunes, but was under pressure to do so. However, many of the congregation had already adopted the Choral tunes of Heinrich Franz before coming to Canada.

So two seemingly intransigent positions became a deeply divisive issue. Another tough issue was the application of the ban. Should the ban be used sparsely in cases of severe infractions? Should the ban be used to enforce social control as it related, for example, to the maintenance of the village settlement pattern?



Fort Dufferin, north of West Lynn (on the west side of the Red River from Emerson), where the Old Kolony (OK) settlers arrived in July, 1875. The barracks served as temporary housing for the immigrants while they established their villages on the plain to the west. The OK church chose to settle near West Lynn, which had a population of several thousand at the time. It was widely believed that West Lynn might even become the capital of Manitoba. Evidently Johann Wiebe and other leaders felt it important to be near the major communication and marketing centre in Manitoba as well as selecting some of the best farmland in western Canada. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 78.

The Bruderschaft of October 5, 1880, left the West Reserve more deeply divided. It hurt Aeltester Johann Wiebe to see this disintegration. His vision was, after all: one church, one colony, one colony administration, based on the village settlement pattern.

The vision was threatened by the influx of the Bergthaler from the East Reserve, who now provided an alternative pattern and by deep division within Aeltester Wiebe's own congregation.

We may question the social control exercised by the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde. But consider Aeltester Wiebe's concerns from his own vantage point. Was it not a most egalitarian concept? No Chutors as in Russia! No huge estates!

“[Wiebe’s]... vision was, after all: one church, one colony, one colony administration, based on the village settlement pattern.”

Belonging to the congregation meant living in the village. It meant: sharing the good land, sharing the poor land, sharing in the community pasture. It meant taking seriously the word of the prophet: Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. Isaiah 5:8 (NIV) (Look at the farm scene on the West Reserve today! Did Johann Wiebe so completely miss the point!?)

Conclusion.

We may question the attitude to schools, the resistance to the Anglicization and secularization of the school system.

Can we also see the integrity of Aeltester Wiebe's position? The education of our children, throughout centuries of Anabaptist educational history had never been the business of the government. This was the responsibility and prerogative of the parents and the community of faith. The church school: reinforced the values of the society and the milieu in which the church's children were living; prepared young

people to live healthy, productive, socially well adjusted lives within that society; planted the roots of faith in firm soil; was successful by its own standards.

Ohm Johannes Wiebe! A man of uncompromising principle! A man who agonized over decisions, but who, once he had made them swerved neither to the left nor to the right. Johann Wiebe was one who believed in the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the leading of the Holy Spirit. A man whose expectation of the church was high and who was often thwarted by the shortcomings of fallible human beings, and who included himself among the fallible.

Johann Wiebe lived to see the school controversy begin in earnest in the West Reserve. He lived to see the payment of the Brotschuld, a \$100,000 government loan to early settlers and he wrote a letter of thanks to the government.

Aeltester Wiebe saw land getting scarce so that young couples could no longer have 160 acres each. The land in the West Reserve was taken up and so he saw the beginning of Mennonite settlement in Saskatchewan. His son Abraham became bishop at Swift Current; his son Peter became bishop in Manitoba. It was the Saskatchewan Aeltester Jacob Wiens who officiated at his funeral service in the village of Reinland.

I want to close with a letter of condolence, a short letter that was sent to Jacob Wiebe,

“Belonging to the congregation meant living in the village. It meant: sharing the good land, sharing the poor land, sharing in the community pasture.”

Aeltester Johann Wiebe's son, in Rosengart, by William Hespeler, after the Aeltester's passing.

“With sadness of heart I receive the painful news that your father who was so close to me had gone to his Creator Please accept my deepest sympathy and also express my condolences to the church he left behind on its irreplaceable

loss. He was a faithful shepherd and spent his energy, indeed, his whole life, for the welfare of his flock and as its example. I will always remember him as a personal friend and as the father of the Reinländer Mennonite Church. I also express my sympathy to his own family and to those who lent assistance and support in his good works and I hope that his good spirit will remain an example to them”

“William Hespeler” Winnipeg
Reprinted from Preservings, No. 14, pages 3-6.

About the Author:
Peter D. Zacharias is one of the pioneers of Manitoba Mennonite historiography. In 1976 when the Separatist-Pietist/Molotschna triumphalism school of interpretation reigned supreme and without question, he wrote the ground breaking *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona, 1976), 350 pages. This was the first work by a Mennonite to consider the founding of the Old Kolony (OK) settlement in the West Reserve with understanding and thorough historical research and analysis. We have to remember this was a time when to write anything positive about the OK church required considerable courage as most Mennonites at the time were enslaved to Anglo-conformity, articulated by modernization typology and small “i” liberalism which saw the communitarian-renaissance spiritual ethos of conservative Mennonites as suspicious at best, and evil, at worst.
In 1984 Peter completed *Footprints of a Pilgrim People* (Altona, 1984), 291 pages, another pioneering work, bringing the standard for church congregational histories to new heights. The publication of Peter's brief but insightful biography of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, founder of the OK denomination is an invaluable starting point for a reexamination of his contribution to the Mennonite story in Manitoba, from a Renaissance/communitarian perspective.
Editor D. Plett Q.C.

The Family of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905)

“The Family of Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, Manitoba, Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Reinland, also known as the Old Kolony Gemeinde (OKG),” by Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Only little is known about the personal life of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906) and his family. Johann Wiebe, his cousin Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), and Aeltester Peter Toews (1841-1922) of the Kleine Gemeinde, were among the three most important Russian Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. I suggest that those willing to pursue actual down and dirty research, collecting primary sources and interviewing of descendants will reap an abundant harvest of information detailing a rich and inspiring history.

Background.

Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) came from a patrician family within the Mennonite community. As already stated in the preceding article by Peter D. Zacharias, Johann Wiebe was the son of Bernhard (1796-1852) and Helena Wiebe (b. 1798), of Neuhorst, Chortitza Colony, where Bernhard also served as the village Schulz.

Bernhard's father, Jakob Wiebe (1760-1804), was among the first immigrants to Russia in 1788. Jakob settled in Neuendorf. With 60 Wirtschaften it was one of the largest and most prosperous villages in the Old Kolony (OK). Neuendorf was the ancestral home of many families with the financial capability and entrepreneurial vision to take advantage of the farming opportunities represented by relocating to Bergthal and/or Fürstenland including Peter Friesen (b. 1751), great-great grandfather of Dyan Cannon Friesen, the famous American movie actress.

Jakob Wiebe is listed in the village lists of 1793 and 1795. The Revision of 1802, in particular, reveals that Jakob was a wealthy farmer with 9 horses, 13 cattle, 55 sheep, 8 swine, a plow, 2 wagons and 3 spinning wheels. Living with the family is Abraham Dueck, age 18, possibly a servant (Unruh, page 255). Jakob died in 1804 and his wife married for the second time to Isaak Born (b. 1778). That Jakob Wiebe and sons had done well on his Wirtschaft is shown by the 1808 Revision which shows that his family owned 8 horses, 28 head of cattle, 25 sheep, 13 swine, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 1 wagon, 1 spinning wheel (Unruh, page 270).

Helena Wiebe (b. 1798), also came from a patrician background. Her father Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746), Blumenort, Prussia, emigrated to the Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, and settled in the village of Blumenort, named for his village of origin in Prussia, usually a sign of some influence and the respect of

the other settlers. Several of Heinrich's children married in the Molotschna, including daughter Maria Wiebe (1784-1845) who married Cornelius Enns (1782-1834), Fischau, parents of Heinrich Enns (1807-81), later the fourth Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde.

By 1816 Heinrich Wiebe had relocated to Einlage, Chortitza Colony. Among Heinrich's large family was Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58), Einlage, whose son Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) became the second Aeltester of the Bergthal Colony.



Aeltester Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925), Swift Colony, Mexico, son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), founding Aeltester of the OK Gemeinde. A handsome intelligent face. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Elisabeth Siemens, nee Wall, Winkler, Manitoba.

Johann Wiebe (1837-1905).

Johann Wiebe married Judith Wall (1836-1910), daughter of Johann and Gertruda Wall, RGB 70-1. As mentioned in the article by Peter D. Zacharias, a number of Bernhard Wiebe's children moved to the Fürstenland Colony, where they became involved in the ministry serving with distinction. In 1875 the Johann Wiebe family immigrated to Manitoba, settling in the village of Rosengart, a mile-and-a-half south of Reinland, where the central worship house of the OK denomination was constructed in 1876. Johann now had responsibility as the leader and spiritual overseer of the largest Mennonite community in Manitoba prior to

WWI, (5,462 souls in 1898).

Johann Wiebe settled on Wirtschaft 2 in the village, staking a homestead on SE1-1-4. According to the 1881 tax records, Johann had 54 acres cultivated land, 4 horses, 4 cows, 7 heifers, 4 hogs, 2 wagons, 1 plow and a grain mower. At 685 Johann's assessment was the second highest in the village.

Of the 21 Wirtschaften in Rosengart, eight were owned by Walls and five by Wiebes. The Wiebes in the village included Johann's brother Heinrich and his son Bernhard, as well as

Johann's own sons Jakob and Peter. Two of Johann's sisters lived in the village--Aganetha and Maria both married to Walls, and, of course, Johann's wife was a Wall. As such the demographics of the village represented normal patterns of matrilocality and matriarchal strategies.

Johann and Helena Wall had 10 children of whom two died in infancy and two--Johann (1859-90) and Bernhard (1867-92)--were handicapped and never married.

Johann Wiebe had a prestigious career as a minister of the Gospel preaching 1544 times, baptised 2228, and officiated at 294 weddings and 660 funerals.

Johann Wiebe was a literate and articulate man. A collection of some 50 of his letters to church leaders in Saskatchewan are extant and in need of translation and further study. At least two of his sermons are extant: "Eine Abscheid's Predigt" ("A Sermon in farewell"), presumably written in 1875, and "Eine Reisebericht von Ruszland nach America anno 1875" ("The Emigration from Russia to America in 1875;"), written some years later and published in German by the OK church in Mexico. Presumably a further collection of Johann Wiebe's sermons are still extant in Mexico, and constitute a rich body of evangelical teachings not yet explored by modern scholars and churchmen.

Children:

5 Jakob Wiebe (1857-1921).

Son **Jakob Wiebe** married Katharina Wiebe (1854-1901) and for the second time to Maria Krahn (1872-1942), RGB 66-1. Jakob settled in the village of Rosengart on Lot 23, on the west side, across the road from his father. He took out a homestead quarter section on NW18-2-3W.

In 1906 Jakob and Katharina moved to the village of Springfelt, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, homesteading the NW4-14-

Gen	Name	Birth	Marriage	Death
4	Johann Wiebe	Mar 23,1837	Dec 4,1856	Feb 21,1905
m	Judith Wall	Aug 7,1836		Jun 8,1910
5	Jakob Wiebe	Oct 2,1857		Aug 24,1921
5	Johann Wiebe	Apr 27,1859		Jul 9,1890
5	Peter Wiebe	May 19,1861		Sep 13,1913
5	Helena Wiebe	Mar 1,1863		Jun 11,1941
5	Bernhard Wiebe	Apr 5,1865		Jul 10,1866
5	Bernhard Wiebe	Apr 5,1867		Aug 19,1892
5	Heinrich Wiebe	Mar 16,1869		May 26,1947
5	Maria Wiebe	Jul 13,1870		Jul 18,1870
5	Abraham Wiebe	Aug 26,1871		Nov 10,1925
5	Maria Wiebe	Feb 11,1874		

Interviews:

Interview Elisabeth, Mrs. Jacob Siemens, Winkler, April 16, 1999; telephone interview Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, April 17, 1999; telephone interview Peter D. Zacharias, April 18, 1999; telephone interview, March 20, 1999, Abraham Wiebe, Campo 102 1/2, Cuauthemoc, Mexico.

Sources:

Reinländer Gemeindebuch (Man. Men. Historical Society, 1994), 525 pages.
1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve (Man. Men. Historical Society 1998), 500 pages.

Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona, 1976), 350 pages, and in particular pages 185-202.

Elaine Wiebe, Don and Gladys Wiebe, *Discovering our Wiebe Heritage Peter Wiebe 1861-1920* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 1998), 370 pages.

Johann Wiebe, *Eine Reisebericht von Ruszland nach America anno 1875* (Cuauthemoc, Mexico), 40 pages.

Patchwork of Memories (Wymark, Saskatchewan, 1985), 1088 pages.

Descendants of OHM Abraham Wiebe 1831-1991 (Winkler, Manitoba, 1991), 304 pages.

Henry Schapansky, "Bergthaler Wiebes," *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 60-67.

Aeltester Bernhard Wiebe obituary, courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, Winkler.

Reprinted from *Preservings* No. 14, pages 7-8.

13W3. Jakob Wiebe died in 1921. Many of Jakob's descendants still live in the Swift Current/Wymark area. Among his descendants is Leonard Wiebe (b. 1941), Professor of Bionucleonics and Radiopharmacy, University of Alberta, 1985.

5 Peter Wiebe (1861-1913).

Peter Wiebe married Anna Ginter and for the second time to Katharina Loewen, RGB 73-2. He established a village farm in Rosengart, Lot 24, on the west side of the village street. Peter was elected as a minister of the Old Kolony (OK) church in 1888. In 1902 Peter was elected to replace his father as Aeltester of the OK Gemeinde in Manitoba.

An interesting anecdote is related by one of Abraham's grandsons. At some point Peter suffered the destruction of his farm buildings by fire. The sermons which had been handed down from his father were in the corner cabinet (Eck Schaup), and only rescued after a heroic effort. The sermons had been somewhat damaged, being charred around the edges. These sermons were later taken along to Mexico where many young ministers copied them.

Peter D. Zacharias has characterized Peter Wiebe's Aeltestership as follows: "His tenure, 1906-1913, was a period of relative calm. The conflicts of the pioneer years were largely over, the church had been established, there was general prosperity and the war had not yet come. Peter Wiebe was a conservative elder and seems to have held a pro-status quo position. Wiebe was a strong supporter of church [confessional] schools.

Aeltester Peter Wiebe "...passed away suddenly in 1913," *Reinland*, page 197. A description of Peter Wiebe's death was appended to the published edition of "Ein Reisebericht..." by his father, Johann, pages 30-32.

6 Bernhard Wiebe (1911-98).

Son Bernhard Wiebe (1911-98) was the grandson of Johann Wiebe and son of Peter Wiebe RGB 73-2. Bernhard Wiebe married Maria Neufeld in 1943. He was elected Aeltester in the Manitoba Colony, Mexico, and then continued as leader of the Buenos Aires Colony, near Muelo Casa Grandes, Mexico. In later years Bernhard shared his disappointment with relative Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, "in

never locating the sermon books written by his ancestors."

5 Helena Wiebe (1863-1941).

Daughter **Helena Wiebe** married Jakob Dueck, RGB 71-2. The family moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and later to the Swift Colony, Cuauthemoc, Mexico.

5 Heinrich Wiebe (1869-1947).

Son **Heinrich Wiebe** married Judith Enns, for the second time to Maria Froese, the third time to Anna Redekopp, and the fourth time to widow K. Loewen who had been married four times before, RGB 64-2. Heinrich Wiebe farmed in Rosengart, later moving to Mexico with his family.

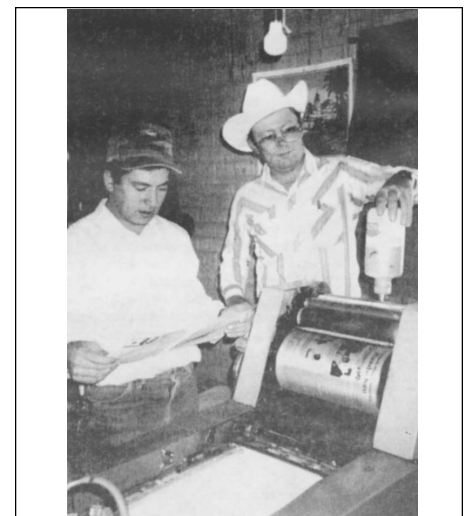
5 Abraham Wiebe (1871-1925).

Son **Abraham Wiebe** married Aganetha Ginter (1873-1913) and for the second time to Anna Harder, RGB 70-2.

Abraham and Aganetha farmed in Rosengart, Manitoba. Later they moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, settling in the village of Springfelt. Abraham was ordained as a minister of the Old Kolony (OK) church in 1895 and as Aeltester of the OK church in Saskatchewan in 1910. Abraham Wiebe moved to Mexico in 1924 where they settled in the village of Neu-Hoffnung. The story is told that Abraham would have preferred to move to southern Ontario where the Old Mennonites enjoyed relative freedom of religion and were not subjected to the fascist Anglo-conformity measures as was the case in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Because the other Aeltesten had opted for Mexico he followed suit not wanting to be the cause of dissension.

5 Maria Wiebe (b. 1874).

Daughter **Maria Wiebe** married widower Julius Loewen (1869-1955) in 1916 and moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, RGB 50-4. He already had six children with his first wife, Maria Friesen. Julius Loewen lived in the village of Hamburg, West Reserve. Julius was elected as a minister of the OK church in 1909. The family moved to the Swift Colony, Mexico. After Maria's death, Julius married for the third time to Anna Harder, widow of her brother Abraham.



Johann Klassen (right) has been a major supporter of the work of the *Rundschau*, with his printing press. For some time already, Enrique Woelk (formerly Durango) has done the actual printing of the *Rundschau*. One of the untruths which some Canadians like to propagate about Mexican Mennonites is that they are all illiterate. The *Rundschau* was in publication for seven years, 22 issues per year, producing a total of almost 500,000 copies. That's a lot of copies for people to buy who are illiterate. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, 17 February 1999, page 6.

Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Documents

Documents Regarding Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Rosengart, Manitoba, Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Reinland (also known as the Old Kolony Church),” as Collected by Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and translated by D. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0,A Supplement to the Biography of Johann Wiebe, by Peter D. Zacharias, published in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 3-8.

Editor’s Foreword.

The Aeltesten of the Mennonite Gemeinden of the 19th century carried an immense work load and responsibility. They were responsible not only for the spiritual and physical welfare of their parishioners but also for many of their socio-economic circumstances. No leaders were ever under greater stress than the Aeltesten of the three conservative Gemeinden--the Kleine Gemeinde, the Bergthaler and the Reinländer (Old Kolony)--who continued to practice the teachings of the Gospels, and consequently decided to emigrate to America, as entire communities in 1874 to 1875.

One of the major responsibilities of the Aeltesten of these embattled Christian communities was the conduct of extensive letter correspondence on behalf of their Gemeinden and in the furtherance of their personal networks required in order to manage and attend to the myriad of needs of up to 4000 parishioners, as in the case of the Old Koloniers. Letters were typically written and then recorded in what was called a “Brief Buch” or letter book.

Although much documentation was destroyed through a variety of means, enough has survived to provide historians with a reasonably good profile of the literary corpus of the three Aeltesten Johann Wiebe (1837-1906), Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) and Peter Toews (1841-1922) who led their people to America, Manitoba. The settlement here would need to be much more difficult than in the mid-western States, being essentially an undeveloped wilderness. Needless to say, the correspondence of these leaders ran into the hundreds of letters in addition to sermons, poetry and journals.

The writings of Aeltester Peter Toews of the

“Johann Wiebe was one of the most articulate and literate Mennonite leaders of the 19th century whether in Imperial Russia or North America.”

Kleine Gemeinde were possibly the most fully preserved, at least in so far as known at the present time. This was ironic as in 1882 Toews chose to join the American Revivalist based Holdeman’s Gemeinde, at which time his document gathering and historical writing seemed to have largely ceased.

Let us hope and pray that there are still components of the literary corpus of Johann and Gerhard Wiebe hidden away somewhere in the jungles of Latin America or the attics of Western Canada. Now that the writings of Johann Wiebe are coming to light, each letter is highly important and critical as we seek to define and sketch the life work of this great Christian leader and Bible ex-

positor.

The discovery of one of the letter books of Johann Wiebe by Bruce Wiebe, and the collection of his other writings, is important because it allows many important chapters of the story of the Old Kolony (OK) Gemeinde to be filled in. It is also significant as it enables comparisons and analysis to be made of the work and literary corpus of the leaders of the other conservative Gemeinden, Aeltesten Wiebe and Toews; see “From the Bishop’s Desk - the correspondence of Aeltester David Stoesz (1842-1903), Bergthal, E.R., Manitoba,” in *Preservings*, No.14, pages 24-26.

From the documents and letters which are being assembled it is evident that Johann Wiebe was one of the most articulate and literate Mennonite leaders of the 19th century whether in Imperial Russia or North America. The fact that he led his own Fürstenlandt Gemeinde to Manitoba in 1875 and then called out an even larger group from amongst the Chortitza Gemeinde in Imperial Russia, gathered and formed them into a cohesive denomination, imprinting upon them in the process the teachings of genuine Biblicism, speaks for itself.

Of particular interest is Wiebe’s focus on the practice of the Gebietsamt, the Mennonite municipal arm of government, in the Chortitza and Molotschna mother colonies, of physically punishing unfaithful members in the Gemeinde a concern reminiscent of Klaas Reimer and his fellow Kleine Gemeinde reformers in 1812, possibly also explaining why the amalgamation of the two denominations was considered or suggested by some adherents later in Manitoba. It is interesting to note that such an amalgamation, in a manner of speaking, is to some extent now coming to pass in Cuauthemoc, Mexico, particularly Jagueyes, where Old Kolony and Kleine Gemeinde people have now happily lived, intermarried and worshipped together for some forty years.

It is comforting and inspirational to read Johann Wiebe’s Biblical insights and observe how he put them into practice under most difficult circumstances. Wiebe’s writings become even more evocative and prophetic when compared to the shallow parroting of Separatist Pietist religious culture found among many Mennonite leaders in Imperial Russia during the same period.

Johann Wiebe was remarkable as a man sure of conviction, charismatic in leadership and as one who sought out and was open to inspiration by the Spirit of God. He was a genuine servant leader who held himself as the least among the children of God.

Johann Wiebe was not one who focused his attention on judging others or instructing them, no matter how well intentioned that might be. Rather he acknowledged that he, of all human-beings, was imperfect and sought to look deeply into his own soul to deal with his imperfections and fail-

ings. Serving Christ often meant humbly waiting upon God to know His will and to serve his community, the Church of God, inspiring others by example, to delve further into their souls and thereby to live up to their full human potential as children of God. This mindset became one of the core values which has sustained the Old Kolony church over the past century.

The Documents.

Document One, Johann Wiebe’s “Record of our journey from Russia to America” is a concise statement not only of the emigration journey but also of the forces which articulated it. It is the English translation of a small booklet *Unsere Reise von Russland nach Amerika aufgezeichnet* (Hague, Saskatchewan, Im Druck gegeben and zu bezeichnen von: Heinrich Thiesen, Blumenthal, Hague, Saskatchewan, Eigentümer der Druckerie in Hague, Saskatchewan, n. date), 10 pages. Although the booklet bears no publishing date, presumably it was published in the years immediately following Aeltester Wiebe’s death, although it would be interesting to document the story of its actual publication.

It is noted that Aeltester Johann Wiebe is using the older Julian calendar for the dates he cites in *Unsere Reise*. According to the modern Gregorian calendar his immigration party arrived in Quebec

“...the Epistle by Johann Wiebe of October 22, 1875,...is a beautiful and touching example of the Gospel-centric teaching typical of conservative Mennonites...”

City on July 13, 1875. Presumably the arrival at Fort Dufferin cited as July 14, 1875, would have been 13 days later according to the Gregorian calendar. The names and ages of the 103 families travelling in Aeltester Wiebe’s party are listed in the Quebec Ship Lists published in the *Bergthal Gemeindebuch*, pages 291-295.

Unsere Reise was originally translated by Ingrid Lamp, Swift Current, Saskatchewan, with final translation by this writer. The original handwritten German manuscript was in the possession of Johann Wiebe, Swift Current, grandson of Jakob Wiebe, who in turn was the son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. It was handed down to Jake Wiebe, Swift Current, who currently has possession of a photocopy of the document.

Document Two, the Epistle by Johann Wiebe of October 22, 1875, was written to those members of his Gemeinde remaining in Imperial Russia and manifests the love and concern which the pioneer Aeltester had for his flock seeking to spare them from the apostasy and alien beliefs which were running rampant in the Colonies. The letter is a beautiful and touching example of the Gospel-

centric teaching typical of conservative Mennonites, those who had remained true to the faith of the matriarchs and patriarchs.

Document Three, the letter by Johann Wiebe to brother Abraham in Imperial Russia was written sometime in fall of 1875, presumably around the time of the Epistle to the Gemeinde in Russia.

“It was the love and unity which...Johann Wiebe taught...to remain living together in Christain village communities enabling them to survive and prosper.”

Document Four, the 1875 to 1878 extracts from the “Gemeindebücher der Dorfschaften...” manifests another important aspect of New Testament teaching, the commandment of Jesus for his disciples to love one another. The accounts of Aeltester Johann Wiebe illustrates the love of the New Testament Gemeinde at work on the untamed prairie land of southern Manitoba in 1875, assisting poor and wealthy alike as they adapted to life in a primitive wilderness. It was the love and unity which leaders such as Johann Wiebe taught their people which allowed them to remain living together in Christain village communities enabling them to survive and prosper.

Document Five, is a pastoral Letter by Aeltester Johann Wiebe to his cousin, Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz, E.R., who encountered a serious spiritual struggle in the aftermath of his resignation as Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde under some considerable disgrace, a fact which the enemies of the conservative Gemeinden cleverly exploited (*ad nauseam*) to heap scorn upon the beloved Ohm Gerhard and to bring into disrepute his life’s work as one of the Father’s of the Province of Manitoba, see *Preservings*, No. 6, pages 1-14. The letter shows that Aeltester Johann Wiebe had a heart of compassion even for those who had interfered with the shepherding of his flock and had subsequently fallen and been marginalized. The letter was included in a book of writings by Johann Wiebe, *Die Auswanderung von Russland nach Kanada 1875 in Form Einer Predigt* (Cuauthemoc, Mexico, 1972), 72 pages, possibly an expanded version of the writing published earlier in Hague, see Document One.

Document Six, the letter of 1903 demonstrates that the ethos of love was still alive and well in the Old Kolony (OK) Gemeinde, as Johann Wiebe asked his people again to give of their abundance to assist someone less fortunate, especially for the mass of impoverished Mennonites in Imperial Russia around the turn-of-the-century.

The readers will notice an uneven quality to the translations of the Johann Wiebe writings. Documents One, Two, Four and Six were translated by and/or edited by the editor from original primary source documents and/or edited with line by line reference thereto. The other documents were translated by others and have to some extent missed the picturesque, pastoral imagery of Johann Wiebe. The elucidate translation of the Danziger High German requires not only a thorough knowledge of that dialect but also an extensive knowledge of English in order to be able to articulate

Wiebe’s evocative prose. It may also help to have a degree in logic or law to translate Wiebe’s writing as, according to the writing style of the time, his sentences and sentence structure were often complex, using allegory and imagery and the level of his comprehension and expression very deep, the mark of a brilliant thinker.

I must say, also, that it has been a great honour to have had the opportunity to translate Wiebe’s writings, providing a window into the mind of a mighty servant of God. I would add that even though I am probably by now one of the experts on the Danziger High German dialect, I am not completely satisfied that I have been able to fully do justice to these writings.

The writings and documents of Johann Wiebe 1875 to 1903 are of great interest to those with a genuine love for the Church of God and who see in His leading hand in history the miracle of the resurrection.

Letter Book.

The story of the letters written by Johann Wiebe (1837-1906). Rosengart, W.R., Manitoba, Aeltester of the Reinländer or Old Kolony (OK) Mennoniten Gemeinde, by Bruce Wiebe, R.R.#1, Box 79, Winkler, MB R6W 4A1.

These letters were re written by Rev. Peter Harms (1876-1952) in a ledger during the 1940s in Mexico. The ledger was taken to the Rio Verde Colony, Paraguay. Deacon Franz Wiebe of Rio Velde brought them to the attention of Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, who requested photo copies. The photo copies were made and were deposited at the Mennonite Heritage Centre for preservation.

Letters 1 to 40 covering the period from 1895 to 1904 are addressed to Rev. Peter Klassen of Neuanlage, Hague, Saskatchewan.

Letter No. 41 dated in 1875 was written to the Gemeinde remaining in Imperial Russia.

Letters 42 to 54 were written to Rev. Julius Wiebe in Saskatchewan, the nephew of Aeltester Johann Wiebe.

Pages 113 to 132 are written by others.

Page 133 is a letter by Aeltester Johann Wiebe to Johann Funk, Elkhart, Indiana.

Page 150 is Aeltester Johann Wiebe’s farewell sermon preached in Imperial Russia.

Page 165 is the Leichenrede or eulogy at Aeltester Johann Wiebe’s funeral.

Document One

A record of our journey from Russia to America

May the saving grace of God and the peace of Jesus Christ increase in all believers through faith in Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, washed by His blood from all our sins so that we may henceforth gladly walk before Him in holiness and unblemished in His love, unto His praise and honour from now on into eternity. Amen.

Remembering our duty, because of certain reasons, whosoever reads this should pay heed thereto; he who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, Rev. 2, 11.

Thus, in 1875, June 3, we, I, Johann Wiebe, together with a fairly large number of brothers and sisters and also children, including the old, weak

and crippled, left Russia because of the military service or because we were to become subject to the secular law and worldly might, and preparing ourselves, emigrated or fled to America where we had been offered or promised liberty to live again according to the teachings of the Lord and the apostles, unto which we had been given strength from God, and we on our part shall exert diligence to come before God in heaven with prayer and supplication.

And we thought: thus it went with the dear ancient ones in whose footsteps and paths we continue to hold ourselves until the death shall lay us low into the scanty of the grave. We are also fully trusting in God that the Lord shall be our guide and companion as it also occurred during the time of Israel. But also in which many were filled with fear and anxious hope of entering into a primitive desert, where one would not know whether there would not be many wild beasts or hostile people who might impose [onerous] burdens upon us, wherewith those of our friends who had remained in Russia had tried to frighten us, or wondering whether in fact bread would be available for our necessities in order that we would not die of starvation.

Many thoughts or anxieties had come forth amongst us emigrants or refugees, each depending on how they had been strengthened by God. But in order not to be disloyal to the beloved God, rather to be ever more and more faithful, all of this did not frighten us, rather through His help and gracious assistance we could become more firmly rooted through all of this, well knowing that everything works for the good for those who love God, Rom. 8, 28. Yes, He would make everything well, and carry it out beneficially, and with hope we cast our cares upon the Lord. He will take good care of us (according to 1 Peter 5, 2).

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters! Thus we boarded the ship, some with good courage and others with anxieties but also with hope, seeking our salvation with fear and trembling and, if possible, for the will of God and Jesus, to measure everything correctly, particularly also for the soul, as mentioned earlier, inwardly screaming and sighing towards God and with many tears, on the third of June [1875], I and a considerable number of brothers and sisters, in a Russian village called Lepeticha on the Dnieper, on a Tuesday morning, 10 o’clock (the last day of Pentecost) embarked upon the ship, which cost us many prayers and many sighs.

And many tears have been shed for which, however, God--Who is such a compassionate friend--Who so dearly wishes [to receive] tears from us, at least such tears that have been shed out of true composure, namely, through a hunger and yearning for His mercy and forgiveness of sins, hopefully to be sealed away in His eternal New Testament and to be duly rewarded in grace after persistent and overwhelming tribulation.

Tears were the sheaves which that sinful woman in the Gospel brought to the Saviour; tears manifest that the human heart has become convicted and desires that the Saviour take up residence therein, when the sinner takes the sanctified tongue of the Son [the Word, the Kingdom of Peace] which is sanctified and Who so gladly would want



Jakob Wiebe, oldest son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), with five of his children. Photo courtesy of great-granddaughter Tina Braun, La Crete, Alberta.

to sanctify the heart, which can only happen through many tears, whereby the rebirth is born of the Seed of the Spirit; the situation of the sinner has become much improved by virtue of the tribulation.

Oh, wherefore we must also walk this difficult path in order to see whether we would accept all sorrows, which we shall encounter, as a fatherly admonishment. For we do not think of all chastening when experienced, as a joy, but as grievous. Nevertheless afterward it shall yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby, Hebrews 12, 11.

Therefore, when we truly and properly consider all this and how it went with the first Christians when it is stated: Some have suffered mockery and scourging, also fetters and prison. They were stoned, hacked into pieces, impaled, killed by the sword. They went about wearing sheep skins and goat fur, they suffered want and tribulations, with discomfort, not deeming the world of any worth, and in desperation they went into the wilderness, upon the mountains and into the caves and hollows of the earth, Hebrews 11, 36.

By comparison, our flight seems rather insignificant and comfortable to us, even though it may have cost us many trials and many a tear because many a one had to leave father and mother, or the parents left their children, and in addition thereto, so many related friends and dear relatives. I say, nevertheless, that it was a very comfortable journey compared to the flight of the early Christians. Since we also have such a host of witnesses around us, let us cast off the sin which always seeks to cling to us and make us slothful, and through patience let us join the battle which has been apportioned unto us and look up upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who--though He might well have wished for joy--suffered the cross and did not consider the shame.

And so, like the first Christians, His follow-

ers, who likewise did not shy from the cross of Christ, we also embarked upon the way, poor as we might be in things temporal and even more in the spiritual--the Lord will take care of us. Fully trusting that the Lord will not forsake his own, if only they do not forsake Him, I will document our journey from Russia up to the local and place where we arrived in America, Manitoba, because I consider it necessary to awaken and to remind you as long as the Lord gives me breath and I am still here. I shall also exert diligence so that you have the wherewithal to retain this in your memories, after my departure.

And so: at 10 in the morning, as mentioned before, we boarded the ship in Lepeticha. Our thoughts and prayers were: Lord, be with us. May Your Holy Will be done. Quietly and forsaken we left our fatherland and birthplace, which had become so dear to us, without much talk, lifting our thoughts up to heaven, and sighing: God, be merciful to us sinners. The ship went gently with us to Cherson. At 5:30 in the evening we had already arrived safely in Cherson with the help of God and through His gracious leading, and there already a child from amongst our midst died and was also buried there.

We stayed there over night. On Wednesday, June 4, at 8 o'clock in the evening we departed from there, and on the next day at 5 o'clock in the evening we arrived at Odessa. We lay there for two days. On June 7 at 10 o'clock in the morning we departed from there and arrived in Podwolschinsk June 8, Sunday morning, at 8 o'clock, safe and sound; many thanks are due to the Lord for everything. There we worshipped our God with encouragement and song.

At quarter to eight we arrived in Mislawitz and at 6 o'clock in the morning we arrived in Berlin and at half-past-two in the morning we departed again. Wednesday at 11 o'clock we arrived in Hamburg, safe and sound. We rested there for two

days and conducted many a consultation. We gazed and looked up upon our Creator and Perfecter Jesus and strengthened one another with encouragement not to become weary. On Friday, June 13, at 9 o'clock in the evening we again departed from there and on Sunday, June 15, we arrived in England at 3 o'clock in the evening but we only got to our quarters in Hull for the night.

We stayed until noon and departed from there at 6 o'clock in the evening, June 16. On Monday we arrived in Liverpool, stayed there until Thursday at 6 o'clock in the morning. Then we went to the ship, embarked upon a small vessel and drove to the bigger one, which took until 5 o'clock in the evening, Thursday, June 19, when we had already departed and were on the big ocean. Yes, I say, the vast sea.

The thoughts were: Oh, that we might be across soon, etc. Oh gracious, merciful God and Father, if it be Your holy will, lead us all over safely, be merciful unto us, forgive us all our sins and trespasses for Jesus' sake and remember our sins no more! For life and death stand in your hand.

Friday, the 20th, the ship received a great blow so that the crew was placed into great anxiety whether the ship might have been damaged. They checked everywhere and after half an hour the journey continued, with strong wind and nice weather. On Friday, June 27th, the ship lay immobile for almost the entire day because it was so foggy that they could not proceed. On Saturday, the 28th, they went forward again. On that same day our assembly increased by one, namely, Jakob Neudorf's wife gave birth to a little baby boy.

God be praised above all. Lord, You almighty God and Father, Your ways are unsearchable, Your rule beyond comprehension; Your hand is almighty. Say unto God, How wonderful are You in your works! Come and behold the works of God: He is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of His praise widely to be heard. Which holds our soul in life, and suffers not our feet to be moved, Psalm 66. "God shall bless us and all the ends of the earth shall fear him," Psalm 67,8.

At sunrise, on July first, we--with the miraculous help of God--had safely crossed the vast ocean and reached land, adjacent to Quebec [City].

With glad mind we sang a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, as follows:

"Nun danket alle Gott,
Mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,
Der Grosze Dinge that,
An uns und allen Enden,
Der uns von Mutterleib,
Und Kindesbeinen an,
Unzählich viel zu gut,
Und noch jetztund gethan," and so forth
[*Gesangbuch*, No. 353, verse one].

[English translation:

"Now thank we all our God / With heart and hands and voices, / Who wondrous things has done, / In whom His world rejoices; / Who, from our mothers' arms / Hath blessed us on our way / With countless gifts of love, / And still is ours today," etc.]

After we had praised and thanked God, we ate

breakfast. Thus the trip had taken from June 19 at 5 o'clock in the evening until July 1, early in the morning. For 12 full days we were afloat on the water. At 6 o'clock in the evening we departed from there arriving in Montreal at 6 o'clock in the morning, where we had breakfast again--coffee, tea and fried potatoes with beef. We departed from there at 11 o'clock at noon for Toronto arriving there at 6 o'clock in the morning; we stayed there until the following day.

Friday, July 4, at 10 o'clock in the morning we left Toronto for Berlin [Kitchener] and from there to Sarnia. Here we boarded the ship at 9 o'clock in the evening, still the same day, July 4th. According to what people had told us, we still had 818 miles to go to Duluth on the ship, but the weather was nice. We arrived there on Tuesday at 7 o'clock in the evening. We over-nighted and departed from there, Wednesday at 2 o'clock in the afternoon to Moorhead, a distance of 253 miles as we were told, arriving there Thursday at 4 o'clock in the morning. At 10 o'clock in the evening we departed from there for Manitoba which according to what we were told was 150 miles.

On Monday, July 14, we arrived in Dufferin at the emigrants' houses, early in the morning. God be praised, where we saw many of our brothers and sisters in the faith who came to meet us and greeted us brotherly. They had travelled a week or even two weeks before us and were already singing a song of grieving.

We, however, were glad and thanked God and Jesus Christ, our Saviour, that we had all travelled so safely and that we--who loved each other so intimately--came to see one another again. Then the shaking of hands and throwing of arms around each other began, including the greeting and kiss of peace with the blessing and wish in our heart, the Lord be with us all. Indeed, hitherto our minds apparently were as one, that the Lord had aided and guided us so miraculously and in the hope that He would continue to help and stand by us and to bring us into His eternal realm. Amen.

May the merciful God and Father grant this unto all of us through His beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen, Amen!

If other hearts were minded differently from that which has here been described; my own [rec-

ollection] has been portrayed pretty clearly, and I hope I have evoked [that of] many others.

And my prayer echoes the words of the poet:

“Der ewig reiche Gott
Woll uns bei unsem Leben
Ein immer fröhlich Herz
Und edlen Frieden geben
Und uns in seiner Gnad
Erhalten fort und fort
Und uns aus aller Noth
Erlösen hier und dort.”

[English translation, verse two.]

“O may this bounteous God / Through all our life be near us, / With ever joyful hearts / And blessed peace to cheer us; / And keep us in His grace, / And guide us when perplexed. / And free us from all ills / In this world and the next.”

And I continue:

“Lob Ehr und Preis sei Gott
Dem Vater und dem Sohne
Und dem, der beiden gleich
Im hohen Himmelsthronen,
Dem dreieinigen Gott
Als der in Anfang war
Und ist und bleiben wird
Jetzt und immer dar Amen.”

[English translation, verse three.]

“All praise and thanks to God, / The Father, now be given; / The Son, and Him who reigns / With Them in highest heaven; / The one eternal God, / Whom earth and heav'n adore; / For thus it was, is now, / And shall be evermore.”

What is written so far, is only about our journey from Russia to America but what we still want to write, if the Lord grants His mercy thereto--may God so grant to us--unto our uplifting, to work unto our salvation with fear and trembling. Since we have had a difficult beginning, we wish to affirm that we keep the word of God as our rule and guide, to live according to the same, and so to act and walk. A large component of which went lost to us in Russia because we considered the carnal as our arm. Stated in other words: we did not want to allow ourselves to be chastised by the Spirit of Christ because we were carnal or lived in the flesh. To be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life and peace, Roman 8, 6.

Therefore, also, we could not remain longer in

the liberty which Christ had procured for us because mankind had made itself subject to the law of the world and punished more the disobedient brethren with worldly might and held the carnal to be their arm, as the Lord says in Jeremiah 17, 5: “Cursed be the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from the Lord, as with the brotherly chastisement.”

For which reason and also on the grounds that the Aeltesten and shepherds together with the Gemeinde did not remain faithful, the chastisement of the brethren always lessened more and more and the worldly power was applied in its place, which, however, was only appropriate for the worldly authority [government] and not the disciples of Jesus, as they have pledged unto God to manifest faithfulness and obedience unto death.

I say: therefore they could not remain standing in the freedom to which Christ has liberated us, and they again allowed themselves to be caught up in the yoke of slaves, Galatians 5. Wherefore Paul also says to his Galatians: Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Galatians 3,3. No w, however, that you have come to know God--indeed, much more so that you are known by God, how can you turn back again to the deficient and feeble laws which you now want to serve anew? How can a disciple of Jesus or a Gemeinde of the Lord carry out such punishments?

We, all of us who came to years [adulthood] in Russia, have often experienced that the [duly] appointed authorities have imprisoned the severely accused brethren, feeding them mainly with bread and water and, in addition, punished them with the blows of the whip, and they remained nonetheless as brethren and members of the Gemeinde. Others, by comparison, were punished with fines or were sentenced to cut wood and dig ditches.

Can God be pleased with such a people? Can he endow them with his Spirit? Oh no! For Jesus says unto his disciples: Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be amongst you, Math. 20, 25. And if this is not to be so among His followers, only among worldly kings and princes, then those Mennonites who exercise this rule and power amongst themselves can likewise not be His disciples and followers because Jesus says: “This is not how it shall be among you. For he says: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;” John 10, 27.

But you do not believe for you are not my sheep as I have told you. Amen, Amen.

A Short Biography of our beloved Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengard, Manitoba.

Our beloved Aeltester and faithful shepherd Johann Wiebe passed unto eternity on February 21, 1905, at 5 o'clock in the morning, where he shall now rest from all his labours.

He was born in 1837 on March 23 and reached the age of 67 years, 10 months and 28 days. He lived in wedlock for 48 years, 2 months and 17 days. He sired ten children of whom four have preceded him. He became grandfather over 48 children and great-grandfather of two. He served



Home of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, W. R., Manitoba. Photo courtesy of 1880 Settlement Registers, page 132.

as minister for five years and as Aeltester of the Gemeinde for 34 years, 5 months and 8 days. During this time he baptized 2228 persons and married 294 couples. He delivered 1544 sermons and conducted 660 funeral services.

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End of Text

Document Two

October 22, 1875
Rosengard
Written to Russia

Beloved Gemeinde in Christ;

Before I, as your Aeltester, to those who regard and acknowledge me as such, speak to you in weakness through my imperfect writing, I firstly wish you grace, love and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the comfort rich fellowship of the Holy Spirit here during our lives as well as in death, also from myself and my Gemeinde, Amen.

Beloved Gemeinde, indeed, beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, of whom I think so frequently, and also often talk about you: do receive these lines as if I would actually be standing before you, as you have previously been accustomed to from me.

For in spirit I am presently before you and gaze upon you and consider with pain what will eventually become of you in these last and troubled times. That is to say, regarding the service [aben?], which you are to assume there, and with your 'yes' have not held to 'yes' and so forth. Indeed, I also hold serious reservations regarding us here that we do not become complacent and slothful [page one] and not to walk the true path of Christ which truly leads and directs us heavenward, whereupon we are to walk and go with striving and firm resolution, yes, with pleading, supplication and earnest remorse.

With respect to which, when I place myself into your situation, or even think of my own while still there, how everything seemed to storm around me, and had to live amidst scorn and shame, and how a number would have banished me to Siberia rather than that I should step up behind the pulpit [Kanzel], which I however, do not want to think of them, and rather that I would bid the Father in heaven that their eyes might be opened and that they might receive forgiveness of all [their sins], your circumstances seem much more serious than ours.

For we have been promised the full religious freedom here in this land, America, respecting which we have no battles to conduct here like you do there. And we can also extend this invitation, which I firmly believe that you should follow, respecting which I have no doubts. For this reason it seems to me that matters with you there are more lamentable than with us here, for [over there] the disputation and factiousness in the Gemeinde could never be put away. For when a kingdom is not united within itself, [page two] how shall it stand?

Likewise also with a Gemeinde which has re-



A sketch of the interior of an early Mennonite dwelling. It is a scene from the West Reserve, around Rosengard, by W. T. Smedley, and published in Picturesque Canada in 1882, page 323, see explanation by Jake Doerksen, Preservings, No. 12, page 37. Photo courtesy of Hanover 100 Years, page 119.

ceived one faith and one baptism, Ephesians 4. How shall it subsist if it lives in open strife and disputation and allows the unadulterated teachings of the Lord, whereupon it has been constituted, to fall away? When we consider the entire teaching of Christ it is completely different from that which you must now adopt there.

Oh, do pay heed, now my beloved, that which our so fully loving Lord says, Do not love nor follow that which is in the world, for whosoever shall love the world, in him is not the love of the Father, and he that taketh not his cross and followeth me, is not worthy of me. For we have only one [concern] which we must earnestly prove, whether we love God above all else.

For I, inherently weak and from within myself sinful person, can hardly understand how, if we love God above everything else, or even if we only seek to so love Him, how shall we be able to assume the service which the Government is requiring of you? That is to say, [the Gemeinde] which is founded upon a true, voluntary, discipleship of Christ, baptised and in the Gemeinde, of which the Lord says, upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it [page three]. For Jesus did teach Peter to place the sword back into its sheath, and these are incidents relevant thereto, and which were entirely given over to [the Gemeinde] here on earth.

Oh my beloved. Everyone! Examine yourselves, earnestly and remorsefully, and not sparingly. I ask you in the name of Jesus Christ, what did you have when you covenanted before God and the Gemeinde? Did you not, indeed, all of us, together with Gemeinde, promise Him obedience and faithfulness for the entire time of your lives, yes, to be true disciples of Christ, which we must

always confess. But now listen further to what the Lord says with a repeated "verily": Joh. 14, 12, "Verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do he shall do also."

Has our Redeemer ever done any such works which aid in the waging of war?

Brothers and sisters, He has on all occasions conducted himself as the suffering Lamb and fled from dangerous situations and said to his disciples, that they should not conduct themselves as the kings and princes. He says, the kings of the world they rule, and they call them most gracious lord, but so shall it not be amongst you, nor shall it be so among all [page four] who are disciples of Christ, Luke 22:25, Matthew 20:25, Mark 10:42, and so on, and further in Joh. 14:15, "If ye love me keep my commandments," and further, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

In this regard we find it necessary that we repeatedly prove ourselves, and to look within ourselves regarding our status. For when we shall come to the portals of death, how shall we not wish to have lived for the Lord. And verily, we shall all arrive at that place. But alas, if a person has not heeded all the warnings and in the meantime is ushered before the face of God, for man is appointed once to die and thereafter the judgement, Matthew and Joh. 12, "If any man shall serve me, let him follow me."

Therefore, if we consider the entire life of Christ, from His birth until His death on the cross, we shall certainly not find anything, other than that all humankind, or those that call themselves Christians, with earnestness of will seek to emulate the life of Christ and to walk in His footsteps.

So far no war has come to pass among Chris-

tians, or among all those who call themselves Christians and also are or are becoming genuine disciples of Christ. And therefore all wars presently [page five] must fall away, yes, from that blink of an eye, henceforth, when the light of Jesus first fills them with conviction in that regard, and he is also willing to follow the same and not to strive against it any longer. I repeat it again, they [wars] shall fall away and such a person shall grieve that they have previously acted against the teachings of Christ.

This was also the experience of the Apostle Paul in his conversion. He had given himself upon the way to Damascus with threats and murders, when the light of Jesus appeared and the voice of the Lord spoke unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" To which he replied with fear and trembling, "Lord what wouldst thou have that I do?" Acts 9.

This is also my belief, worthy Gemeinde, and for this reason I gave myself over to the flight [emigration], together with all those also who have understood the matter in like manner and to whom it was distasteful that those who call ourselves members and brothers should live in the midst of disputation.

For the one says we are free to take it on [military service], and the other says no. And even among those who have been placed as watchman over the Gemeinde of whom the Lord speaks, "For if they shall fall silent [page six] the very rocks shall cry out."

For how can the weak members experience anything different, if they do not wish to circumvent the weak ministers, and to look unto Jesus alone, but to fall into apostasy. Alas, my beloved, search in the Scriptures, in the Holy Scriptures, not after freedom but in order that the will of the Lord might also come to pass thereby. For then you shall also find that which will be for the best of your soul. Indeed how many destroyers are there not in the present time with Christendom, who in blindness live out their self-righteousness and pride as if they had made a covenant with the [spirit] of death, and do not wish to know anything about the true conversion.

Indeed, read the songs numbered 281 and 303, wherefrom you can perceive how things occurred in earlier times. Even the references above the songs give testimony of the great apostasy of the pharisees and those learned in the scripture. For we are seriously warned to take better heed of our lives and to be more earnest regarding our conduct if we wish to attain the heavenly kingdom.

Alas, my worthy Gemeinde, I now wish to close regarding this. I have again carried out my responsibility and obligation, of which I have been commanded by my weak spirit [page seven].

I had gone walking tonight in the neighbourhood, and then we had talked among ourselves about our journey to America. What great grace the Almighty God has bestowed upon us unworthy ones, that He had led us so safely. For this we certainly cannot give enough thanks and for which reason we also frequently need to remind ourselves about the journey and to praise and thank God, as David says, "Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not the great things he hath

done," and so forth.

And then our discussion came around to you, which [occurs] often, and [which] fell so heavily upon my heart that I went home and sat down to write.

Oh, brothers and sisters, if only I could once again come into your midst, and if I would then feel like talking as much as I do now, I would talk until I was satiated. But since it is not [possible], do please accept these insignificant lines in love, for I genuinely mean them well.

But I continue to rejoice that a number [of you] will follow us this forthcoming spring, and for which I have a true longing. It is as if the time seems too long for me, but I do not know why it

Johann Wiebe		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1	Johann Wiebe													9
2	Johann Enns													13
3	Alexanderthal													14
4	Johann Enns													14
5	Johann Enns													14
6	Johann Enns													14
7	Johann Enns													14
8	Johann Enns													14
9	Johann Enns													14
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47	Johann Enns													14
48	Johann Enns													14
49	Johann Enns													14
50	Johann Enns													14

Johann Wiebe's Page 3, from the account book of the villages of Rosengart, Grünfeld, Blumenfeld, Eigensfeld, Osterwick, Hochfeld. Illustrates how the Old Kolony people maintained careful records of mutual aid extended within the community, a practice typical of conservative Mennonites.

would be so [page eight]. Also further I have very little expectation as it is with brother Abraham. Peace be with you and your house, yes, may the Lord strengthen you with your burdens and tribulations which may come upon you. You have written and [we have] read a good many letters. It is not that much better this year with the harvest than the one [last] year we were still there.

But, nevertheless, I believe that those who are in earnest will also be able to emigrate. But those who do not have it, or are not willing to submit themselves from darkness unto light, I will certainly not counsel to emigrate. For the emigration alone will certainly not make anyone saved.

Oh, woe, my beloved. We already have an example [of this] here but also those who mean it truthfully and sincerely. Take note of [those with] such a faith where [someone does] not know [the] Son as that sometimes results in a difficult proving.

But brothers and sisters, I do think you will

not yet have forgotten us and in what a lamentable dilemma we stood and also that many did not believe that we would emigrate, at least the poor, until they saw that we were departing.

A number, on the other hand, had argued that it [page nine] was not feasible that the poor emigrants would be able to emigrate. And they were told that those who had more than they needed should share something with the poor. This, also, they refused to believe, all the while [they were] striving after their own betterment and eventually had to come into shame.

Others, in contrast, had said, why do you want to move to America, to go hungry? This caused me a great deal of sorrow at times, that there was not a greater faith and trust in our All-loving Provider, as if we can take our own lives or provide for ourselves [in any event].

I must shorten [my letter] my beloved, or else I will again write as much as the first time. And yet, I wish to relate this to you that we have no reason to complain, much more rather to give thanks. We have been provided with everything, with the beloved bread and seed grain, as well as for those who do not have money, each family— one cow, one ox, two together a wagon, two together a plow, that it was actually miraculous, if only we could have faith that God would help us. For He the living God sees us and continues to seek to bring the person from the paths of sin and to draw them unto Him and also hears [page ten] us and has also made to shame our little faith, for our own disturbance.

I have indicated above that I gave myself over to the flight together with all those who perceived the matter as I did. But I have already written this in my first letter, that not all of you who had approached me regarding your life and walk and made yourselves up [dedicated yourselves] in the true meaning, and that there have been many murmurers and still continue to be, which presently allow themselves to be heard. But [they do] not [murmur] against me, for anywhere I come, be it in the villages or somewhere else, when I ask how it is going they say, "Good", "they are completely satisfied". For this reason I can not give thanks enough for the grace and peace which we have had here until now.

Now I will [direct] myself to you beloved brother Joh. Enns, Alexanderthal, you have requested of me, that I shall report to you in truth, whether the people would also improve themselves, for according to your understanding I shall experience much more here that I ever did there. What answer shall I give to you? But I will answer to you that how all the people stand in their relationship with God I do not know, that is only known to our beloved God.

Nor have I experienced [page eleven] any intimate knowledge, until now, [how] things [occurred] there, for the division of the land in our settlement went completely peacefully until now, so that in the beginning I could hardly imagine. I have nowhere yet been called upon to arbitrate unpeaceful matters, for which I cannot give enough praise and thanks to our Saviour.

But that is not to say that there are not many and important matters lacking in our Gemeinde; no, you must not understand this in that way. None-

theless, I hold it very dear that I do not hear of much strife, as frequently occurs on a new settlement. Of course, it may also have taken a longer time, so that we still [will] have this experience. May God grant that it will always become better and not worse. Indeed, that He might grant us strength and support, [so] that we [might] walk in His ways and [follow His] commandments during the time of our lives.

For on the average we are all full of misdeeds, so much so that one might actually become anxious. Even I must always battle with my evil flesh and blood, so that I frequently fall down [under its weight]. But with the help of God I can always stand up again, that is to say, I confess and grieve over my sins and ask God [page twelve] for forgiveness. My belief in this matter will certainly not alter until the body has lived out its time here on earth and passes over from this world unto the blessed eternity, either to the joyful saved eternity or to the place of suffering where there shall be knocking of teeth and crying.

Ah, [it will be] horrible to hear. But even more horrible for those who must personally experience it, for those who cast all warning into the wind and do not allow themselves to be counselled by God's hand of grace. But as of now the door of grace still stands open for whoever will go through in the right way, shall be helped [saved].

But all my beloved! I must end abruptly, for the paper is again running out and it is soon time to go to sleep. Please forgive me for my weak writing. And I commit you together with us unto the loving God and from the bottom of my heart I wish that if we should not see each other again here on this earth, that our all-compassionate God might grant us the grace that we might be declared there before the throne of God and see each other afresh where there shall never again be any parting, and for which our gracious God and Father will provide for all of us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

From Aeltester Joh. Wiebe, Rosengart, Canada, Manitoba.

Document Three

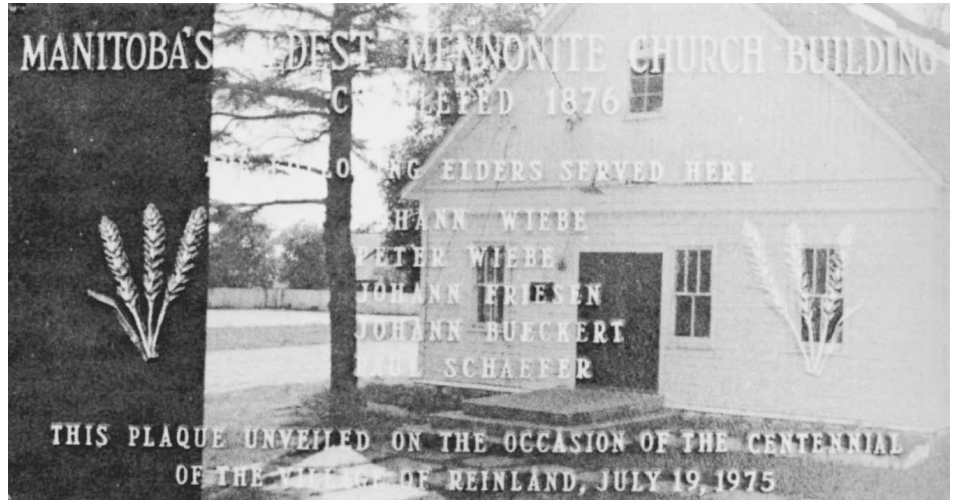
A Letter from Aeltester Johann Wiebe from America to Russia;

To my brother Abraham Wiebe and your dear wife and children who are so far away. First of all, I wish you grace, peace and love, from God our Lord Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Beloved and deeply appreciated brother in Christ! I greet you and all of those who love our Lord Jesus with the kiss of love.

And now I am asking, dear brother, how are you? I am very curious about it because of all my activities, but when I am by myself then it seems at times as if there is a burden on my heart, some heaviness, and then I think of you.

And then I often think that you carry a heavier burden than I do and as if I feel something of your burden, but I don't know, perhaps it is different but tell me about it because I am often thinking of you and also of the dear congregation and all those who are thinking of me in love. I also often think of those who were my enemies, but I think they didn't have cause. And I think of them and how it is going to be, for all of us want to be with the one



A double exposure photograph of the worship house of the Reinländer Gemeinde, built in Reinland, W. R., Manitoba, in 1876, the oldest Mennonite sanctuary in Western Canada. The double exposure shows the plaque which was dedicated at the time of the Reinland village centennial in 1975. Photo courtesy of P. Zacharias, Reinland, An Experience in Community (1976, Altona), page 186.

Father someday, and here we can't agree. How is it going to be in eternity if man would be taken away quickly like those five foolish virgins.

Oh! On my part I wish all of them a true repentance from the heart and true conversion and the best of peace with God and man and the perseverance of children to the end and a peaceful death. Yes, brother, at times I wonder whether those will follow us who were such a burden to me at times, and I would wish they would if it is God's will, but that they would come with true contentment.

But to come and to create troubles, I am scared of that, but for my part I would love them if they also came, and I do love them now so that there would be no obstacle if they came in true peace. You will wonder, dear brother, how things are with me here. There is also toil here. Nor was the journey without troubles as you can also read about the children of Israel, but so far things are very well.

So far I don't have to carry a heavy burden regarding the congregation. What I struggle with most or the hardest is my own flesh and blood. I am anxious as to how we will fare but am always comforted by the thought that things will be well with us if we truly look to the Lord, his storehouse has bread in abundance and will never be empty. And I am not burdened by the question whether it was right for us to move here because we were given freedom of conscience. But God alone knows for how long. As far as temporal things are concerned, it seems good here.

We have a lot of grass for hay but our men broke the scythe twice so that I don't have enough hay but I think I'll get enough yet. We have settled along the Dakota boundary, up from the Red River to the left, about 45 "werst", but otherwise our land is closer only the woods are farther away, and close to the boundary there is wheat with such heads as I have never had before, and this is a dry year. But we don't now what it will be like in the future. But here there are people living around us.

Now about our building, we are already living in our house. I will tell how I did build - 15 ft. wide and 25 ft. long, half in the ground and half above ground, and lined with boards inside and

the roof covered with long hay I am writing and it is already 10:30 and I am keeping the iron stove going, we do not have a floor as yet, and little Maria is not very well as yet. Most of us are living in villages here, about 16 farmers in one village (with a few exceptions), like we used to live in villages. Here in the village are PW. - JH. - JH. - JL. - HW. - JG. - JA W. - MKW. - JA N. - KW. - JB. - WP. - KW. - also Harms but B. Wiebe is living in Neuhorst, not far from us, 7 or 8 "werst". I haven't seen the Peter Wiebes as yet, he lives at a distance of about 130 "werst", our land is supposed to be better than theirs.

Dear brother, my page is getting full and thus I will close, and I say in closing. convey greetings to the church which I love from my heart, and remember me in prayer, and I will remember you in love. Yes, greet all who love our Lord Jesus, and I remain your loving brother and co-worker in the gospel of grace. Greetings also from my wife and children. Also to your children, written by "Johann Wiebe", Rosengart. (Received October 25, 1875)

Two Poems/hymns follow - "Liebster Vater, ich, dein Kind..." and "O du Liebe meiner Liebe..."

Document Four

Gemeindeguch der Dorfschaften Rosengart, Grünfeld, Blumenfeld, Eigenfeld, Osterwick, Hochfeld, "Account Book for the Village Societies of Rosengart, Grünfeld, Blumenfeld, Eigenfeld, Osterwick, Hochfeld, Volume 4230, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Schaftsbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba. The account book appears to be a continuation of an earlier volume, as the account of Johann Wiebe opens with a balance owing of \$9.75.

Page 3

Johann Wiebe

May 25 [1876] debit 3 Kulle [a Kulle is a sack full weighing 220 pounds] flour balance \$9.75; July 25, 1 Kulle, 3.80; August 4, 4 kulle 14.40, total 24.95; 30 bushel wheat \$30.00, paid credit

\$45.00, money as requested 1.45, balance 14.40. 1 Kulle flour, 3.60; \$18.00; From Jakob Wiens, requisitioned, earned by his children, \$15.00, remains a balance of \$3.00.

1878 January 12, returned one bag of flour, credit \$3.00;

1877, transported wheat to "Killer", Emerson, credit \$20.80; transported wheat to "Killer", Emerson, \$13.20; April 19, returned 2 Kulle to Neuendorf \$5.00; 27th 1 Kulle to Blumstein. \$5.00; May 1, 1 Kulle to Blumstein, \$2.50; 2 Kulle to Reinland, \$5.00; milk delivered to customs office \$3.25; total credit \$52.25; January 18, paid back 96 1/2 lb. flour \$2.89; total credit, \$55.15; paid back Hoffnungsfeld 5 bu. wheat \$5.00; June 20, paid back 6 bu. wheat Eichenfeld; July 29; credit 6 1/2 bu. wheat \$6; July 29, 6 1/2 bushel wheat returned \$6.50, credit \$72.65; Cre. 7 1/2 bushel for Neu Wiebe Joh. \$7.50; credit \$65.15; August 6, received money from [Oberschulz] Mueller \$50.00.

Page 4,

Carried forward, \$15.15, interest for 1878 \$1.68; for wood debit \$13.52 2/3; balance \$3.00; for wheat from "Killer" rec. add \$1.57; interest on same 0.10.; credit \$4.97; Feb 17, received credit, payment for wood (Wald) \$2.34.

Page 11

Johann Wiebe

Remained indebted in 1877 for the years 1875 and '76, balance remaining, \$208.30;

For the year 1877 receivable and became indebted as follows: 1 Kulle from Winnipeg, from the above sum, transferred to Schantz [debited] to the community [account]; \$100.00; from the above sum transferred to the Waisenamt \$108.30 [and debited]; 111 lbs poor flour at 2 cents per lb. \$2.23 1/2; May 25, 4 Kulle at \$3.23 \$13.00; 1 Kulle \$3.23; August 4, 1 Kulle \$3.60; balance to date, \$25.08 1/2; A wagon provided to Cornylachi in Schönfeld, \$10.00; balance \$25.08 1/2; balance remaining \$15.08 1/2;

1878, interest debited for 1875 \$7.20; March, debit interest for 1876 \$8.61; debit interest for 1877, \$7.99; April 11, returned 4 bu. barley; delivered wheat to the customs office credit \$43.93; balance remaining credit \$38.89; and balance remaining debit \$45.93; net credit \$7.04; August, received for wheat \$30.00; credit \$22.96; interest for 1878 credit \$0.17; interest payable to Schantz \$6.00; balance remaining \$29.13; for wood (Wald) \$13.52 2/3; balance credit \$42.76;

Document Five

Letter to Gerhard Wiebe, Chortitz, E.R.

A letter to the dearly beloved but no longer serving as Aeltester of the Gemeinde in Begthal, Gerhard Wiebe.

I wish you first of all much grace, peace and blessing in your miserable and fallen circumstances, a right-working remorse and repentance respecting God and man, the way you have often taught during that former time. And that is that during this time of grace, which has been granted unto you until now, you would let yourself be made free, through the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, which He carries after all sinners with love, if it were possible. Amen.

You have requested, as I have heard from Cornelius Fehrs, from me weak and so very lowly

person in this most difficult time—I believe of you and also for me, as God knows, a writing directed to you in love.

Oh, beloved Wiebe! What then shall I write? What would be best for the circumstances of your soul? For what would your soul hunger the most?

Is it to become righteous through Christ and in grace to receive salvation? Then do submit yourself unto His grace, and confess and acknowledge your serious misdeed in true remorse and repentance. Firstly, towards our Almighty God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and secondly, also towards your Gemeinde which has loved you dearly, and which for so many years you did also teach this way, and also punished the sins.

Thirdly, also hear regarding the back sliding brethren, as I believe, if it is alright with you, or shall become alright with you, that you undoubtedly feel very responsible for their blood, and if it were possible, to bring them to another belief, that they also would repent, before the great and horrible day of the Lord shall come, and to recompense them, each and everyone according to what they have earned with their works.

And fourthly, I believe that you will also not be able to feel free with us here. Oh, my beloved Wiebe! Your own conscience and the good Holy Spirit will teach you everything, and lead you in all truth, if only you will submit yourself fully and completely unto Him, and if you remain true to His teaching and to His word and that you then teach the people completely freely according to God's word, without respect to what is pleasing to the people, as Paul teaches us, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ," Galatians 1, 10 and 1 Thess. 2,4

When I see this in my great sorrow and can hear about you, who has also caused me so much work and sorrow, that I have sometimes come almost to the point of succumbing, and that together with David in his fear I have been compelled to call out to God, "Forsake me not, my God, and strengthen me. Preserve my soul,..." and so on. Wherefore I would experience heartfelt joy in that regard, and thank, praise and glorify God within my spirit after grace was granted to me.

Otherwise I have no intention to speak or to deal with you other than for the honour of God and for the well-being of our poor souls. May God grant that this poor writing may serve for the best, which is my wish and prayer.

Your [servant] who loves you, and [a] God-seeking poor crippled sinner, "Johann Wiebe."

Document Six

Letter 1903.

Rosenort,
August 20th, 1903

Firstly, the greeting of peace of Jesus, may peace be with you.

Beloved brethren: Upon the plea or request for help from brother Franz Hiebert regarding his friend Daniel Friesen from Russia and travelling to America, Manitoba, and whom they had wanted to send back because his eyes were not really healthy, which he throughout had not wanted, an agent had shown him a way which went through the State of Argentina, from which it is possible to come here to

Manitoba and cheap, but regarding which it now sounds like the very opposite is the case.

He had permitted himself to go this way with his wife and children in order to come here to his friends. But how deceived he now feels. They were barely able to obtain shelter for their family. And even at that, it was among such bad people, the way he writes, that it seems sorrowful to live there. Murders and deaths are so common place there that he fears to remain there with his family.

What can he do? He has no escape, no means whereby he can help himself. Therefore he now pleads so earnestly for help to his friends and they plead in turn for help from the Gemeinde. For there they are in danger for their very lives, temporally as well as spiritually, if they must remain there.

If we reflect upon the matter for ourselves, if we were the ones in this dilemma and had been led on such a false way, and could only see need and desperation everywhere before our eyes, would we not wish, and indeed, also pray that the beloved God would also have people with compassionate hearts, who would deliver us from this devastation, and who would succeed.

Oh indeed, this is what we would wish, and we would beg for people who would want to help and who were able to do so. Undoubtedly we would thank them, but what is more, [we would thank] God above everything else, from Whom all good things come, the Father of Light.

In this intention, I invite you to gather a friendly offering, and for the village chairmen to thoroughly make everyone aware, and to hand over or forward that which is voluntarily given or contributed to our Gemeinde Vorsteher F. Froese, to transmit the same for the assistance of the ones who had requested it. For God loves a willing giver.

Together with a greeting, from your Aeltester and brother in the Reinländer Gemeinde who loves you dearly, "Johann Wiebe"

Whoever wants to give something for this collection can bring it to me this week. Rosenort the 25th August, 1903, "Isaak Friesen"

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 15, pages 17-24.

A brief biography of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) by Peter D. Zacharias and a number of Wiebe's shorter writings have now been published. It is hoped that this will inspire residents of the West Reserve (Reinland Stanley) and particular members of Wiebe's family to translate and publish in both English and German, Wiebe's entire literary corpus of which at least three sermons and one letter book are known to be extant at the present time.

Publishing such a "Complete Writings of Johann Wiebe" would be an appropriate recognition of Johann Wiebe, a great man of God and undoubtedly among the most significant Mennonite leaders of the 19th century. It would also seem appropriate to honour the Old Colony (OK) people by erecting cairns in Johann Wiebe's honour at the landing site at Fort Dufferin, as well as in his home village of Rosengart and the village of Reinland where Wiebe ministered to his flock for three decades.

Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Publisher, 1881

Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Publisher, 1881, Confession of Faith, by Delbert Plett.

Publications, 1881.

The range of duties of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) was enormous. As the spiritual shepherd of the largest Mennonite denomination in western Canada, he was seized of jurisdiction regarding a host of matters going far beyond the responsibilities of the modern-day minister. One of these responsibilities was the provision of devotional writings for his parishioners.

A recent find by historian Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, places Johann Wiebe and his Reinländer into the forefront of the whole area of books and publications.

Leonard Doell found a tear sheet from a Confession of Faith, pages 3 to 4, neatly placed within the pages of a Catechism he was examining.

It is a foreword to a Confession of Faith published in 1881. This publication does not seem to be mentioned in Springer and Klassen, *Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1977), Volumes One and Two, nor does it seem to be mentioned in any of the histories of Mennonites in Manitoba.

Based on the research I did for an article in 1994, "Print Culture of the East Reserve 1874-1930," published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, October 1994 pages 524-550, and also in John Dyck, ed. *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve* (Steinbach, 1994), pages 686-715, it was among the first, if not the very first publication among the Mennonites in Western Canada.

The discovery of the 1881 Confession of Faith by Leonard Doell will probably result in the identification of other devotional and institutional writings as originating with Aeltester Johann Wiebe and his Reinlanders.

Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, advises that the Confession of Faith, as printed by Aeltester Wiebe is still being used today by the Old Colony Church in Manitoba as well as elsewhere in North and South America. Peter still has a copy of the 1881 original.

What a legacy Johann Wiebe has left for the Church of God.

Translation.

The following is a translation of the "foreword" to the Confession of Faith, 1881, the portion available to the writer at the present time.

"In the following pages I commit unto the Gemeinde our Confession of Faith, as we annually present it to our youth in the articles during the baptismal instruction.

"For a long time already the necessity [of such a publication] became manifest to certain of our members, that our confession of faith, whereupon we receive baptism, should not only be heard a number of times during the year in our worship services, rather to have it for one's self in order to read and compare it with the Word of God wherefrom it has been compiled. By so doing we will be able to become more firmly grounded [in our faith] and that we should at all times be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks for a basis for the faith which is within us, 1 Peter 3, 15.

"In order to satisfy this need and also to contribute in a small way to the building up of our Gemeinde, I feel convicted regarding the publication of this written Confession of Faith, which will constitute a desirable addition to our Catechism. Together with the same it offers our youth, who are preparing themselves for baptism, the opportunity that they can betroth themselves ever more deeply within the godly truth, at home when they are alone, which is presented to them in the house of God,

"May the Saviour, Jesus Christ, bless the use of these pages unto many hearts, that they would not merely more and more spread the knowledge of the truth among us, rather that the same much more might also become a God-given empowerment for the eternal life which it manifests in word and deed.

"Grant this, oh God, through your grace.

"Johannes Wiebe"
Aeltester der Gemeinde at Reinland, in Manitoba, Rosengart, on the 27th day of June 1881."

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, page 18.

W o r t.

In nachfolgenden Blättern übergebe ich der Gemeinde unser Glaubensbekenntnis, wie wir es jährlich in Artikeln beim Taufunterrichte der Jugend vortragen. Schon lange machte sich in unserer Gemeinde bei einigen Gliedern das Bedürfnis fühlbar, unser Glaubensbekenntnis, auf welches wir die heilige Taufe empfangen, nicht bloß in der gottesdienstlichen Versammlung einige Male im Jahr zu hören, sondern es auch selbst zu haben, um es lesen und mit dem Worte Gottes, aus dem es geschöpft ist, vergleichen zu können, damit wir in demselben immer fester gegründet werden und wir allezeit bereit seien zur Verantwortung gegen jedermann, der Grund fordert der Hoffnung, die in uns ist. 1. Petri 3, 15. Um nun diesem Bedürfnis abzuhelpen und in einem geringen Teile auch hierdurch zur Erbauung unserer Gemeinde beizutragen, fühle ich mich zur Herausgabe dieser Bekenntnisschrift veranlaßt, die einen gewünschten Anhang zu unserem Catechismus bildet und mit diesem zusammen unserer Jugend, die sich zur heiligen Taufe vorbereitet, die Gelegenheit darbietet, sich auch zu Hause, wenn sie allein ist, immer näher mit der göttlichen Wahrheit vertraut zu machen, die ihr im Gotteshaufe verkündigt wird. Der Heiland Jesus Christus wolle den Gebrauch dieser Blätter an vie-

4

len Herzen dergestalt segnen, daß sie nicht bloß die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit unter uns immer mehr verbreiten, sondern daß dieselbe vielmehr in den Herzen auch eine Gotteskraft zum ewigen Leben werde, die sich in Wort und Wandel offenbart. Das gebe Gottes Gnade. Amen.

Johannes Wiebe,
Aeltester der Gemeinde zu Reinland, in Manitoba.

Rosengart, am 27. Juni 1881.



Pages 3 and 4 of the 1881 Confession of Faith as published by Aeltester Johannes Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba. These pages are courtesy of Leonard Doell/Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Wrestling Satan, ca. 1885

“Wrestling Satan: A Number of Ancient Events from Canada, Manitoba,” [Circa 1885, Author Unknown, see Endnote]

Editor’s Introduction.

In the novel *Sarah’s Prairie* (page 102), Franz Friese, the inimitable village story teller, enjoys regaling his nephew Martien Koep with his own version of Mennonite history. In one scene where the two are neighbouring together as Franz hauls a load of pigs to market, he relates how the conservative Mennonites gave away their beautiful *Wirtschaften* in Russia to their Separatist Pietist neighbours, who disparaged their faith and traditions.

Then he says, “We pioneered for a decade building a new land. We worked with little more than bare bleeding hands and torn fingernails...No sooner was the hard work all done, then we once more had these snout nosed *schwears* on our backs. Again they tried to tell us that everything we believed in and did was wrong.”

While the character Franz Friese was known for his hyperbole and penchant to overstate, his version of truth does provide an appropriate backdrop to the account of Johann Wiebe, “Wrestling Satan, circa 1885.”

By the early 1880s the Old Koloniers, by virtue of hard work and astuteness in selecting the best land in Manitoba, had reestablished themselves materially. Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and leading hand of God, Aeltester Johann Wiebe had been successful in calling forth some 4000 souls, who came from many different villages and communities in the old homeland, and organizing them as the *Reinländer Gemeinde* in 1875.

There were, of course, among the Old Koloniers those who had associated themselves with Johann Wiebe’s group solely in order to be able to take part in the immigration effort. No sooner were the foundation stones laid when missionaries/preachers from the United States beset the pioneer community seeking to divert them away from their Gospel-centric faith and to “convert” them to Separatist-Pietist and/or American Revivalist religious culture, both of which rejected the Gospels by virtue of a bizarre teaching known as “Dispensationalism.”

Such apostasy had little appeal to Johann Wiebe and his denomination as their teachings, by comparison, were firmly grounded on the Gospels. Satan must have realized that he would have little chance to subvert the Old Koloniers by such an obvious strategy. So he devised another plan to mount an attack from the inside. He was able to seduce several members from within the *Reinländer Gemeinde* itself, to fall for these false teachings and to propagate the same internally.

The spirit of these interlopers is clear from their references that the members of the *Reinländer Gemeinde* should “convert” themselves. This is unequivocal evidence that they

did not accept and/or recognize the genuine Gospel-based conversions of conservative Mennonitism, and instead, advocated the adoption of American Revivalist religious culture which held the legalistic belief that a person could not be saved unless they had undergone a radical, climatic and emotional conversion experience.

Because they did not believe in a genuine Gospel-articulated conversion, Revivalists/Fundamentalists were evidently forever unsure of their salvation. As a result they needed another artificial doctrine, namely, the doctrine of “assurance of salvation”. This doctrine held that adherents should continually repeat and announce that they were “saved” presumably as a psychological mechanism to help them overcome their lack of confidence that they were a part of the kingdom of God, caused by their circumvention of the teachings of the Gospel.

“Wrestling Satan” is the intriguing account of what happened and how God empowered Johann Wiebe to see through the sinister scheme.

The story is heart wrenching. Johann Wiebe was shaken to the depths of his innermost being as he was almost seduced by Satan’s masterful strategy, how he grappled with Satan.

He felt as if God had forsaken him.

“My God, why hast Thou forsake me?” was his anguished cry.

He struggled for days, convicted unto the core of his being by this onslaught. He aged by several years in the course of a week, as if he had undergone a grievous illness.

But victory came and the attack was repulsed. The *Gemeinde* was firmly reestablished on the sure and secure foundation of the apostolic order.

The attack is reminiscent of a similar endeavour against the *Kleine Gemeinde* in the *Molotschna Colony*, Imperial Russia, in 1828-9. Here too Satan subverted several members to a form of radical Separatist-Pietism known as “False-humility pietism.” The insurrectionists in the KG also prophesied and spoke convincingly that the end-times were at hand.

Satan’s attack here was so strong that Aeltester Klaas Reimer was actually suspended from office. What we know about the KG insurrection is based on Aeltester Reimer’s own autobiography, “*Ein Kleines Aufsatz*”:

“Satan obviously realized that he was unable to lead us to the others by erring ministers and also that he could not turn us completely from God through the confusions of Babel. Satan now came in amongst us as an angel of light, as a false spirit, and presented himself as a true brother. This occurred in the manner of which Menno Simons says that the angel of light locates himself in the midst of the saints, so that he partakes of the communion with them

Wrestling Satan, ca. 1885.

“A number of ancient events from Manitoba, Canada, which took place in the 1880s.

The following writing is transcribed, which is founded upon on the truth, about an important *Gemeinde* matter which occurred in Manitoba.

Many have perceived it as good if this would be put into print, and wanted to see this done. It is our wish that we would not offend anyone thereby, but only to remind ourselves how strong the enemy already was in that time--[strong enough] to bring the *Gemeinde* into confusion.

The following writing is transcribed from an old letter (which is established on the truth) regarding a serious *Gemeinde* matter that occurred in its own time in Manitoba, Canada, and should be considered as instructive even today. Because in the present time we are again propelled much further into the danger of the tempter, so that he had not only identified the best of the flock, but knew how to initiate a schism among the church leaders, or it was allowed to happen while all of us were not watching, as it is written: “Watch and pray, so that you do not come into the time of trial” [Mt.26:41].

Indeed, how much closer are we now to the end of the world, and thereby also have drawn nearer to the desolation, so that for many it might well bring fruitful results to think back into the bygone times in order to compare how much gain that same spirit has found and still finds daily in the *Gemeinde* in our time and continues to find every day. For they had all fallen asleep, the ten virgins, but only five had oil! If only we could be found to be as the five wise virgins.

and washes the feet of the saints, and is an earnest and productive spirit in all his deeds. This danger was far more frightful than the first” (*Leaders*, page 139).

But here too, truth and order was eventually restored “Whereupon God performed mighty wonders amongst us. [and] The foolish hearts were smitten so mightily that they were compelled to confess their great shame” (See Plett, *Saints and Sinners* (Steinbach, 1999), pages 78-9).

Although it appears on the surface that the evil plan of Satan circa 1885 to subvert the *Reinländer Gemeinde* was foiled, he probably still chocked it up as a victory. By getting one group of Christians to attack another, he weakened their resources, forcing those who still followed the Saviour to defend themselves instead of helping others in need.

What a tragedy it would have been for the Church of God in Manitoba had Johann Wiebe and his *Reinländer Gemeinde* succumbed and fallen victim to this insidious attack.

Introduction to “Wrestling Satan, circa 1885,” by editor Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

The Anti-Christ.

So then, this writing was occasioned in its time under the long-ago deceased Aeltester Johann Wiebe in Rosengart, Manitoba, Canada, because the anti-Christ had set about to prove the poor Gemeinde [1], and foremostly the beloved Aeltester, who was, however, able to ward off [the evil one] by means of earnest prayer and fasting, and whereby the sun of grace allowed itself to appear once again.

For which we should be saying praises and thanksgiving until the present day, and concurrently to pray that our own eyes might be opened in order to see how we find ourselves with our youth and ourselves in this our own time. According to your beloved letter which we have received, I perceive that you would gladly learn to know about the important events which have taken place in our Gemeinde in the times gone by.

So I will inform you about them in as much as I have still retained many things in my memory from my beloved parents, who spoke

“...Satan took it upon himself to...tear away several men...as an angel of God in order to raise them up as God’s prophets.”

of them. Still I cannot report the exact year. To describe everything exactly would make too long a letter. It might possibly also be of benefit for the future generations in the world to follow if they had knowledge of it, at least those who are interested in observing the changes of times, for the times are changeable especially in these [last] days, when everything is readying itself and rushing with winged speed toward the end.

Angel of Light.

Now I wish to begin to report on the significant events which came to pass in those days, according to my own knowledge. It happened in the time of the previous century, apparently during the eighties, after it had been allowed him, that Satan took it upon himself to prepare [fashion] or tear away several men to whom he revealed himself as an angel of God in order to raise them up as God’s prophets. These men then came forward publicly in the name of God before the Gemeinde assemblies in the house of prayer in Reinland.

With unsuitable gesticulations and also with shrieking they called out to congregation: “Repent, make amends and give God the glory, and convert yourselves, because the end of the world has drawn near, do not delay, [2] hurry therefore, for you have only a little time left”

Indeed, they repeated this clamour with shouting voices until the assembly became afraid and anxious. Many became fearful and anguished, awoken thereby from their sinful slumber and converted.

Even the Aeltester Johann Wiebe was deeply shaken into the innermost conceptions of his heart by this emergence, whereby he himself in

the beginning came to the sense that they were true prophets who were to urgently admonish the community to repent, to make amends and to arouse themselves from their sinful slumber, and ready themselves and set out to meet the Saviour, that they might be made worthy to stand before the Son of Man when He would burst forth for the judgement of the world.

The Aeltester pointed many into that direction that they should pay heed to these men and see how urgently they were preaching. Indeed they were gifted with talents and wisdom, so that a normal preacher would never have been able to emulate them.

Ohm Funk, Neuenburg.

But their essence constituted itself in a fleshly form, indeed, to such a degree of excess, until they presumed to grasp at the Aeltester [by usurping] his office. In order to carry this out, Ohm Funk from Neuenburg, who was most advantaged of the three, consented to direct this matter, and thus it happened that he came into conflict with his brother to such a degree that there were hard feelings between them, on account of an exchange of words and perhaps because of other dealings as well. (I have this by hear-say only.)

Funk now notified this Friesen, that in that case he stood in a full ban, and that he should not take it upon himself to enter the church in Reinland. Indeed, if he did so he would immediately fall down instantly dead.

These words struck Friesen’s heart so deeply he set his entire trust in them. This was a difficult situation for the beloved man that he was so rigorously constrained. As I have understood, Mr. Funk had instructed him so strictly that he was not even to leave his house to go to the neighbours for anything. [3] This was doubly hard for Friesen. He would gladly have driven after the Aeltester, but could not risk it, because he had been told so strictly that he was not to leave his house.

But the neighbours took note, for the entire situation did seem very suspicious to them, because they had never yet heard of such severity. They began to go over to his house to visit him. He, however, wanted to hide himself from them, since it was also forbidden to him to have communication with anybody. But they addressed him verbally until the point that they could enter into a conversation with him and he himself could realize it was not quite that dangerous, as he did not experience anything untoward [on account of it].

Finally they suggested to him that he should go to see the Aeltester. However he was afraid to contravene the order by leaving his house. As I have understood it, [some] neighbours persuaded him and drove with him to the Aeltester. This was, by Funk’s evaluation, a daring endeavour. Of necessity he [Friesen] had overstepped [his ban], and yet, nothing bad happened to him, and this gave him more courage.

The Aeltester.

When they came to the Aeltester and presented the whole situation to him, the Aeltester

was deeply struck, since he knew of little to say about it.

He may well have thought, “Am I now discarded of God? Has He selected another instead of me and appointed him into the office?”

They had come to receive judgement and clarity on this difficult matter, but he could not give them or tell them any clear pronouncement. He allowed the same to stand untouched, just as Funk had made judgement on Friesen. Consequently they had to return home with disappointed and uncontented hearts.

It is hardly imaginable how devastated the beloved Aeltester must have been. Now he stood as before a mountain he could not climb, nor could he see a detour to circumvent it nor even a trail by which he could climb over it; [like standing before] a deep valley where one perceives only darkness, and nowhere a light [4] to be found which could bring some hope for him, [which] had become weak in him on account of his having directed the people towards these men, to listen to their teachings. He had taken false steps through this and had occasioned an injury to others. He had thereby strayed from his path, and had stepped off to the side. Since he was now overcast by a dark cloud, he was almost driven mad, [with] fear and anguish of his soul.

Notwithstanding that a number of men now came to him and said they [Funk and colleagues] were false prophets, this work of testing was not yet lifted, since their faith, works, and teachings, or [I should say] their works, were so powerful they held sway over preachers and the Aeltester. Indeed this undertaking needed to be eradicated out by the Holy Spirit, whereby a clear position could be established, striking Satan a mortal blow in order to bring him to silence.

Battling Satan.

This would cost a wrestling and struggling in light and darkness, from out of the spirit of God and against Satan’s spirit, which goes far above and beyond all human reason and wisdom. This also struck deeply in the beloved Aeltester’s heart. Near confusion and fear per-

“This would cost a wrestling and struggling in light and darkness, from out of the spirit of God and against Satan’s spirit...”

meated his soul.

He began to battle and to pray. Satan contended against him with all his power. It appeared as if God had withdrawn His spirit from him, and [as if] for the proving of his faith, God had forsaken him in this cosmic struggle for a few moments, and he had to grapple with Satan alone entirely without Divine support.

The struggle grew severe in that when he was kneeling and lay on the ground, the devil would lift him up from the ground with his might, as if he wanted to shatter him.

At that he also began to cry out insistently in

his soul's fear and peril, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" This reminded him of the soul's distress of our Saviour while He was hanging on the cross and called out the same words in great terror.

Thus he struggled day and night with praying and wrestling in bewildered hope, as I [5] have heard from my beloved father, who visited him often.

One night between Saturday and Sunday, the fighting was at its most severe. Indeed at that time the devil manifested himself free and openly in his terrifying form, and when he drew near unto him with widely-stretched jaws and

"...the devil manifested himself free and openly....with widely-stretched jaws and talons, the fear in his heart was unimaginable."

talons, the fear in his heart was unimaginable.

He could no longer see any hope or alternative whereby to escape and flee from Satan. The thought came to him, "Now God has yielded me up unto Satan, he is taking me alive, along with him into the abyss."

Victory.

Then Funk's countenance instantaneously mirrored a lightning-speed change. And before the devil could grasp him, this confused struggle disappeared from him, he was lifted up therefrom, and the spirit of comfort was again imparted unto his heart, whereby it was rejuvenated from the grievous battle he had withstood. The work of these three men was now determined, whose spirits it was by which they were governed.

The Aeltester had been weakened to such an extent by the struggle that he, with much diminished strength, had almost lost the ability to walk alone.

The following day was Sunday, when the Gemeinde congregated in the Reinland church or house of prayer to attend the worship service.

The Aeltester was also present. I can well imagine about this, that there must have been traces visible on his countenance as evidence of his very deep suffering. He had been significantly changed within one week, so that one would have to believe that he had been through a severe illness. He could not preach the Word because he was too weak.

Restoration.

The three men were also present again, [in order to] take up their mission and work again at the end of the service, and admonish the assembly to repentance.

When they got up to speak, the Aeltester stood up and stationed himself at the podium and warned them that they could not come up and present with all their ritual as previously. He notified them that the entire foundation, of that which they had been doing until now, was ruled by a false spirit. [6] It had presented itself

to them as an angel of light, but it had been sent out by Satan. With that, the Aeltester had, by the power of God, struck Satan at the core and destroyed his work, that he could not complete what he had had in mind, namely, to lead the Gemeinde astray, and to direct it onto false paths, and finally to ruination.

When the men heard these words, it gave them such a jolt, that they almost lost their senses. According to God's word, they were rightly deserving that the ban be imposed by the Gemeinde, but they had already barred [placed] themselves [under the ban]. They confessed freely [and] openly with painful pangs of conscience that they were not worthy of their feet even walking the ground.

Just as previously they had cried out to the people that they should repent and, where it was needed, to make amends and convert themselves to God, now they were crying out for themselves, for grace and mercy. Yes, they had sunk so fully and deeply in bewildered self-denigration, that they did not feel worthy of anyone even praying for them.

Oh, man! Take note of the profound degradation. They went out upon the fields and did not know the distinction between inside and out, nor where to stay. [Thoughts of] working and eating forsook them because of the pain in their souls and burdensome temptations. They could not comprehend how Satan had been able to present himself to them in such a manner, enchanting them like an angel of light, to lead them off the right way in order to blind their

"The Aeltester had been weakened to such an extent by the struggle that he, ...had almost lost the ability to walk alone."

eyes without their noticing.

They could now see all of this clearly, how they had gone beyond their station that they had stepped into those footsteps and had attacked him [Wiebe] in his office, having thereby pushed him aside when they themselves had begun to reign as rulers. Of this mainly Ohm Funk was primarily guilty, who had been drawn along by the devil in his power into this nominally holy work.

Conclusion.

Now I will end [my comments] in this regard, and add some remarks about this difficult circumstance, that are worth giving some attention.

Firstly, I have to note what Aeltester Ohm Johann Wiebe has spoken concerning these men, namely, it is of great importance to observe the same and measure it with the heart, since they were wake-up calls, which find relevance to the near future.

Indeed he himself at his own departure said he was leaving the world: light and darkness are drawn into a cosmic battle with each other. Should the light be victorious, Christendom can endure for a short while longer. But if the dark-

ness gains the victory, Christendom will quickly crumble. Since it is apparent that Christianity has sunken into a spiritual sleep, it is also apparent that Christianity is enveloped by a cloud of darkness, and by that measure the end of the world must follow.

He also said that presently Satan has come as a roaring lion, but in the future he will come in such a form that he will work almost without being noticeable.

There would be much more to write about the spiritual slumber or the enveloping darkness that has encompassed Christianity. But I will conclude with this, in that I will convey it to you, and if it should later come into question, then let it be sufficient to serve for many as a reminder and to inspire an awakening regarding themselves. Indeed, that would be my sincere wish.

This has been written down by the long-ago deceased Aeltester's friends and family, already sometime later. Nonetheless, it remains a richly instructive subject even today for those of whom it speaks. How much more has not the dragon raised himself up much more formidably in our day--in the sense [that he purports to speak] in the name of Christ?

How many of our own today do not stand in that posture and claim that they are more righteous than anyone has ever been previously. They want to overrule regulations, protocol, or even the worship service? [They] meet together secretly with an outlook that is threaded with the spirit of destruction, but has the outside appearance of a will blessed of God, but will not be able to persist in it for long. Because there is a judge who perceives all such things, and will make it as nothing at the day of his coming.[8]

Endnote: Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, has recalled that the booklet "Ancient Events" describing the insurrection in the Old Colony Gemeinde in the mid-1880s, was written by an Ohm Friesen from the Hague-Osler area. Any reader that can shed further light on the authorship of this booklet is asked to contact the editor at Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, 1(204)326-6465.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 19-26.

Editor's Note "Wrestling Satan"

The German title of this account of the Church of God and its victory over Satan, ca. 1885, was "Einige Alte Begebeheiten von Canada, Manitoba." The booklet was sent to me courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R.R. 1, Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, R6W 4A1, descendant and long-time friend of the OK Church.

The title "Wrestling Satan" and section headings and paragraph breaks have been added by the editor. Primary translation by Julia Zacharias, M. A., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The German booklet itself dates this event in the Reinländer Gemeinde simply as taking place "sometime in the 1880s." Consequently the date is referred to as "circa 1885", being the mid-point in the 1880s.

Reinland Village Book, 1889

“Village Account Book for the Village of Reinland, 1889: Dorfs Buch der Dorfschaft Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba, 1889.

Editor's Foreword.

Unlike many other cultures, conservative Mennonite society was fundamentally literate in nature and character. Such a culture informed by the belief that all adherents should read and study Scripture. There was also the necessity of record keeping within a centuries old tradition of land-owning agrarianism, known as the “household economy”.

One of the most specialized aspects of this written culture was found in the “Strassendorf” villages which Mennonites adopted as their own from medieval usages in northern Europe. The functioning of these simple-looking “street” villages required a staggering amount of documentation and record keeping. The village governance imposed a wide array of duties and also reimbursed its residents for numerous tasks carried out for the village society or “Dorfs Gemeindegenschaft”.

The village system was adopted by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) as a paradigm which resonated harmoniously with scriptural mandates regarding “community of sharing” whereby the members of the Church of Christ were to “look unto the necessities of the saints,” Romans 12:13 (See *Saints and Sinners*, pages 267-270).

The village was part of Johann Wiebe's vision of a church community articulated by the teachings of the Gospels and conformed in accordance therewith. It was a vehicle whereby believers could participate in the earthly kingdom of God.

The implementation and continuation of the village system probably was the single most important reason for the rapid material progress of the Reinländer community prior to WWI. According to G. F. Galbraith (*Mennonites in Manitoba* (Morden, 1900), pages 29 and 42), “that about 1885 the Mennonite community began to show up as one of the wealthiest in the Province, and continued to hold a leading position from that time forward.” This prosperity was no doubt something which infuriated jealous neighbours and added to the paranoia of the Anglo-conformity hysteria which swept the Prairie Provinces only a decade later.

The conservative Mennonite writing regime as it related to the “street” village culture was manifested by account books which were maintained in each village. No doubt thousands of these ledger/journal books have gone lost. Fortunately at least part of the record for the capital village of Reinland is still extant and in the possession of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The extracts which follow here provide some interesting examples of how sophisticated the village paradigm had become by the 1880s.

The first document (page 10) is a transcription of a mandate of the Obervorsteher, head of the civil administration. The position was somewhat similar to that of Reeve in the Municipal system in Manitoba, but with a much wider jurisdiction. In Hutterian and conservative Mennonite religious culture, the civil administration was always servient to that of the spiritual governance. The mandate or directive illustrates the fundamentally democratic nature of all aspects of conservative Mennonite culture.

The second document from the Reinland village book (page 11) is an edict by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, calling for the support of an impoverished community in Assiniboia. It vividly demonstrates that a community founded on the teachings of the Gospels will always seek to aid those in need. It explains why I personally would rather have car trouble at the driveway of an Old Kolonier than practically any other denomination of Mennonites.

Johann Wiebe's 1889 exhortation to his Gemeinde provides an interesting view of conservative Mennonite culture at its best, their willingness to assist others in need without trying to impose their own religious ethos as a condition of that aid, a mark of genuine Christian piety.

According to the book by Gerhard P. Bassler, *The German-Canadians 1750-1937* (St. John's, 1986), page 228, the Ebenezer Gemeinde was founded north of Yorkton in 1887 mainly by German Baptists from Russia (Vohlynia, Volga district). By 1889 there were about 100 families. In 1893 they established the adjoining Langenau community, north of the Whitesand River. Later the Ebenezer community prospered and became known for its prosperity.

Wiebe's 1889 exhortation to assist the poverty stricken Ebenzers is also heart wrenching considering that at the same time they are helping the German Baptists, the Reinländer people themselves were beset by a hodge-podge of missionaries attempting to seduce them away from their Gospel-centric teachings. Had Aeltester Johann Wiebe not been genuinely led by the Holy Spirit and firmly grounded on the Gospel it would have been easy for him to spurn all outsiders and concentrate his community's resources on defending itself against alien religious cultures.

Interesting also is the speculation that the process of providing aid to the Ebenzers may have heralded the availability of land in the area, leading to the establishment of the highly successful Hague-Osler Reserve shortly thereafter by the astute Old Koloniers.

Reinland December, 1889.

“The village Vorsteher (mayors) are hereby instructed in writing that in the villages where there are vacancies in Vorsteher or Beisitzer (executive community members), an election shall be held and the electoral list is to be submitted to my office by the 21st of this month.

“The term of the Colony accountant Jakob Wiebe has expired. Therefore one shall be elected for a two year term. The electors list shall be submitted by the 21st of this month.

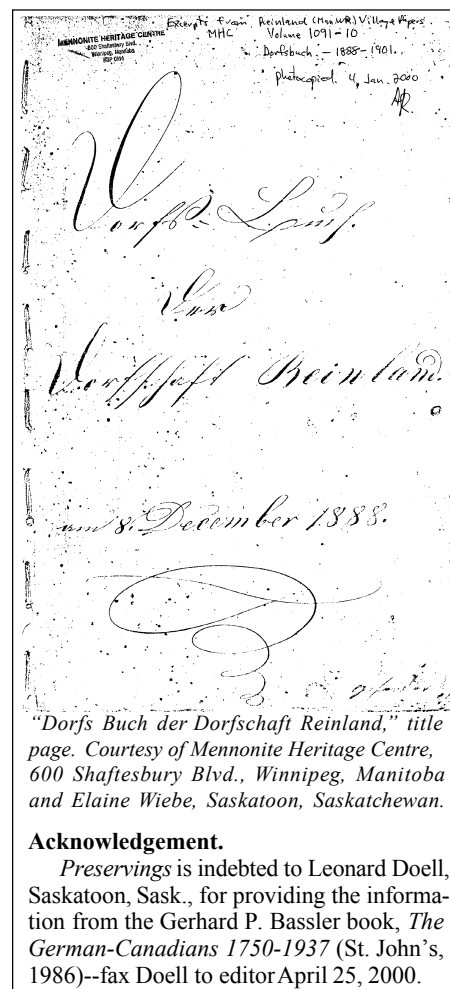
“Upon the receipt of this [mandate], the village books shall promptly be brought to me, in order that everything will be entered therein.

“The Vorsteher shall communicate with the debtors to pay their debt. They shall also collect the \$5.00 from the farms which are outside of the village, and bring the same to my office by the 21st of this month.”

“Vorsteher Franz Froese”

Directive.

The grace of our compassionate God and the love of Jesus Christ is firstly wished unto all of you from me, weak and humble servant, through Jesus Christ. Amen. Beloved and redeemed



“Dorfs Buch der Dorfschaft Reinland,” title page. Courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba and Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Acknowledgement.

Preservings is indebted to Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Sask., for providing the information from the Gerhard P. Bassler book, *The German-Canadians 1750-1937* (St. John's, 1986)--fax Doell to editor April 25, 2000.



Franz Froese (1877-1937) served as Obervorsteher of the Reinländer community from 1919-1925. He was the son of Franz Froese (1845-1913), Obervorsteher from 1887-1908, being the author of the 1889 instruction. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland, page 40. Franz Froese Sr. is credited with organizing "the successful founding of the new 'colonies' in the West by negotiating with Ottawa the land grants and settlement condition for the Hague-Osler Reserve in 1894 and the Swift Current Reserve in 1904," John Dyck, editor, 1880 Village Census, page 394-5. Franz Froese (1877-1937) was the son-in-law of delegate Klaas Heide.

through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Two persons from the Ebenezer Colony, Assiniboia, Fr. Golling and Wilhelm Grunert, have expressed themselves to me and brother Franz Froese, in writing and well as verbally. They have declared their miserable circumstances and need and that they are there 17 families in their settlement who are severely impoverished. They are in need of bread and have only very little to eat. If help does not arrive soon it will not be very long before they will have to suffer from hunger.

They have earnestly beseeched us to present their lamentable circumstance to the members of our Gemeinde and to come to their aid with help and advise so that they would not have to suffer hunger or might actually even freeze.

Whosoever helps the poor, is loved of the Lord. If we come to the aid of the poor, the beloved God will help us again also. Be compassionate just as our Lord in heaven is compassionate. God loves a willing heart and a cheerful giver.

And since all goodness comes from God and through Him, how then can a Christian heart refrain from coming to the aid of suffering people in need, as one who is merely placed as a steward thereof, and does not wish to be so commanded by God, rather to do so as a poor anguished, repentant and through the blood of Jesus redeemed sinner, who wishes to be obedient in all things which are pleasing unto God and to manifest the same willingly, to hope for eternal salva-



The Wirtschaft of Obervorsteher Franz Froese in the village of Reinland. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland, page 19.

tion through the propitiation of Jesus.

Oh my beloved brethren, I say, let us truly reflect on this. From your beloved brother, "Johan Wiebe, Rosengart, the 24 December, 1889, Aeltester of the Gemeinde at Reinland"

Our best consideration is that whoever is possessed of a sympathetic heart, and has wheat or money to give, should bring it to the village Vorsteher as soon as possible. The wheat shall be sold and the money brought to the Obervorsteher, who will send it to them immediately upon receipt.

For which [I] have subscribed, "Obervorsteher Franz Froese"

Directive:

The village councils are hereby informed that they can pick up the village books immediately upon the receipt of this notice. They shall check to ensure that everything is entered correctly. Where an error is found, they shall bring in the book so that it can be corrected.

Secondly, the Colony has engaged a colonist for four months to look after the aged Peter Wiens in Reinland. His remuneration is \$10.00 which the Gemeinde shall pay to him for looking after Wiens during the night.

The Vorsteher are to make a free will inquiry for money, how much each one wishes to contribute for this purpose, and to bring the gathered money to me in order that I can pay the man his wages.

Thirdly, since the term of service of the Waisenvorsteher Gerhard Neufeld has expired, and wishes to be released from this office, and also writes that he is no longer able to serve the office, and his family suffers thereby, unless he would receive double the [normal] compensa-

Preservings is indebted to Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who obtained copies of pages 10 and 11 of the "Reinland village book" from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg. The first three items in this article are from this source. These directives were translated by D. Plett, Steinbach. The directives dated September 4, 1899, and September 14, 1900, are courtesy of and translated by historian Leonard Doell, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

tion. He also opines that there are many who are capable of serving the office and that it is not necessary that double remuneration be paid by the Gemeinde. Also to be elected for the years 1890-1891-1892.

Directive: Reinland Sept. 4, 1899.

The village leaders are notified to see to it that the fire guards will be made and kept in good order. Also threshing is not to be done too close to the village or to the fire guards.

2) Franz Gunter. Schonwiese, and Aron Schroeder, Gnadenthal, want to sell their farms. Those interested can go and see them.

A woman's coat has been found. The owner can come and get it.

"Franz Froese" [Vorsteher]

The peace of God and the love of Jesus Christ be with you all of whom we have everything good. To him be honour, glory and praise and thanksgiving forever. Amen. Beloved brethren in the Lord. Since I have received a letter from the west, from brother Peter Klassen who is asking the whole church for help to build a meeting house or house of prayer in order to teach and to instruct everyone according to God's word, and because they do not have money and this had to be paid for and the people are mostly poor and

Editor's Note:

Johann Wiebe - Death Date.

The issue of the correct death date of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) has now been resolved.

The death information recorded at the R. M. of Reinland shows that Johann Wiebe died February 21, 1905, at the age of 67 years, 10 months and 28 days. The death was due to cancer from which he had suffered for four months. The name of the attending physician was Dr. McKenly, and the person reporting the death was Rev. Jakob Wiens, Rosengart, March 15, 1905. The information from the R. M. of Reinland, death records, is courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Manitoba.

This information in the death records is also consistent with the death date of February 21, 1905, recorded in the obituary attached to the booklet, "1904, von Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba," published by Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck, 1958.



Waisenvorsteher Peter Neufeld. Photo courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 40. The Waisenvorordnung provided regulation for the administration of estates and the management of trust funds for widows, orphans and the handicapped. It provided safeguards protecting the rights of the dispossessed and the underprivileged. The Waisenvorsteher managed and supervised a sophisticated system which attempted nothing less than to implement the principles of the Gospels in the everyday lives of the community members.

the harvest was poor, as they write, damaged by frost and disease.

Therefore we ask all of you, dear brothers, on our part, be charitable and compassionate and open your hands and give gladly for much has been given to us again this year by our merciful God and Father, albeit it varied but to our best.

Therefore God likes to have cheerful givers and God loves cheerful givers. Cor. 9,7. And who would not want to be loved by God. Therefore it is said: Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. Luke 6.7. Therefore, dear



The interior of the worship house at Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Conservative Mennonites believed that aesthetics which reflected simplicity manifested the greater beauty and honoured their Saviour born in a humble stable. The construction of the Gnadenfeld worship house was similar to that of the one in Reinland, built in 1876, the first Mennonite worship house in western Canada. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 102.

brothers, I ask you, those who sow plentifully shall reap plentifully, for if someone is willing that is pleasing, according to what he has, not what he has not, 2 Cho. 8:12 And if God loves cheerful givers who give to those who are needy, will he then not love cheerful givers who give for a house of prayer where his name, his honour, his kingdom is proclaimed and a house is built for his honour?

Therefore remember the word of the Lord Jesus when he said: It is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts 20:35. And if giving is more blessed than to receive, should we be slow to give? O God, lead our hearts and make them willing to give. I am asking all village leaders to make this known to everyone and to bring the donations to our Vorsteher F. Froese as soon as possible.

They plan a building 30 feet wide and 60 feet long. And if there are more donations than needed for the building, we would like to see it used for our last two houses of prayer. About three hundred dollars are still owing.

Please be willing to give. We commend you to God and his word. Grace and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

This is requested and wished by your very feeble and lowly brother Johann Wiebe, and

Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church. Rosengart, September 28, 1899 (1894?)

Directive – Rosengart, Sept. 14, 1900

May God give you much grace, mercy and peace and love. Jude 1:2.

Dearly beloved brethren! Our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ who loves his own so much and wantsthem to walk in truth and to follow him in meekness and humility, said to his disciples when he walked with them on earth: Great is the harvest but few are the labourers. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Matth. 9:37, 38.

And because the harvest or church is large and there are few workers or teachers, therefore the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to ask the Lord of harvest to send workers. And because I have consulted with the teachers, we are agreed, if the church is of the same view, to have an election of teachers and to elect three teachers from our church.

Therefore we all need to pray and ask the Lord to give us such men as teachers who will serve the church with his word and will seek with all their strength to live according to his commandments. May God grant to us poor sinners to give us this grace or the teachers. Lord, may your holy will be done. Amen.

We invite all dear brethren to come to the day which we have chosen, Oct. 2, in the Reinland church at 9 o'clock in the morning, in order to have the election, through prayer and pleading, according to God's holy will and pleasure, as Jesus is telling us. Pray to the Lord of harvest to send workers, teachers, into his harvest. To God be glory and majesty and power and might now and forever. Amen.

I ask you make this known to all brethren and to do this on that day, God willing. Grace and love from Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church and very humble brother Johann Wiebe. Sept. 17, 1900.

Isaak Klassen wants to sell two farms. Reinland, This is to let the village leaders know that Gerhard Goertzen, Chortitz, wants to sell on the 29th of this month through the Waisenamt.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 22-24.



The village street in Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, in the 1940s. This is probably similar to what the village of Reinland must have looked like in the 1880s. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 103.

Epistle to the Gemeinden, 1904

**“Pastoral Letter to the Gemeinden, July 9, 1904,” by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905),
Rosengart, West Reserve, Manitoba, to the Reinländer Gemeinden a Reinland, Manitoba, and Hague Osler, Saskatchewan.**

Editor's Foreword.

In 1904 Aeltester Johann Wiebe was 67 years of age, his body ravaged by time, disease and the strenuous demands of his office. For some 30 years he had successfully shepherded a community of some 4000 souls, the largest Mennonite denomination in western Canada.

During the time of his leadership the Reinländer people had quickly become wealthy, some say they were the wealthiest community in Manitoba.

Almost daily during his three decades of leadership, his neighbours in Rosengart had heard the sounds of Wiebe clicking and gently calling to his horses as he drove off his driveway, in his cutter or buggy, be it in the middle of a January blizzard, or during a hailstorm in summer. He might well be on the way to the furthest reaches of his Reserve to commiserate with a grieving widow, or to listen to a distraught jilted husband, or to reconcile two neighbours in a dispute, or he might be on the way to meet with the Obervorsteher to discuss the many issues which affected his people.

The neighbours were equally used to seeing a steady stream of horse-drawn vehicles and even people by foot who came to the Wiebe home in Rosengart to petition the Aeltester for various needs, be it personal, financial, or spiritual. Sometimes groups from far away such as the Ebenezer in Assiniboia, north of Yorkton, came to the Wiebe home to petition for material aid and assistance.

Indeed, it is astounding to reflect that in the 125 year history of the Old Kolony Church, Johann Wiebe had served as the Aeltester for over 30. This record of service is not matched by very many.

By way of comparison, the Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), Jansen, Nebraska, comes to mind, who served for 46 years. But then, Friesen's Gemeinde would not survive the onslaughts of Fundamentalist missionaries seeking to subvert his parishioners away from their Gospel-centric faith.

The OK Gemeinde, much to Wiebe's credit, would survive such attacks, even though it was embattled and beleaguered by alien religious cultures during much of its history.

The 1904 "Epistle to the Gemeinden," is reminiscent of the "Closing admonition, 1849" of another great conservative, KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, Imperial Russia (*Leaders*, pages 241-3). The writing of such epistles by conservative Mennonite leaders, was of itself a genuine act of emulating the apostles in New Testament times.

How refreshing to read the epistles of these great men of God as they write about discipling and growing deeper in the Godly virtues. What

"Epistle to the Gemeinden, 1904.

The following is a letter written by Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, the 9th of July 1904.

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love, be with all of you, [2 John 1:3]. Amen.

Before I write further, I will say with the poet:[1]

"Ensure, O Lord, if I must part
Gieb O herr wenn ich soll Scheiden

a wonderful contrast to the shallow and superficial emphasis of other religious cultures such as American Revivalism on being born again and the continual enjoyment thereof, the concerns of novices in the kingdom of God. It is clear that Johann Wiebe and his Reinländer Gemeinde were a quantum leap beyond such juvenile pursuits.

Ravaged by cancer, the highly esteemed Aeltester endured great pain as he carried out the last duties of his office.

One can well imagine a July morning in 1904.

Johann Wiebe sitting by his writing desk in the Rosengart home, a table he himself had built with his own hands (see Johann Wiebe table article). He was composing what would be his last address to his beloved Gemeinde, the bride of Christ.

The sun was shining through the window, its golden rays splashed across his face. His countenance was framed with its luminous light.

The aged and weary Aeltester reflected on the thoughts he wished to leave with his parishioners.

He exhorted them to follow the way of the Cross; to glorify God with their life and thoughts: "The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace and patience, gentleness and purity."

He encouraged his parishioners to conform their lives and community to the word of God. "Punish them strictly so that they might be healthy in faith." The Saviour's teaching of peace must permeate all endeavours. He admonished them to disown the world with all its fleshly lusts and to walk worthily as it pleases the Lord.

Johann Wiebe's closing sentiment to his Gemeinde was: "I say once more with John: 'I have no greater joy than this, that I hear or behold our brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde walking in the truth,'" [3 Jn 1:4].

What a touching closing view of one of the most charismatic leaders in Mennonite history. Johann Wiebe's career in the service of the Church of God is inspiring and uplifting.

What a testimony to the leading hand of God in history and to the redemptive power of the resurrection.

From the earth according to your word
Von der Erd nach deinem Wort,

That I might, indeed with joy,
Das ich moege recht mit Freuden,
Enter through the gate of life.

Eingehn durch die lebenspfort.

Jesus, you yourself are the door,

Jesu du bist selbst die Thuer,

Beloved, direct me through yourself.

Liebster, mich durch dich einfuehr.

But Lord, should I still live

Aber Herr soll ich noch leben,

For a while on the earth,

Einer Zeit auf dieser Erd,

Do not let me separate from you,

Lasz mich doch von dir nichts scheiden,

And more than that--with the small flock

Vielmehr mit der kleinen Herd

Be patient, pray, struggle, wrestle

Dulden, Beten, Kaempfen, Ringen,

And in this way propel [them] toward heaven.

Und also zum Himmel dringen.

Finally, Lord, if I must part

Endlich Herr wenn ich soll scheiden,

From the earth, [at a] determined time,

Von der Erd Bestimmte zeit,

Let it happen with joy

Lasz es doch geschehn mit Freuden,

And direct me into blessedness,

Und fuehr mich zur seeligkeit.

Where I can take up your praising

Wo ich mag dein Lob vermehren,

With the sweetest angel choirs. Amen.

Mit den Liebsten Engelchoeren: Amen.

Pastoral Epistle.

I come to you as a guest, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, with this writing. John says unto his own--those who were entrusted unto him, those whom he had taught so much, and to those who were so near unto his heart: "I have no greater joy than this, that I hear that my chil-

"Allow me, O my God,...to see
and hear my children, the
Gemeinde entrusted unto me, walk
in the truth, and to love, revere,
and praise you our God above all
else,..."

dren are walking in truth." 3 John 1:4. Amen, you beloved God and father.

That is indeed a joy above all joys. Allow me, O my God, to also become a partaker in this precious happiness, and to see and hear my children, the Gemeinde entrusted unto me, walk in the truth, and to love, revere, and praise you our God above all else; and to the contrary, disowning the [2] world with all its fleshly lusts. For the love of the Father is not in the one who loves the world, 1 John 2:15. Therefore, let us



Building the first Old Kolony school in the village of Blumenort on the West Reserve. The village was one of the very first to be built in that area in 1875. Photo and caption courtesy of Man. Men. Memories 1874-1974 (Altona, 1974), page 26.

love him, for he first loved us, 1 John 4:19, and gave his life for us as a sacrifice, and redeemed us from this present evil world, in accordance with the will of God our Father.

Therefore with God's help, [may we, you there] in the west, as well as us here, all together want to walk worthily as it pleases the Lord, and to live, appreciate and meditate upon this time which God has granted unto us to live, as to why God has allowed us to be born into this earth; [certainly] not in order to become rich, lordly, or to be acclaimed in this world.

Oh no! Rather [we are] to work out our eternal salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12, and to seek firstly the kingdom of God. Indeed, consider it rightly my beloved brothers and sisters, man is not so much created for the short life in this world, but much more for the eternal life to come.

On account of the sin he has committed, man came into this world. However, because Adam heard about the promised serpent-destroyer or Saviour, he rejoiced through that same one, namely Jesus Christ, to be freed again, and to again be brought unto eternal rest and joy after this life. Yes, beloved friends, this serpent-destroyer and Saviour promised of God came into this wearying world when the time was fulfilled for us poor sinners [3] in order to make reconciliation for us from sin, indeed, from eternal death, and to again make us co-inheritors of eternal life.

My beloved friends, if we wish to be partakers of this Saviour so lovingly given to us by God, this Deliverer, we must also strive in all things to walk in His ways and according to His commandments. Just as he himself says, "Whosoever would be my servant will deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me," Luke 9:23[nLB]. "And where I am, there my servant should also be," John 12:16 [should read 12:26].

To deny oneself, however, does not mean to love oneself or the world, or to be conformed to the world, but to break one's own will, and not to live any longer according to the flesh, rather according to the spirit, Romans 8:4. Verse 6 states similarly, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, and to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace." Paul explains it even more clearly

and says,[nLB] "To set the mind on the flesh is to be at enmity with God, since that mind is not subject to God's spirit--of course, it cannot be. For if you live by the flesh you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live," [from Rom. 8].

So understand my beloved ones, if by the spirit we put to death the flesh, [4] then we shall live. So being conformed to the world and being a friend of the world must be resisted and denied, if it is not to be the eternal death. James straightforwardly calls these "adulterers," James 4:4 and Romans 12:2.

Behold, this deliverer Jesus Christ, who was given to us by God as a highly expensive gift, left the throne of His splendour out of free and pure love for us, and came to us in this wearying world, in order to reconcile us again with His heavenly Father, indeed, even to give His blood and life for us and to become an offering for sin, and to satisfy God, His heavenly Father, and to reconcile the fallen humanity with God, yes, to make them children and fellow inheritors of eternal life.

"Behold, this deliverer Jesus Christ...came to us in this wearying world, in order to reconcile us again with His heavenly Father...."

Behold and comprehend, dear brothers and sisters, how much indeed Christ has done for us. He did not give gold or silver for us nor some otherwise large possession. O no, fallen humanity could not have been helped by that or atoned for by it. Instead Jesus had to give His blood and life for man, so that he could be helped. Behold, that is how our beloved Saviour made our purchase, dearly and at great cost, 1 Corinthians 6:20.

For this reason, we should glorify God with our body and spirit, which are God's. And if we should praise God with body and spirit, and He, who, acting in lowliness and [5] humility, has said, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls," [Mt.11:29]. How can we then be conformed to

the world and adorn ourselves splendidly contrary to his teaching and commandments? After all, Christ says: "Would you like to see a person in soft clothes? Look, those that live in soft clothing and luxury are in kingly courts," [nLB] Luke 7:25. He does not say here "among his disciples."

Consider it carefully my dear friends--after our release-purchase, and after we have surrendered ourselves unto God, we no longer belong to ourselves, rather to the one who bought us, namely Jesus, to whom we belong through the redemption in order that we would not anew, like Eve, allow ourselves be led astray by the lying enemy, but that we consider the one that says that everything comes out of the heart: divorce, prostitution, murder, robbery, villainy, blasphemy, arrogance, and foolishness, Mark 7:21[22][nLB].

For beyond that, there is no other sacrifice available for our sins. Nor is there salvation in any other, nor is there any other salvation, nor is there any other name given unto humanity by which they might be saved, but only through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear ones, aged and young, do allow [6] following Christ and obedience to be for you a truly earnest [pursuit]. Because He himself says that not everyone who says unto him "Lord, Lord," will enter into the kingdom of God, but rather those who do the will of His father in heaven, Matt. 7:21.

These will be recognizable by their fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and patience, gentleness and purity. Those who belong to Christ crucify their flesh along with its lusts and desires, Gal.5:22 [,24]. Those who do not belong to Christ, they do it not--for they are still enemies of those who do. Or those who, as watchkeepers, are responsible to warn such people; in addition they must bear and endure their mockery for so doing.

Consider, my beloved ones, there are after all only two paths through this world, of which the Lord Jesus says, "The gate is broad, and the path is wide which leadeth unto condemnation, and there are many who walk in it, but the gate is small, and the path is narrow that leadeth unto life, and those that find it are few," Matt. 7:13,14 [not LB]. Oh, how different, indeed, are these two paths, the one unto the eternal life and eter-



The first Old Kolony homes in the village of Blumenort, West Reserve, west of Gretna, Manitoba. A typical "Strassendorf" scene in the West Reserve, 1875-80. The OKers astutely selected the dryer lands to the west of a line running north from Gretna, north-northwesterly toward Horndean. Photo courtesy of Men. Memories: Settling in Western Canada (Winnipeg, 1977), page 68.

nal joy, but the other unto eternal death and [7] eternal condemnation. "Depart from me, ye evildoers," Matt. 7:23 and 25:41.

Nor do we read even once that those who are conformed to the world, or are a friend of the world, or live by the flesh, all the while continuing to say, "Lord, Lord," can become saved while they continue in that manner. Oh no! Instead Jesus speaks and praises only the poor in heart as saved and says, "for the kingdom of heaven is yours." Likewise [He blesses] those who are suffering, the meek, those that hunger for truth and forgiveness of sins, the merciful, those with a pure heart, and the peacemakers who seek and love peace, and not those who are the enemies of the teachers who have been sent of God to counsel them to forsake the wide road.

"Likewise [He blesses] those who are suffering, the meek, those that hunger for truth and forgiveness of sins...."

Yes, those who are hated and persecuted for righteousness sake, and of whom are spoken all manner of evil by means of lies, be joyful and content. You will be richly recompensed in heaven. For in like manner, they persecuted the prophets before you [nLB], says Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 5 in his Sermon on the Mount. He spoke also to his disciples, "You are the salt of the world. If the salt has lost its flavour, what should one salt with? It has become useless from that point on, other than to pour out and let people trample on it. You are the light of the world".

When Jesus says that the disciples and true followers are the light of the world, [8] how can they then be conformed to the world with extravagant clothing, with games and drinking, with driving and going on about with contrivance and airs, with misguided sitting and standing and walking, with embellishments on houses, inside and out, and so on? And sometimes they actually remain lying drunk, so that

even the world must wonder about it. Can these, according to the word of God, remain standing in the community regardless? Jesus and the apostle speak about how to deal with such people if the Gemeinde does not wish to appropriate the damage to itself or be spoiled thereby Matt. 18:[15-]17; 1 Cor 5:22; 2 Thess. 3:6 and Titus3:10, and so on.

Should we not then earnestly strive not to err from the correct path? For how many detours are found even today, especially by those who would lead us from the right road! Indeed, even our own body and blood is walking unwillingly along this narrow heavenly path, being always inherently predisposed toward walking with the world on the path of pleasure making, and does not wish to live constrained, but much rather to be held in high esteem and honour. Indeed, the devil himself watches intently to see if he cannot lead us astray anew. Even if we have already made a good start, he stalks us just as he did Eve, seeking to seduce us with a crafty lie, to see if he cannot entice us toward a love of the world, being the lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, arrogant living, indeed, [9] [he] still speaks just as he did to Eve.

Should God have said, "This and that desire or pleasure, should you not be able to partake of it and still be saved?" Or, God will not take this one quite so seriously, it will not harm you. These [statements] are perfectly compatible to our corrupted flesh, which it would gladly hear. In this regard, it is predisposed, just like Eve, to

"...there also remains so much work in our present time, because so many churches have acquiesced to this freedom...."

enjoy or partake in the forbidden desire.

Wherefore, there also remains so much work in our present time, because so many churches have acquiesced to this freedom and have treated the command, "Do not be conformed to this world," [Rom.12.2] with disdain, or doubtfully,

or even make the comparison: if the person's appearance is decorated and decked with all manner of adornment, it provides an image of how beautiful and glorious it will be in heaven, meanwhile thereby forgetting completely about the rich man who lived all his days in splendour and with joy, and had also dressed himself in precious linen, but ended up in hell, and poor Lazarus on the other hand, went to heaven. Oh, read it for yourselves in Luke 16:17ff.

Why is it that the luxurious life and clothing in particular, yes, extravagant clothing, are cited if there is nothing wrong with it? For in other respects there is no sinful or immoral life intimated or mentioned. Oh do not allow yourself to err. God will not be mocked. What a person sows, that shall he also reap, Gal.6:7 [nLB]. [10]

Being watchful and praying are essential for this, that indeed the loving God shall stand by us in all temptation, and will equip us with the power of His Holy Spirit, since we all would like to have victory and triumph over our enemies, yes even over our own corrupt body and blood, or the sins that are within us. As Christ says, "Watch and pray, so that ye fall not into temptation." And yet again [he says], "Now be watchful always and pray that you might become worthy to withstand everything which mist needs come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man," Luke 21:31 [nLB].

And indeed, our Gemeinde must not also concede to this freedom, but much rather to punish: I say, if all teaching, and all warning does not help, and [the people] walk and conduct themselves against God and God's Word, and no longer cling unto the word that is sure and which can instruct because He is mighty to admonish through the salvation-yielding teachings, and to discipline the recalcitrant ones.

And further it says, "Punish them strictly, so that they might be healthy in faith. They say that they know God, but in their deeds they deny it," Titus 1:[13,]16. And since our eternal welfare or woe hangs on this, whether we live in the spirit or the flesh, I say once more with John: "I have no greater joy than this, that I hear or behold our brothers and sisters in the Gemeinde

walking in the truth," [3 Jn 1:4][nLB]. And what more could one wish, than that we would all walk [11] in the truth. May God grant this through grace. Amen.

As great as the joy may be over the one that walks in the truth, that even the angels in heaven rejoice over it, it is equally as distressing with regards to those who claim to be disciples of Christ and have committed themselves to be faithful and to remain so until their death, but live by the flesh, sinfully, and conform themselves to the world, and are become enemies of the word of God and His followers, and do not want to live by the evangelical and apostolic ordinances.

The root of pride and the desire for honour and greed for money are very evil roots. And yet these roots, however, are so deeply fixed among us, as if almost no teaching would help against it, and before they would give up pride, they would first leave the church and the divine ordinances. One believes, one hopes that it would decrease, that it would be exterminated and destroyed, but with some, with some there is little fruit to be seen, because out of the bad root is growing a bad tree, and on the bad tree, again bad fruit. And so it is manifestly evident, by the fruit shall ye know the tree, according to Jesus' words, Matthew 7:16.

Oh God, it is a deplorable state which has arisen amongst us, that a number of people intentionally push the love away from themselves, and therewith also God's holy Word. In this way, the faithful Saviour, whom we have covenanted to follow, becomes [12] crucified anew--[He] Who surely meant so well by us, and still means well. Many do not pay any heed unto him.

But He still allows us to call upon Him, His few watchkeepers and God-seeking souls. Yes, one can indeed say few, and those few because we have received from the most gracious government the freedom [to live] according to our evangelical faith. [We] also want to live out that very faith according to the word of God, and want to cling firmly thereto. [There are] those that are our enemies, who would gladly cause difficulties for us with our most gracious government, [and would have done so] if the government had not had sympathy with us. But God be praised and thanks unto the government many times over, which has allowed us to live out our faith, when we actually practice it.

For that reason, some were so difficult toward the watchkeepers sent by God, because the beloved God directed them so grievously unto His word, to abide by the same as a governing standard and law upon danger of losing their salvation, and as a good many of their fellow Gemeinde members have provided assistance as well, and because the watchkeepers were not afraid to bring the truth to light, even though in fear and trembling.

“...the beloved God directed them so grievously unto His word, to abide by the same as a governing standard and law...”

[The light] which had already grown quite dim, and could only produce a small glimmer of light, and only with great difficulty--difficulty--could shine through, and only then in those who were willing and had prayed much unto God, yes, that God might wish or want to give [us] His grace for that end, that we might be able to teach according to [God's] holy Word [13] and will. [This was] no longer given very much attention in Russia in the Gemeinde, and we ourselves were not free from this situation, that we oppressed and afflicted each other, and exercised force. And for those for whom this was not enough, there was slander, and reviling, mockery, and scolding.

Instead this violence--about which Jesus says, it should not be thus among you, Mk.10:42 [43]-was so deeply ingrained in the Gemeinde in Russia that on account of it men taught by God were discharged from their village offices, among whom was also my father, now resting in God. And not that alone, but three teachers [ministers], Jacob Dyck, who was yet to become Aeltester, and Jacob Wiens, and Franz Wiens--who are all resting in eternity, and hopefully in the blessed eternity--in the Chortitzer Gemeinde had to do penance labour in the forest because they did not paint their houses and fences.

And all this came about through men from the Gemeinde who had been given offices according to the worldly fashion, or put another way, these were brothers from the Gemeinde that exercised this power. And further, among the Molotschna Gemeinden, an Aeltester was dismissed, and another was actually exiled from the country. Should this not move us and make us alert to be vigilant in God's holy Word, and to strive to live in accordance thereto with all our might? And not to allow this paradigm to have the mastery amongst us [14] but to ward off all injustice with God's Word, and with all in earnestness to teach and exhort, and to [set them] out of our midst when it is necessary to do so.

Or as Jesus teaches and says, “If they absolutely refuse to follow or listen from one or two, consider them to be as Gentiles and tax-collectors,” Matt. 18:17 [paraphrase]. Indeed it is a command of Jesus and His apostles, and Jesus reproached the Pharisees a great deal over this, saying: “You hypocrites! You leave out the most difficult part of the law.”

“You hypocrites! You leave out the most difficult part of the law. ...Jesus calls it justice, mercy, and faith.”

What is the most difficult? Jesus calls it justice, mercy, and faith. These things one should do without omitting the other, Matt. 23:23. Luke calls it the love of God, Luke 11:42. The world, however, calls it a hateful thing.

I bid you my beloved brothers in the ministry and sisters, forgive me that this is written, instead of being spoken orally in person. But it has been done so for no other reason than to make us all well aware of what we have al-

ready--or I, as an aged man, have already--experienced, and that which we may yet experience, and what a Gemeinde can experience if they transgress the covenant and do not remain constant in the teachings of Christ: they become like the children of Israel, who could not stand up to their enemies, Josh. 7:11, 12.

[15] We have ourselves experienced in our own churches that which we are taught by [the example of] Israel. “For how can a house stand, that is divided against itself?” says Jesus, Mk. 3:25.

Ah! May God grant us the power to withstand all wrong doing, to walk in the truth, and to forsake all unrighteousness. My soul has often been more fearful and anxious than I can say. And indeed for the reason that we were all so weak, and yet in weakness could still see by the grace of God that the house of God had to endure many severe blows, not only from the outside, but also from the inside.

Oh brothers, brothers, arm yourselves, since the words of Paul are true, that to practice the word or the ministry of the New Testament is not a service to the letter, but a service to the spirit, 2 Cor. 3:6.

“...the word or the ministry of the New Testament is not a service to the letter, but a service to the spirit, 2 Cor. 3:6.”

With that, I would like to come to a close, and have answered both of your letters, namely Johann Wall and Julius Wiebe, and rather than in person, have shared my opinions and reasons with you by writing, since I am very weak right now and need to lie down.

Good bye, [I] commit you unto God, [from] you weakly and frail Aeltester, Johann Wiebe.

With greetings to all. May the grace and love of Jesus be with you all. Amen. [16]

For the Honourable Aeltester Johann Wiebe:

Shepherd, are you leaving the lambs,
Hirte, Gehst du von den Laemmern,
You, the father of the children?
Vater von den Kindern Du?
Is it time for the night to dim around you?
Soll di nacht dich nun Umdaemmern?
Into the deep grave's rest?
In der tiefen Grabes Ruh?
Yes, the Lord has spoken,
Ja der Herr hat es Gesprochen
And now your heart is broken.
Und dein Herz ist nun Gebrochen.
Beloved, descend in peace
Liebster Sinke hin in Frieden
After the harsh pilgrim's journey,
Nach dem Herben Pilgerlauf,
Arise, undivided from the Saviour,
Steh vom Heiland ungeschieden
Finally at the day of grace.
Einst am Tag der Gnaden Auf.
And then call out with a sweet cry,
Und dann Ruf mit Sueszem Schalle,

Here are all your lambs.
Hier sind deine LaemmerAlle.

On February 21, 1905, at 5 a. m. the Aeltester of the Reinland Mennonite Church, the Honourable Johann Wiebe, went to his final rest. What had been long feared and anticipated had now occurred. The large Gemeinde was deprived of its shepherd, who had cared for it with such great faithfulness. And as the paled one was delivered into the cool lap of mother earth on the following Saturday, the countless guests, arriving from near and far, made best manifest what the deceased one had showed his congregation.

His brother in ministry the Honourable Jacob Wiens from Saskatchewan spoke the funeral sermon on behalf of the deceased. Blessed are the dead who have died in the Lord from henceforth, indeed, for the spirit affirms that they are resting from their labours, [17] since their deeds survive them.

A tired pilgrim, weary and worn from the tiring struggles of life has laid down his walking stick, at the call of his Lord and master. [He has] left the work in the vineyard of the Lord, in order to bring praise and honour to his Creator in the sanctuary above for all eternity. He who possessed constant love toward all, and who welcomed all with friendly love, is now gone into a better world by means of death.

But concerning those of us crying here, yes, bitterly crying, [we ought to know that] he is not to be pitied, because eternal blessedness, and heavenly happiness are the reward of all that go home by faith. [This] is now also his reward. We would gladly wish for him the rest and also the peace that he, friend of all and father through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, has entered.

More than 29 years ago now, people of a similar mindset gathered around him, and he guided them in full faith in God's gracious assistance and protection out of Russia's fruitful steppes, the fondly-enjoyed home, and over into Manitoba's blessed meadows. We, though pioneers of the endless prairie, have gained well-being and wealth here, thanks to the goodness of heaven. Now he has arrived at the goal, at the Canaan above with the Lord and master, in whose service he grew aged. [18]

The icy hand of death has closed the faithful eye; the mouth is now shut that had a friendly word of love and of comfort for each one, and that so, so often called out to his congregation as a holy representative, "Make amends." Now may it also be for him that the teachers will shine like the light of heaven, and those that have guided so many in righteousness, appear like stars always and forever. May his work and conviction live on among us for a long time, and become our source of strength for struggling mightily against sin and eagerly emulating everything good.

Indeed it is by active love that the master will one day recognize love, and [determine] who can become a part of his reign, and who is

allowed the authority to participate by grace, to sit as a guest at the great table of the eternal and perfect hall.

Begin the last journey
Tritt an die Letzte Reise,
You death-weary dust.
Du Todesmueder Staub.
Because of your praise of God
Zu deines Gottes Preise
You will rob the grave;
Wirst du des Grabes Raub;
There you will rest eternally
Dort Wirst du Ewig Ruhen,
Through the sovereignty of God,
Durch Gottes Meisterschaft,
There your heart will shine
Da wird dein Herz ergluen
In unending power of love.
In Ewger Liebeskraft.

Put into print by Prediger Heinrich A. Dyck, 1953. [19]

Poetic Eulogy by Wm. Hespeler.

By Mr. Hespeler.
To Bishop Johan Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba.
With reverence to him:

On this copperplate
Aus diesem Kupferblat
You can indeed see better,
Kanst du Zwar besser sehen,
of what sort of appearance
Von was fuer Angesicht,
Menno would have been.
Der Menno sei gewesen,
But because you would like
Dafern du aber willst
to see his spiritual gifts,
Seins Geistes gaben sehen,
you must without bias,
So must do Unparteisich,
go to his writings.
In seinen Schriften gehen.
There you will doubtless
Da wirst du Zweifelfrei
notice the finger of God,
Den Finger gottes Merken,
who loved this worthy man,
Der diesen werten Mann
in order to strengthen [him]
Beliebet so zu Staerken
and mightily support [him].
Und Kraeftig beizustehn.
He was a faithful servant
Er war ein Treuer Knecht,
of his Lord's work
Am werke seines Herrn
and lived truly and rightly.:
Und Lebte Schlecht und Recht.:
Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 25-29.

A Table Made By Johann Wiebe

"A Table Made By Johann Wiebe",
written and submitted by R. Dale Keeler,
Box 41, Vanscoy, Saskatchewan

Introduction.

An old table my wife Betty Ann (Wall) and I purchased from her Aunt, Mrs. Mary (Wiebe) Thiessen, from Warman, Saskatchewan, has a more significant history than we could have ever realized.

We were told it was about 100 years old and had been made by my wife's great-great-grandfather, a Mennonite Minister in Manitoba.

We had no further information of who this Elder Wiebe was until we were recently contacted by Elaine Wiebe who is compiling a history of the Wiebe family and its descendants with special attention given to Johann Wiebe.

More information has come to us through a publication called *Preservings*, a Magazine/ Journal of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. We have come to recognize the apparent historical value of this artifact and I will give a brief history and description of the table.

Historical Background

In 1875 Aeltester Johann Wiebe and a large number of his followers left Russia and travelled to Canada to settle in Manitoba in an area that came to be known as the West Reserve.

Notwithstanding the tremendous responsibility that fell on the shoulders of Johann Wiebe as minister and leader of his denomination as well as family and farming duties, he must also have developed a talent for joinery and cabinet making as evidenced in the fine example of the table that we purchased.



Wide angle view of the Johann Wiebe table with a 1916 Martyr's Mirror lying on top. Note the fine quality metal handles and the lock mechanism on the drawer. Photographs for this article are courtesy of R. Dale Keeler, Box 41, Vanscoy, Saskatchewan, SOL 3J0.

The forgoing writing was originally published as "1904 Von Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, Manitoba," by Rev. Heinrich A. Dyck, 1958. The booklet was received by *Preservings* courtesy of Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, November 22, 1999. Elaine Wiebe received it from Mrs. Mary (Wiebe) Thiessen, Warman, Saskatchewan, the great-grand daughter of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. Primary translation by Julia Zacharias, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Table.

This type of table can be looked upon as a traditional Mennonite piece along with the “kjist”, “kjleadaschap”, “schlupbank” and “eckschap” found in most households. According to historian Reinhild Kauenhowen Janzen the style used in furniture construction as well as the design of homes and barns originated from the Netherlands and the Vistula Delta of Poland where the Mennonites lived during the 16th and 17th centuries. Furniture was well built to be practical and utilitarian with very few embellishments.

The table stands 29 inches tall. The top measuring 27.5 inches wide by 42 inches in length is made up of two 3/4 inch pine boards 14 1/2 inch and 13 inch in width. The underside of the top has dovetailed splines set into channels on either end. These serve to prevent the top from warping and also secure the top by means of wooden dowels to the 3/4” by 6” pine rails--the horizontal members of the table frame. The legs are slightly tapered and are of maple (bird’s eye pattern on two legs).

Mortise and tenon joints secured with dowels hold the legs fast to the rails. Additional strength here is also provided by small decorative brackets mortised into the table legs. Applied horizontal mouldings held by 2d or 2 penny wire nails (1” nails) are attached to the rails.

A small bevelled lapped drawer of pine measuring 14” by 18” centred on one side is fastened together with 2d (1”) and 6d (2”) wire nails. The fact that wire nails are used gives us a clue to the table’s age. Wire nails came into common use in construction and limited use in furniture building after 1895. Prior to that square iron nails were employed. The drawer has a drop brass pull and is fitted with a brass drawer lock and nickel plated escutcheon.



Maria and Peter J. Wiebe, brother Klaas Wiebe, and his son Henry Wiebe. Photo taken in the early 1950s in Lizzard Lake, Saskatchewan.

It is interesting to note that a bottom consisting of a 3/4” by 16” and a 3/4” by 4.5” pine boards creates a hidden space on either side of the drawer which is only accessible by the removal of the drawer. It is possible this table



Close up view of Johann Wiebe table showing the fine workmanship. The table represents a careful balance between the conservative Mennonite aesthetic of simplicity and function as the greatest beauty and the natural tendency of an expert artisan to perfect his work. It adds perspective and depth to Johann Wiebe’s leadership and shepherding of his flock to know that he had learned the art of Mennonite furniture making and possibly pursued it as a hobby and method of relaxing.

was built for and used as a writing desk by Aeltester Wiebe since a kitchen table would certainly have not been fitted with a drawer lock. The table was originally painted with a type of red paint or stain as evidenced by splatters on the underside of the top, and had a black trim around the top edge.

We can only speculate how the Aeltester’s table made its way to Saskatchewan into the hands of his grandson Peter J. Wiebe (1888-1956). Johann’s eldest son Jacob Wiebe (1858-1921), Peter’s father, who lived in the village of Rosengart, Manitoba, across the road from his father, moved with his family to Springfelt, near Swift Current Saskatchewan in 1906.

Did Jacob take the table to Saskatchewan or was it part of an inheritance after Johann’s death?

Peter J. Wiebe (1888-1956), Springfelt, Sk.

Peter J. was Jacob’s third son from his first marriage. Peter married Maria Wall (1895-1984) in 1914 and from this union were born four children: Annie (1915-99) married William Wall (1910-78); Katherine (1918-98) married John Thiessen (1912-58); Peter (1920-99) married Anne Guenther (b. 1921); and Mary (b. 1922) married Abe Thiessen (1918-90).

Peter was a successful farmer in the Springfelt area having built his own house complete with a coal furnace as well as having a threshing outfit which he hired out. In 1923 the family sold their farm and moved to Mexico where Peter hoped to be the owner and operator of a general store. This venture did not work out so they sold what they could to finance their trip back to Springfelt. They rented a house in Springfelt in which they lived for seven years. Peter worked for others.

In June 1930 on a hot windy day while Mrs. Wiebe was baking bread, the house caught fire and burned to the ground. Family and neighbours helped rescue possessions from the burning building including the table which Peter had been using as a writing desk in which he stored important papers in the secret area behind the drawer.

Eldest daughter Annie had a pet brooding hen setting on eggs in a back leanto shed that was forgotten until it was too late. Neighbours had to forcibly restrain Annie to prevent her from running into the burning building in an attempt to save her pet. After the fire they lived in several locations and suffered much hardship in the drought-stricken area of southwest Saskatchewan.

Lizzard Lake, Sask.

In August of 1934 along with several other Mennonite families, the Wiebes moved by wagon train to a parkland area called Lizzard Lake situated north of Biggar, Sask.

A great deal of work had to be done before winter and they were fortunate that it was a long fall. Mrs. Wiebe and the girls dug the cellar while son Peter age 14 cut and hauled logs to a local sawmill to be cut into boards for the house. Mr. Wiebe put up hay for the few head of livestock they had. Since times were hard they had to make do with what they had and so the table was used in the kitchen serving many purposes. Mr. Wiebe had made two benches from lumber salvaged from an old “kjleedaschaup” (clothes cupboard) to provide seating for the children.

After her husband’s death, Mrs. Wiebe eventually moved to Saskatoon, Sask., then to Warman, Sask.

Conclusion.

But the old table was still in use.

Mrs. Wiebe removed the original red paint and applied a varnish finish. When advancing age forced her to relocate from her little home in Warman to the nursing home, the table was passed on to her youngest daughter Mrs. Mary Thiessen. Along with her husband Abe, Mary spent many hours of hard work completely refinishing it and applying a new varnish finish with a dark brown trim.

In spite of its advanced age of 100 years the table still remains as sturdy as the day it was built. One can see little niches and scratches in the soft pine top and an acid stain perhaps from an old battery radio.

My wife’s mother Mrs. Annie Wall died January 26, 1999 and her uncle Peter Wiebe (Annie’s brother) died August 1999. It is regrettable they did not live long enough to learn the history of their great-grandfather as I know that they would have found it very interesting.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 129-130.

The Clock Keeps Ticking

“The Clock Keeps Ticking: The Pendulum Clock of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905),”
by Elaine Wiebe 24-1605, 7th Street East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7H 0Z3.

The Clock 1866.

Aeltester Johann and Judith Wiebe, Olgafeld, Fürstenland Colony, Imperial Russia, bought an 1866 pendulum clock.

The clock bears the identification mark “No. 1866 K.HDB. 190”. Clock expert Tony Funk, Hague, Saskatchewan, has indicated that this clock was built by Cornelius Hildebrand (1833-1920), Insel Chortitza, Imperial Russia.

To Manitoba, 1875.

Johann and Judith Wiebe took the pendulum clock along with them among their possessions when they migrated from Imperial Russia to Manitoba in 1875.

The emigration, however, was only the beginning of its travels.

When Aeltester Wiebe passed away in 1905 it is believed the clock was distributed when family possessions were divided among the children. The clock was given to son Aeltester Peter Wiebe

but his wife did not want the clock because she feared their children would play with the long dangling cords and ruin it.

So Peter and his older brother Jacob exchanged their inheritances. It is not known what Jacob traded; however the clock kept ticking.

Jacob lived at Springfield, Saskatchewan, on the Swift Current Reserve. When he passed away in 1921, the clock was handed down to his daughter Gertruda and son-in-law, Johann V. Wolfe. They had homesteaded one mile south of Springfield, Saskatchewan.

And the clock kept ticking.

To Mexico, 1922.

This was the time the Mennonites were struggling with educational issues in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Johann and Gertruda Wolfe moved to Mexico in 1922. They settled in the village of Neu-Hoffnung (No. 114a), Swift Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua. Later they moved to the village of Springfield, Ojo de la Yegua Colony, northeast of Rubio.

They took the treasured clock with them.

To Alberta, 1939.

In 1939 the clock moved back to Manitoba with them and then on to La Crete, Alberta, in 1941.

Since the face of the clock had badly faded, John Wall (a son-in-law of theirs) repainted it and added the rose stickers.

In 1953 after the death of both Johann and Gertruda the clock was sold at their auction. Daughter Helena and son-in-law, Peter Neustaeter, bought it for \$20.00 and the clock kept ticking.

To Belize, 1960.

In 1960 the clock was sold privately to William Neufeld for \$25.00. About this time they decided to move from La Crete to Belize.

While here the clock stopped ticking.

It was sold at the Neufeld auction for \$10.00 to Aron and Mary Krahn, another daughter of Johann and Gertruda Wolfe. The clock was now back in the family!

What a disappointment, the clock stopped ticking.

Jake Gerbrandt married to Mary's sister Margaret inquired about the clock several times while visiting in Belize during the 1960s.

Since the clock wasn't working and there was no one who could fix it, the Krahns sold the clock to Jake for \$10.00.



Johann V. Wolfe and Gertruda Wiebe Wolfe in 1938 in Springfield, Ojo de la Yegua Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Gertruda was the granddaughter of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, Manitoba and inherited the clock from her parents.

To Saskatchewan.

Jake and Margaret Gerbrandt lived in Martensville, Saskatchewan, at the time. Jake contacted someone in Manitoba about repairing it.

Along with the mechanical repairs, the numbers were repainted and the bird stickers were added.

Being rejuvenated, the clock started ticking again!

La Crete, 1974.

This clock made one more move in 1974, this time back to La Crete, Alberta, where it now resides in the place of honour in Margaret Gerbrandt's home. She is Johann and Judith Wiebe's great-granddaughter.

Contentedly, the clock keeps ticking.

Source:

Interview with Helen Buller, La Crete, Alberta.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 17, page 122.



1993, Jakob B. Gerbrandt and Margaretha Wolfe Gerbrandt, Box 373, La Crete, Alberta, T0H 2H0. Margaretha is the daughter of Johann and Gertruda Wolfe and great-granddaughter of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905). Mr. Gerbrandt has already passed away.



This wall clock kept time in Johann and Judith Wiebe's home in Olgafeld, Fürstenland Colony of Russia and then in Rosengart, Manitoba. It is a Hildebrand clock, "No. 1866 K. HDB. 190" with an age of 134 years. The unique one-hour hand keeps perfect time even today.

Part Three: Biographies

Jakob Fehr (1809-77), Reinland Pioneer

Jakob Fehr (1809-77), Kronsthal, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, to Steinbach, E. R. 1874, and Reinland, W. R., 1875, by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

In a series of letters to his sister, Katharina Loeppky, Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) described the experience of the tearful departure from the village of Kronsthal, Old Colony in the "old" Homeland in Imperial Russia, the ocean journey and the first few weeks spent at Fort Dufferin along the banks of the Red River. See article following.

Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

The writer, Jakob Fehr, was the grandson of another Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

Genealogist Henry Schapansky, has written that Jakob Fehr (1809-77) "...appears to be the son of Isaac de Fehr (1763-1857), of Nieder-Chortitza, Chortitza Colony. Isaac de Fehr came to Russia circa 1796-98 after his father, Benjamin De Fehr (b. 1734) who immigrated in 1788-89 [among the first Mennonite pioneers in Imperial Russia]"

Henry Schapansky adds, "Jakob Fehr (1809-77) married Helena Fehr (1823-98) who appears to be his cousin and daughter of Jakob De Fehr (b. 1780) (who married Maria Peters (b. 1791). Helena Fehr and the Elisabeth Fehr (1823-1908) who married Wilhelm Esau, Peter Loewen and Aelt. Gerhard Wiebe were sisters" (Note One).

Benjamin De Fehr (b. 1734) was listed on a Wirtschaft in the village of Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony in the 1795 Revision, "Family 8, Benjamin Defer, age 56, wife Anna 52, son Jakob 15, Kornelius 12, daughter Maria 18" (Unruh, page 240).

The village of Neuendorf was one of the largest and wealthiest farming village in the Old Colony. This raises again the interesting speculation as to why there were so many families from Neuendorf relocating to Bergthal in



1974 photo of the Henry W. Penner building in Reinland, oldest building still in use in the village as of 1976. Built by Jakob Fehrs in 1877 it was sold to windmill builder Johann Bergmann that same year. The structure originally had a thatched roof. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: An Experience in Community (Altona, 1976, page 35).

1802 census as "Benjamin Decker age 67, wife Anna 61, son Cornelius 18; Property: 5 horses, 6 cows, 13 sheep, 3 swine, 1/2 a plow, 1 wagon and 1 spinning wheel" (Unruh, page 255). It seems that the roots of many of the 1870s emigrants invariably trace back to the Vollwirt class in the early years of the Mennonite settlement in Imperial Russia.

Jakob Fehr (1809-77).

According to great-granddaughter Helena Fehr, Winkler, Jakob Fehr (1809-77), was supposedly born in Schöneberg, Chortitza Colony. Later he lived in Osterwick, where son Jakob was born in 1837. At the time of the

immigration they lived in the village of Kronsthal in the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia.

Further study will presumably be necessary to verify the places of residence of the Fehr family. They may have been living in Kronsthal by 1871 when Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Peter Toews and Abraham Reimer visited their "sister in the faith Helena Defehr...to summon her here for Holy Communion," (Profile, page 151.)

February 16, 1873, daughter Helena married Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), a KG school teacher from Steinbach, Borosenko, some 50 kilometers west of the Old Colony. In 1874 the

"It seems that the roots of...the 1870s emigrants...trace back to the Vollwirt class...in Imperial Russia."

the 1830s and also emigrating to America, Manitoba, in the 1870s. Were there any pre-select groups dating back to Prussia or was this simply a function of being a wealthier village where people had the means and entrepreneurial skills to organize such endeavours?

Benjamin De Fehr was a Vollwirt listed as owner of Wirtschaft 32 in Neuendorf in the

Jakob Fehr, Death Date

An undated note by Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), grandson of Jakob Fehr (1809-77), states as follows: "I must also make note that my grandfather died in the summer of 1877 and not '76 as I had written in the letter. He had to die in the ground in the semlin where he was very confined and the air very bad, for he had a very grievous illness, namely, bladder disease ("Blasenkrankheit"). The house which they were building above ground was also almost finished to the point that they could move into it at the time that he died. The funeral was already held in the new house" (Note Two).

Jakob Fehr's granddaughter Aganetha F. Fast (1883-1977) has been characterized as the "Florence Nightingale of Steinbach" for her heroic battle against the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 at great risk to her personal safety. Aganetha's sister Margaretha F. Fast (1889-1984), played an important role in the history of Hanover Steinbach as the wife and help-mate of Aeltester Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949), one of the most important leaders of the community during the Depression and troubled 1940s.



1927. Brothers David Fehr (b. 1871) and Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), right, taken at Jakob Loepkys, Schönfeld, Swift Current, P.O. Wymark, Saskatchewan. The brothers were neighbours in Eichenfeld area, Winkler. Jakob Fehr was the author of the travelogue account published in this article. Photo courtesy of Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.



Isaac Fehr family, Reinland, Manitoba. Isaac (1878-1924) was the son of Jakob Fehr (1837-1916). Katharina Fehr, nee Driedger, and Isaac Fehr, with children, Katharina, sitting on the "baenstje", Anna (standing in middle) and Jakob, standing at the right. Photo courtesy of daughter Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.

Fehrs were among the first 12 to 15 OK families immigrating to Manitoba, Canada, where they settled in the East Reserve. They had a KG connection through their son-in-law Cornelius Fast, and associated themselves with the Steinbachers who departed from Borosenko on July 18 and 21, 1874 (Julien calendar).

Steinbach Pioneer, 1874.

The Steinbach immigrants travelled on the S. S. Hiberian. The group included the important Reimer clan--brothers Johann, Klaas, son-in-laws Abraham Friesen and Peter Toews and

“Jakob Fehr Sr. and family were among the 18 families who founded...[Steinbach]...in September 1874.”

parents Abraham Reimer, Klaas Brandt, Peter Friesens, Gerhard Siemens, Peter Buhlers, Cornelius Fasts and Bernhard Bergens and their parents Jakob and Helena Fehr.

This was the last contingent of Mennonite

immigrants out of Russia in 1874, arriving in Quebec City, August 31, and reaching the site of their new village of Steinbach in the south-east corner of the East Reserve around September 15. Incidentally on the same ship was KG minister Abraham Klassen whose great-great grandson Matt Groening would later produce the “Simpsons” TV cartoon show.

Not all of the Steinbachers on the S. S. Hiberian opted to settle in the new pioneer village of Steinbach, Manitoba, but Jakob Fehr Sr. and family were among the 18 families who founded the village in September 1874. They were entered as the first owner of Wirtschaft Seven, village of Steinbach, in the Kleine Gemeinde “Brandordnung” records of Brandaeltester Johann Esau.

On August 21, 1875, the insurance coverage was transferred to Dietrich S. Friesen (1849-1901), *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, page 25, and on April 26, 1879, it was transferred to Dietrich’s brother Jakob S. Friesen. Jakob has traditionally been credited as being the first pioneer on this Wirtschaft, but the evidence and facts supporting this assertion were always somewhat vague. The informa-

tion in the Johann Esau, “Brandbuch,” finally clears up this conundrum.

Presumably son-in-law Bernhard Bergen and sons Dietrich and Johann, and the parents Jakob and Helena Fehr all lived together in one dwelling during that first winter of 1874 to 1875. (See Jakob Fehr, letter of Sept. 25, 1951, following.)

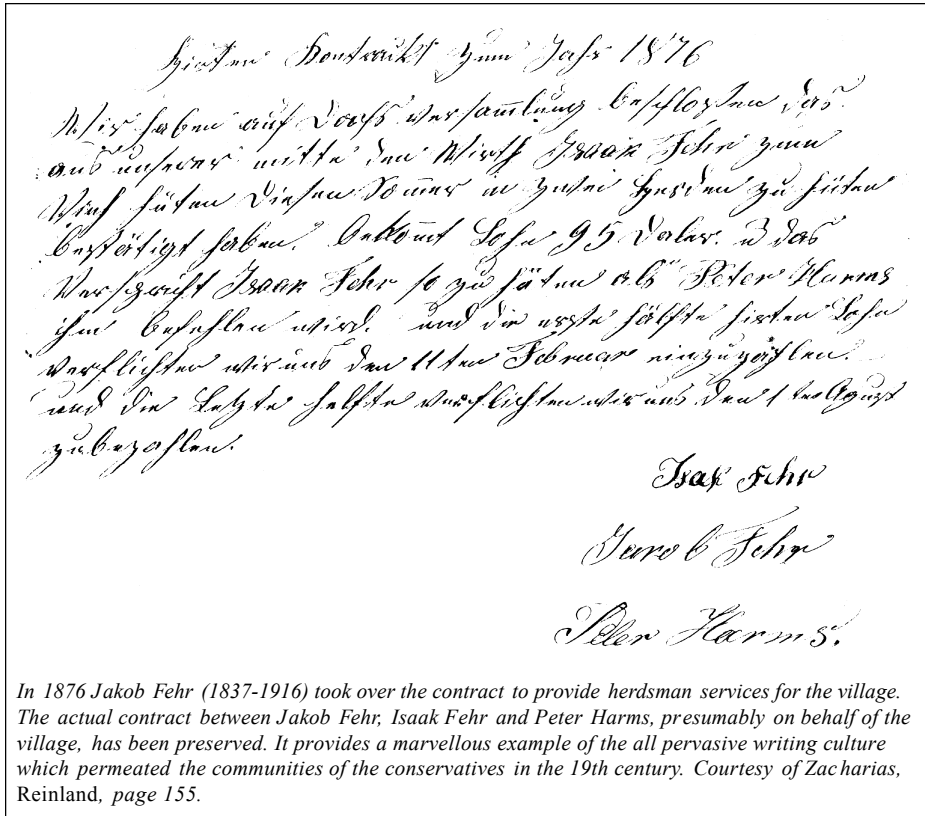
Reinland Pioneer, 1875.

In summer of 1875 the Jakob Fehrs, with daughter and son-in-law Bernhard Bergen

“Jakob Fehr Sr. was 'the first Reinland family to arrive in Canada.’”

moved to the West Reserve to join their sons David Fehr (b. 1844), Isaac (b. 1842) and Jakob (b. 1837), and their families who had arrived on the S. S. Sarmatian in July of 1875 to join Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905). Their son Jakob (b. 1837) was the father of Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), the journalist.

Jakob Fehr Sr. and son Jakob (b. 1837)



In 1876 Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) took over the contract to provide herdsman services for the village. The actual contract between Jakob Fehr, Isak Fehr and Peter Harms, presumably on behalf of the village, has been preserved. It provides a marvellous example of the all pervasive writing culture which permeated the communities of the conservatives in the 19th century. Courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 155.

were among the first settlers of the village of Reinland, W. R. Historian Peter Zacharias has written that Jakob Fehr, Sr. was “the first Reinland family to arrive in Canada.” He adds that “In 1875 the Fehrs came to Reinland and built their first crude shelter for the winter. In 1877 they built the house standing just west of the Penner’s store today (1976), the present

etables. In the “house garden” adjacent to the street, they had a krueschdje (pear) tree whose branches were so large they reached half way over the street.

In 1875 the Jakob Fehr family immigrated to Canada settling in Manitoba, where they were pioneers in the village of Reinland. According to Peter Zacharias, Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) was the first Schulz or mayor of the village. They farmed in Reinland all their days.

Youngest son Isaac J. Fehr took over the Wirtschaft in 1903 after which the parents moved into a little retirement house, diagonally across the street.

Jakob Fehr died in Reinland in 1916 and was buried in the village cemetery. His widow Maria Wiens Fehr moved back in with her children Isaac Fehrs living in the original Wirtschaft.

When son Isaac Fehr died in 1924, Mrs. Maria Fehr moved in with son Jakob Fehr, the

“Jakob Fehr (1837-1916)... maintained a substantial journal... reflecting a three-generational writing tradition...[it] contains transcriptions of various letters by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck in Chortitz, Imperial Russia...”

residence of Henry W. Penners.”

Peter Zacharias adds, “Before the building was quite finished, Mr. Fehr passed away at the age of 68.”

Sometime before 1880 Mrs. Fehr moved to Hoffnungsfeld, W. R., together with her son Diedrich where they are listed in the 1880 West Reserve village census.

Jakob Fehr (1837-1916).

Jakob Fehr’s son Jakob Fehr was born in Osterwick, Chortitz Colony, in 1837. Jakob Jr. married Maria Wiens, from Insel-Chortitz, and the couple lived in Kronsthal, where they had a fine Wirtschaft.

They had many fine fruit trees, where son Jakob helped till the ground and planting veg-

“The account of the death of young Franz Wiens, in particular, is evocative and speaks for the simple Biblical faith of the OK-ers.”

writer, in Eichenfeld, near Haskett. Jakob’s wife, Matilda Hemming, was a midwife.

Youngest daughter Mrs. Jakob Loeppky, nee Katharina Fehr, had moved to Schönfeld, near Wymark, Saskatchewan. In 1927, Maria Wiens Fehr moved to Wymark to live with her daughter. She died here the following year and

was buried in Schönfeld, Saskatchewan.

Some of the earliest photographs found among the Russian Mennonites were taken by Old Koloniers. But Mrs. Jakob Fehr, nee Maria Wiens, did not wish to have her picture taken. As result there is no picture extant, even though son-in-law Jakob Loeppky, dearly wanted to photograph her.

Jakob Fehr (1837-1916) also maintained a substantial journal which may have been originally started by his father thus reflecting a three-generational writing tradition in this family. The journal contains transcriptions of various letters by Aeltester Gerhard Dyck in Chortitz, Imperial Russia, as well as a brief family chronicle.

Jakob Fehr (1859-1952).

Jakob Fehr had a son Jakob born in 1859 who was the author of the descriptive travelogue account. Jakob Jr. lived and farmed in Eichenfeld, near Haskett, Manitoba.

Jakob Fehr was an articulate person and a good writer. He wrote many letters to sister Katharina Fehr Loeppky in Schönfeld, Saskatchewan.

In a series of five letters dated January 30, February 7, February 17 and March 18, 1942, and September 25, 1951, he described the emigration experience of 1875 and the settlement of the Reinland community. It was these letters which historian Peter Zacharias used to compile the composite description of the journey from Russia to America which he published in his groundbreaking *Reinland* book in 1975.

These letters reflect a writing genius and eloquently speak for the pioneering experience on the West Reserve. The account of the death of young Franz Wiens, in particular, is evocative and speaks for the simple Biblical faith of the OKers.

Katharina Fehr Loeppky later turned these letters over to her daughter Mrs. Wilhelm Neustadter, nee Katharina Loeppky, who in turned passed them on to her cousin Helena Fehr, daughter of Isaac who had owned the original Fehr Wirtschaft in Reinland. Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba, is presently in possession of these marvellous writings.

Endnote:

Note One: Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C. V3L 4V5, letter to the author April 7, 2000.

Note Two: Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), document collection, courtesy of niece Helena Fehr, Winkler, Manitoba.

Sources:

Telephone interviews with granddaughter Helena Fehr, Pembina Ave., Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 2T1.

Peter Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona, 1976), pages 34-46.

Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) Journal

Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), Journal, as translated and published in Peter Zacharias, *Reinland: Experience in Community* (Altona, Man., 1976), pages 34-46.

The "old" Homeland.

I would like to tell something of times past, of that which I have experienced, especially of the departure from Russia, because this often comes to my memory.

And so I will begin from the day before we left our former home--how I walked in the garden before evening, how I criss-crossed it in various directions. I remember how often I had hoed it and cleaned it of weeds.

I observed the fruit trees and how promising they looked and what a blessing they could bring forth, without our being able to enjoy it. The May cherries were almost ripe. The other sweet cherries were less advanced. The plums were greener still; one plum variety when it ripened became white as snow and was to have an unusually excellent taste. I have not tasted them because the trees were still young--they were to show forth their art for the first time and were now heavily-laden with fruit.

I remember how so often I had worked in the garden with my mother. She showed me where the beds were and I dug them up. Thereupon she seeded them. Father had bought me a light metal spade that I could easily handle, far at the time I still was a school child.

When I had observed all these things and reflected on them, I walked out of the garden and closed the gate. I remained standing at the gate and looked at the garden once more and said to myself, "I will never again enjoy your fruit." My eyes filled with tears.

Thereupon I left the garden, walked across the yard, and entered the house and the room where they were busily packing different articles that were to be taken along to America. Finally they also packed roasted buns into bags. These were to be taken along for the trip as something to eat at times when meals would be irregular. And while all this was being prepared for the departure, evening came and we lay down for the night's rest.

Farewell.

Next morning when we had risen and finished our breakfast, women began gathering in the house and in the yard--they came for the farewell. Mother's brother, Uncle Johann

"I remember how so often I had worked in the garden with my mother."

Wiens, too, came with his vehicle. He had been asked to drive us to the boat which lay at anchor in the river at Neu-Chortitz. Then we packed onto the wagon what we wanted to take along. When all was done and we were ready to board the wagon, farewells were taken of all who had gathered on the yard. These farewells were ac-



S. S. Sarmatian crossing the Atlantic Ocean in 1878. This was the ship which carried young Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) and 118 Old Kolony and Bergthaler families from Liverpool arriving in Quebec City on July 6, 1875. They were followed a week later by Aeltester Johann Wiebe and his group who crossed the ocean on the S. S. Peruvian. Photo courtesy of L. Klippenstein, David Klassen and the Mennonites (Agincourt, 1982), page 12. The names of all the Mennonites on board these ships have been published in John Dyck, ed., Bergthal Gemeindebuch (Steinbach, 1992), pages 255-333, now unfortunately out of print.

companied by many tears. Then we climbed onto the wagon and the vehicle was set in motion. And we drove off the yard toward the road.

For some time while we were on the road, which gradually rose--we were going uphill now--we could always look back and see the village, we could continue to see it from quite far. Often we turned around to see the home we had left and were reminded of the many good things we had enjoyed there. One could also

"When they began to sing there arose a mighty sound along the river and along the hill--its echoes spread out far and wide."

notice the many people gathered at the fences along the street. Finally, as we covered more and more distance, the crowd resembled only a black line until at last we reached the top of the hill.

Then we had a flat prairie before our eyes, and our village and home, where we had lived so long, were taken from our sight. For some distance now we drove through grain fields which looked dreary because rain was needed.

At last we had traversed the level prairie. The road began to drop downhill. Then we caught sight of the village of Neu-Chortitz and beside it the river in which our boat lay anchored. As we approached we noticed that the hill was covered with vehicles and people. The boat, too, was filled with people. It was almost impossible to get close to the boat with the wagon for the purpose of unloading. The boat had a

gangplank, approximately 10 feet wide, connecting the boat and the shore. The people were walking back and forth over it. They would be seen with tear-stained cheeks and handkerchiefs in their hands. Kisses and handshakes were general, indicating that a painful parting was taking place.

On the ship's bridge, which was generally reserved for the captain, the Vorsänger gathered to announce the songs that were to be sung in farewell. When they began to sing there arose a mighty sound along the river and along the hill--its echoes spread out far and wide. I had never seen a gathering of people as large as this one. It was a leave-taking with no hope of again seeing each other in this world. Parents parted from their children and children from their parents. It was a heart-rending day. There was much weeping and crying among the people--a memorable day that I will never forget. In the meantime, the singing had ended. Suddenly, a shrill whistle with a penetrating tone came from the boat.

Departure.

When the captain had taken his place on the bridge he called out at the top of his voice that those who wanted to go with the ship should come to the ship and those who wanted to stay should leave the ship. The walls of separation were drawn for a final time.

Then a machine pulled the drawbridge onto the deck and the ship began to move. The farewell call sounded through the air in full tones. Caps were waved in the air from both sides and the women did the same with their handkerchiefs. The ship had gone for a considerable distance and still we saw the repetition of this act of farewell until there was a bend in the

river. Now all was separated.

Our ship sailed along towards the south. Our departure from the village of Nieder-Chortitz took place at two pm. At about seven o'clock in the evening we reached the large city of Nikopol. During this stretch that we had sailed we had seen so many beautiful fruit orchards and vineyards, which had been planted along the river, and beautiful estates. Oh, the beautiful region and climate we had to leave!

During our landing at this city we met the Fürstenländer, who also constituted a Mennonite church, and who also originated from our "Old" Kolony. A number of these, too, wanted to migrate and joined our party and we emigrated together. Among them was also their Aeltester [Johann Wiebe]. Later the church became known as the Old Colony Church.

Narrative--Peter Zacharias.

On the second day the boat continued down the Dneiper and arrived at Kherson. There the travellers changed to a larger vessel--they had to cross a part of the Black Sea on the way to Odessa. At Odessa a larger camp was set up on a rise not far from shore and near a forest. The men camped in a circle surrounding the women and children in the middle. Next morning the roasted buns which they had brought with them and water or coffee were served as breakfast. Fehr was impressed with the luxury of the train that they now boarded. His account continues.

The Journey.

So we had a wonderful trip up to the border of the Russian Empire, where we had to transfer to a different train. From there we crossed a corner of the Austrian Empire to Germany and continued to the port of Hamburg. We stayed there for almost a week.

We also had a worship service here for there was a minister with us, Ohm Jacob Wiens, whom I knew, because he, too, was from our

“Among them were many Mennonite brethren who lived in Kansas.”

village of Kronsthal. Soon, however, the time came that we should leave here, too. Now we were to board a large ship which was to take us across the North Sea to England. How long we sailed this sea, I have forgotten, but that we were heavily struck with seasickness, I will not forget. It is a severe sickness with constant vomiting. When we got across we landed at the port of Hull.

There we were prevented from immediately leaving the ship because of a woman in childbirth. But because she could not give birth successfully, she had to give up her spirit. Oh, how hard it was for her husband, wringing his hands in agony. He had to leave his wife in a strange land and continue travelling into the unknown.

From there we travelled across England by rail to the harbour of Liverpool. There our ship was ready to receive us. It was a mighty liner



The Red River steamer Dakota at the Fort Dufferin landing around 1872 to 1874. The 1873 Mennonite delegates travelled on this boat on their return trip from Winnipeg to Moorehead. It is highly probable that this boat also carried Mennonite immigrants in 1874 to 1876 like the S. S. International. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 40.

which was to take us across the Atlantic Ocean. Late in the evening the ship began moving. When we had risen in the morning we found that the ship had landed at the Island of Ireland.

It was Sunday. In the night the ship left the place. Next morning, when we were on deck (we had to go on deck every morning for fresh air) we saw water mirrored all around us as far as our eyes could see.

The quiet lasted for two days and two nights. On the evening of the second day a wind began blowing and soon the water appeared black and because of the whirling winds its surface underwent a transformation. Thereupon it got dark and we went for our rest.

But our rest changed to the greatest unrest. The ship began moving rapidly. It did not take long until the chamber pots were thrown in all directions. One could not walk around without leaning on solid objects or holding on with hands for support. In the morning we could not go on deck for the waves were rolling over the ship and were washing everything they could reach off the deck and into the sea.

This weather lasted up to three days. There were sounds of rumbling and crashing. We thought we were in danger of death. Those who had not yet learned to pray learned now.

Even the captain requested prayer that our Creator might have mercy upon us and help us. We were also struck by seasickness.

All became better again; the storm and the waves calmed down. The sea became friendly

and smooth as before. The small children lay ill.

Quebec City.

On the eighth day of our voyage the captain announced that he could see America through the telescope. Then joyous hope streamed into our hearts. At two in the afternoon we could see with our naked eyes a small black line which gradually came nearer.

Everyone rejoiced in the hope of setting foot on solid ground again. Soon we could differentiate between the mountains. Then white dots were discovered and it was thought that these were white stones. When we neared they turned

“When we arrived in Reinland after a nearly three days trip...we pitched our tent....”

out to be large buildings. We entered a gulf that was locked in by high mountains on both sides. At first the mountains were far away. The gulf got narrower and narrower and the mountains gradually came closer and closer together. We met some fishing boats going about their business.

Dusk began falling; it got dark. Electric lights sent their streaming beams toward the ships from both sides. Soon we caught sight of innumerable lights, a world of stars, by which we

knew that we had reached the port of Quebec. Three times the ship sent a flare skyward. It sailed into harbour. Thereupon the gates were opened for disembarking. We saw an almost uncountable crowd of people, there to welcome those leaving the ship. Then we were received as Canadian immigrants. The Queen had seen to this for us, as non-resident Christians. We were then served a wonderful evening meal.

Duluth.

Here we had to wait until noon for the train. We travelled across these two provinces changing back and forth from train to boat. Because the border between Canada and the United States then takes a turn we had to travel through the U.S.A. for a stretch and finally arrived at a city called Duluth.

Here it was recommended that we buy tools, cook stoves and cooking utensils in this city for "where you are now going there is no trade nor traffic. Nor can you obtain anything there for it is an absolute wilderness." ("...denn da wo ihr jetzt hingehet ist kein Handel noch Wandel. Da konnt ihr auch nichts anschaffen denn das is eine reine Wildnis.")

So purchases were made and packed into the freight car. We spent one or two days there. I still remember that cutlery was prepared for usage; stoves were erected and fired and food was prepared; a large yard with much room was placed at our disposal.

From there we continued by rail and came to a small town. It had only recently been founded and construction was in progress. It was called Fishers Landing.

Kansas Brethren.

When we got there we were received by a large crowd of people. Among them were many Mennonite brethren who lived in Kansas. During the time when our forefathers moved from Germany to Russia they had moved to America. They came and tried to persuade us not to go to Manitoba. They said that two settlements had been made there before and these settlers had to turn back. They could not survive there because of the cold, raw, long winter.

They insisted that we come to Kansas. The climate was much milder there. Many allowed themselves to be persuaded and went with them to the south.

But our leadership remained firm. It had once negotiated our freedoms with the Queen. The contract was in writing. We could fully enjoy those freedoms within the framework of our confession of faith according to the teachings of the Apostles and if we would hold on to those teachings no law would touch us. Our leaders and Aeltester did not want to break this solemn promise. They held true to it. The majority remained on our side.

After the two parties had taken leave of each other, we, who wanted to stay with Canada, boarded the boat which brought us to Emerson in three days.

Fort Dufferin.

There still was not much to see of the town.



The Fort Dufferin landing site looking south toward Emerson. Note the cairn in the foreground beside the former Highway 14 and also the old clearing. The Red River is on the left. Pembina, North Dakota, would be in the upper right hand corner. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 42.

A few houses could be seen that had been constructed very superficially. The town lay on the east side of the river. On the west side the government had set up immigration houses for us. It seems to me that there were three buildings arranged in a triangle. Our party occupied these quarters quite fully. There was little elbow room.

There were many sick children who had not recovered from seasickness and one after the other they passed into eternity. There was a funeral every day. In addition there was a need for variety of diet, especially of milk for the small children.

We were waiting for the arrival of the brethren we left behind in Ontario, wondering whether these would soon come with a herd of cattle, milk cows and oxen. During the time when we travelled through Ontario the Mennonites had offered to help us get some cattle, they wanted to buy up a herd. The Old Mennonites also offered to keep some of our poor people there to earn some money since they were in need of labourers for their large orchards. And this is what happened. They stayed there and joined us the following year.

The cattle arrived and there was great joy, especially for the mothers who had to take care of the sick children. To a degree this necessary supplement rejuvenated the children.

But the sadness of the time was not completely taken away. There was still a yearning for the true friends which had to be left behind, for the beautiful "Heimat" with its precious orchards. Here in contrast, we saw only a rolling prairie. Sometimes when I walked along the shore of the river, I saw someone sitting on a tree stump here and someone sitting on a tree stump there.



The Fort Dufferin landing site as it looked in 1976. The picture shows the Red River approach from Winnipeg. The site is marked by a cairn, see arrow. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland: Experience in Community (Altona, 1976), page 42.

"There was still a yearning for the true friends which had to be left behind, for the beautiful "Heimat" with its precious orchards."

Then I remembered the verse in Psalm 137: "By the river of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion."

We spent six weeks at this place of mourning till we could finally start out and set our foot upon our new land.

At the immigration houses my smallest brother died.

The delegates decided to strike out west of Emerson.

Reinland, Ho, by Peter Zacharias.

The farmer had planted an orchard of wild cherry trees. Fehr, who so vividly recollected the fruit orchards in his native Russia, comments: "Es waren Pungels aber doch anders als die Wein Trauben" ("The fruit was in clusters and yet different than wine grapes.")

Since the fruit was now ripe one after another undertook to taste it and one after another drew his face into contortions and spit out the cherries. The general opinion was that this fruit could not be eaten. The immigrants had made their first encounter with chokecherries.

The group was warmly received at the farm. The cooking utensils were taken from the wagon and a meal was prepared. Fresh potatoes were purchased here at a price of 80 cents per pail.

Fehr then describes the arrival at Reinland.

Because we could travel only with oxen, everything was slow. At last we came to the land. The land had been surveyed few days before and numbered and had also received names. Our lot was the name of Reinland After a three day journey we arrived at Reinland and pitched our tent. The government had ordered these tents for the immigrants at a very small cost to us.

That was Reinland, summer, 1875--a vil- lage of tents and campfires.

Letter of February 17, 1942,
pages 4-5.

Our stay at the immigration houses [Fort Dufferin] lasted six weeks....The reason we stayed so long at the immigration houses was because our delegates were not able to make a decision to which place they should commit themselves, in order to take up land for a settlement. They did not really want to be too far from the city, because the business intercourse with the world could not be completely done without.

But at that time the land adjacent to the river was too uneven for cultivation and interspersed with swales, and in most cases the lower places were swampy, although otherwise, the indications were of good quality and rich growth of grass. Further towards the west the land was generally dryer and more suitable for laying out a colony. Further toward the north, the indications were similar: too uneven and the low spots had many water pot holes.

Since there was a great need for wood, which is a great necessity to sustain human life, we found the westerly portion the most suitably located. After they had finished with this they returned and presented their plans, which were willingly accepted.

The largest part of the group really pushed that we should move onto the land as soon as possible. In the meantime a man also came to us who knew the region well. He said to us that it was time that we got ready for winter since it could happen that we already had snow by the beginning of October. This gave us added incentive that we hurried even more to get onto the land.



The sturdy precision construction of the Old Kolonier pioneers, a testimony to a strong tradition of artisans and craftsmen found in the Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. By the end of the 19th century, the factories of Chortitza were a major economic factor in the economy of southern Russia, something already being replicated in Winkler and surrounding area in the present day. Photo courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 60.

But since it only went with oxen, everything went very slowly. Horses for not available which was also suitable for us since there was not sufficient feed for them. If an ox has good grass or enough hay it can work slowly. Finally, after a slow journey we came to the land. The land had already been surveyed out a few days earlier and the village plan numbered with the names attached. Our lot was the name Reinland.

When we arrived in Reinland after a nearly three days trip with our young oxen, we pitched our tent, which nearly everyone else did as well. The government had arranged for the tents, and I think they were quite cheap to buy. When we had finished with that, our dwelling place for

“Our father immediately left this refuge....[so] that he could visit the settlement in Steinbach where his parents were.”

the next while was ready. Now came the frantic business, to get ourselves ready for winter.

Father instructed me to dig a hole in the ground, to make a dwelling place out of it for ourselves. Father together with Johan drove to the forest in order to get wood for burning so that food could be prepared. At the same time they provided [beams] for a frame which would later be placed in the hole which I was supposed to dig about four feet deep and which were then to be sheathed with boards.

This was then to be our residence, and also at the same time for our few head of livestock, two oxen, two cows and one small horse. In this manner we completed our home as much as we could. At the same time grass was mowed for feed for the livestock for winter.

But our highest priority was for our winter quarters. In the meantime Fall had come and we were not yet ready for winter. Then the weather came the way the man had already told us, on October 3, some eight inches of snow fell. The hay was still lying on the field but it had already been gathered into small piles. Many hearts now became anxious and fearful.

But after a few days it became warm almost like in summer and the snow quickly disappeared. The hearts were again quickened and we worked forward with joyful optimism. This then gave us a good opportunity so that by the 25th of October we were more or less ready with everything for winter.

But on the date last mentioned, the 25th, the fierce winter fell upon us with snow, wind and frost. During this time we had also already moved into our earth dwelling. It was an exceptionally warm residence. We used it for two years until we were able to build ourselves a new home above the ground. During the second winter, 1876, in the month of February, our sister Maria was born while we were still living in the earth.



Reinland pioneers Abraham and Anna (Dueck) Dyck with their children Peter and Anna. The Dycks returned to Russia for some years for the sake of their children's education. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 47.

Letter of September 25, 1951,
pages 5-6.

I will refer back to the time when we had just occupied the immigration houses. Our father immediately left this refuge and embarked upon the next following ship in order that he could visit the settlement in Steinbach where his parents were.

They had already immigrated there from Russia the previous year, 1874. But there was only little prairie land there, rather there was mainly bush and where there was no bush it was mainly swampy. For this reason the government had decided to criss-cross the area to the north and west adjacent to the small city of Emerson to seek out a place where a settlement could be established.

The reason that my father's parents had immigrated together with the Kleine Gemeinde was due to the fact that they had children among them.....And also for another reason, many of our brethren in the Gemeinde went with them to their new settlement [Borosenko] in order to establish an improved Gemeinde and more according to the pure teaching of the Apostles and also in order to avoid and to reflect upon certain afflictions which were abundant in the Old Kolony. The most serious reason was because of the great disorder there among the youths; secondly, the smoking of tobacco; thirdly, playing and dancing; fourthly, the extreme pride; and, fifthly, drunkenness....

It frequently happened that much interaction existed between the two Gemeinden because they worked for friendship between each other. So it came to pass one day that a widower entered my grandparents' dwelling, undoubtedly sent there by someone, and since there was a young lady there who was ready for marriage, to marry her--which was also accomplished. Thereafter they also had a connection with that Gemeinde.



Jakob Zacharias (b. 1853) and family, a great uncle to Peter the historian. This photograph may well date to Imperial Russia. Some of the earliest photographs among the Russian Mennonites are found among the Old Kolony community. Courtesy of Zacharias, *Reinland*, page 47. S2A-11.

Since the emigration was already decided, and the Kleine Gemeinde was the first to make a beginning with the emigration, and their son-in-law--who also belonged to the Gemeinde--was going with the Gemeinde, consequently the grandparents joined themselves to them and emigrated together with them to America in 1874.

The grandparents, as well as one set of children whom they had taken along with them, did not take out any homestead there. Rather they preferred to wait one year until we followed them, at which time they wanted to settle with us together wherever our Gemeinde located itself. (You will probably already have heard at some point about Bernhard Bergens and Cornelius Fasts, who were also grandparent's children.

This was the reason why our father left our company a few days after we arrived at the immigration houses, and embarked on another vessel, shipping northwards in order to visit his parents and siblings there and, if possible, to return immediately together with them to the place where the Gemeinde to which they belonged had decided to lay out its domicile, namely, the Old Kolony Gemeinde.

Letter of March 18, 1942.

pages 3-6.

Firstly, I will mention something about the food which sustains the body and which costs us three times as much today as it did in comparison with the past. I am referring here among Christian people. It is astounding the difference between rich and poor, which has also always been the case.

We, or my parents, were not of the very poorest. I have witnessed (that means in Russia), that the poorest help themselves with rye bread and barley "prips", for coffee, to which they then add bread, salt and onions. This was the breakfast menu.

For the midday meal there was usually barley porridge, cooked with water--whoever had milk, added milk to it--whoever did not have it,

had to be satisfied as it was. People made this porridge themselves from the barley.

A block of oak wood was hollowed out, and the barley heated with hot water and poured into the hollowed-out block. It was pounded with a wooden wedge until it had shelled itself. In the meantime it was passed through the wind, so that the shells were separated. This was repeated until the shelling was complete. Now it was ready for cooking.

Water soup was also often cooked for the evening meal (if no porridge was available), out of hard wheat flour ("semel")--we say, "white wheat). Small semele were made and poured into the brew, salted a little, and if bacon is available, small slivers are cut, fried somewhat in a pan on the fire, and spread out over the brew.

They eat this with rye bread and onions. If they had something available, they also spread something on the bread. If they didn't have, they did without.

This is how things were among the poorest people in Russia and the same conditions also applied to the poorest here in America. And the poor were not only a few, which the Gemeinde had taken along from Russia to here. Many had also become indebted to the Gemeinde for the trip, they had to work it off here to the Gemeinde.

Since the Gemeinde itself was only poor and could not support the poor any longer, and since they had to live longer, and, in addition, the long winter was at the door, provision also had to be made for them, that they had nourishment and clothing. Accordingly the Gemeinde saw it as necessary to borrow money to use it for them, so that they could keep everyone alive. In order to become united in this regard, it required a deeply considered brotherly love in order to bring this to pass.

"But we had an Aeltester who had totally committed himself to his Shepherd...."

But we had an Aeltester who had totally committed himself to his Shepherd, with the complete confidence in the One who had helped us over the great and stormy ocean with our lives, would not forsake us either in this barren land, if we would not forsake Him. But God was with him and empowered him that he could be a true light to the Gemeinde, to be able to exposit the Word of God clearly and understandably, so that the Gemeinde became willing to do everything necessary, that the entire Gemeinde was to be brought through the winter as a community

"But God was with him and empowered him...[to] be a true light...so that the Gemeinde became willing to do everything necessary.... The poor were also to be helped...."

The poor were also to be helped so that they could work their land in the approaching spring. The Gemeinde had to set about and borrow money for this purpose. The Gemeinde had to obligate itself for these loans. In so far as I can recall, the Gemeinde borrowed or loaned 30,000 dollars two times in a row. Once from the government and one time from the Ontario Mennonite Gemeinde.

It was a difficult beginning to look after the future life, for the land was a barren wilderness, everything had to be broken from sod. Our father did not need to receive help from the Gemeinde. He had enough of his own that he could purchase one pair of young oxen, two cows, and a pony, as well as an old buggy.

We had brought one freight wagon along from Russia with which we were able to transport ourselves as necessary. One of the great advantages here was that there was sufficient woods so that one had fire wood and building material, to the fullest. Father had purchased a iron board saw with which we cut the trees for building material in order to build a house.

For two winters we lived in the earth [semelin]. By the third winter we had a dwelling house above the ground. That was the house were you have also yet lived inside and so you can well think that it is quite old, and since we had started with sawing the wood, the people almost hauled our yard full, for they wanted their wood cut, as well for building houses.

During the second winter we started, father and I sawed the wood for the house. We were also able to saw some for others and earn something so that we could purchase flour. For the harvest that following summer that we were already here in America was only meagre since we had only broken nine acres with the two young oxen, six for wheat and three for oats. I think that we beat it out with the threshing stick.

Attention Readers: The Jakob Fehr immigration account compiled by Rev. Peter Zacharias was also published in German in the *Mennonite Post*, January 22, 1988, and February 5, 1988.

"Several factors in their Russian experience suited these immigrants [the Old Koloniers] for the 'big Plain'. They had lived on the open steppes before. They had learned how to make fuel in the absence of wood (though they were to make much use of wood from the Pembina Hills right from the beginning.) They had learned to plant trees. They had struck living water on level ground before. Their open field system of land-holding did not require wooden fences. The historian of Manitoba Mennonites, Dr. E. K. Francis, sums it up this way "Thus the West Reserve, laid out between Emerson and Mountain City at a depth of 18 miles north of the United States boundary, was really the first permanent agricultural settlement ever established on the open prairie of Western Canada without direct access to a major body or current of water." Peter Zacharias, *Reinland*.

The yield was only small as it was seeded on sod which had only been broken in spring.

In the second year father took on the herding of cattle so that he could earn himself something, and then your two sisters had to herd the cattle and I and Johan sawed wood. We had a lot of work and then we earned enough that we could finish the house and get it ready for occupancy. This was the third winter. During this time we had a lot of work sawing wood.

In the meantime, the land cultivation, wherever possible, became more and more prominent; the land, of course, varied, but on the average it yielded well. On the average the weather was fruitful for the benefit of the grain farming economy. During the beginning years, threshing the grain from the straw was done with a threshing stone since no threshing machines were available. These threshing stones were pulled by a team of horses, which was then rolled around on the spread out sheaves, which lay spread out beside each other in a circular area.

This is how the grain was threshed out in the early years until with time, the change was made to threshing machines which were priced to sell. They were small threshing boxes which were manually fed the sheaves which had been cut into small pieces. The box was only small, it had only a small cylinder, in the form which you have seen on the large threshing boxes.

This machine was powered by five teams, whether oxen or horses. For this, a motor was set up with drive wheels whereby the machine was kept in motion. There were five poles attached to this motor, to each of which a team was hitched and on which they had to pull in order to keep it in motion. From this motor a coupled iron bar went to the threshing box, where it was similarly coupled to a drive wheel in order to keep the entire substance of the machine in motion. Although the machine was only small, nevertheless, it still separated the kernels and chaff from the straw. The straw was taken away by two workers or by a team of livestock.

Now to close, I want to come to your question. Our grandparents lived in Reinland on the old Barkman's [Bergmann] place. I believe only two or three years after which they sold and moved to Hoffnungsfeld. But the grandmother moved there as a widow; the grandfather had already died in Reinland. The grandfather died still in Reinland in the second year [later corrected to read, the third year].....

When I think back to the time that our grandfather died and at the same time that our sister Maria was born. I think both occurred in the first winter in 1876, which really does not seem very long ago to me. She was born while we were living in the earth [in the semlin]. I had to dig this hole the first summer that we were in America, which I have already mentioned in my previous writing.

This dwelling was built with spars above the earth which were to serve as the roof. They were then covered with grass instead of straw. Grandfather finished the roof himself. I mowed the grass with a hand scythe which we had brought along from Russia. Tall grass was grow-

ing along the creek ("ritch") and the two sisters tied it into bundles for the roof which were then fastened with the same grass to the poles which were fastened to the spars with nails.

I also cut the seeded grain with this hand scythe which we had sown by hand. Father taught me how to seed since it was too a hard for him to drag around the loose soil with the bag ("pingel"). He was quite weak because of his pneumonia by which he had been afflicted in Russia because of his hard work.

I believe we farmed in this manner for two years with seeding and moving until father bought a mower, called by the name of "Ripper". It had four rakes which functioned in a circular manner when the machine was being pulled. The machine had a platform from which three rakes threw off the grain which had been cut off.

When it had been thrown off, the rakes turned themselves on the side, lifted themselves up, and came by in the upright position moving towards the front passing close by the drivers side. The four rakes shoved the gathered grain off the platform, each clump becoming a sheave which, however, had to be bound by the hand.

Father sat on the machine and drove which was powered by a team of horses, and I, Johan and Justina bound the sheaves. Peter was still too small at the time, but he was also on the field. He dragged the sheaves together as good as he could. This saved us a lot of time in setting the shocks as it spared us from having to run after the individual sheaves and carrying them together nearby.

In those days we had a time of cooperative effort for the field was richly appointed with workers since everything had to be bound by hand. But the influence of lowliness, humbleness and communal love made everything light.

After the harvesting was done, the sheaves were hauled together and piled in stacks. When this was completed, then came the threshing time. It did get somewhat late in Fall before everything was completed and winter set in.

I often remember from those days, one day while we were working on the field and we were working adjacent to our neighbours [working on their field]. The driver suddenly stopped adjacent to me; it was my companion and comrade, Wiens' Franz, the minister's son. He jumped from the mover and rushed towards me.

He complained and said, "I do not know why I feel so bad today. All my limbs are aching and hurt me. I will soon not be able to contain my pain, sitting on the machine."

We visited regarding a number of things, after which each one returned to his work. The following days he was not on the field. We understood from his family that he lay sick in bed. That evening I went over to see how things were going for him. He was very sick, the "nerve fever" [typhus] had gotten a hold of him and after a five week illness he was a corpse.

His sickness was difficult: he was almost always mentally deranged. One could not talk much with him. Toward the end of his illness, he got better; he came back to consciousness. His eyes were transported while he was dying, from the ascertainable to the unascertainable.

He did not see those standing around his bed. But intermittently he saw his bed surrounded by radiant angels. One observed this from his

"...intermittently he saw his bed surrounded by radiant angels."

gentle breaths which broke into quiet whispers from his weak spirit, in that his eyes soon turned here or directed themselves there as long as his breathing continued.

Then my precious comrade was torn from my side with whom I had so often stood together by the boundary fence discussing many different things, often times about spiritual matters. I really missed this company for a long time.

Not long thereafter, I had a dream that I went outside on the yard. In the middle there I saw two white clad streams, standing on the ground, their ends reaching up into the heavens. While I stood there nearby and gazed up into heaven, I noticed to my great joy that Wiensen' Franz, the deceased sufferer, came down on one of them from heaven descending to the earth.

I rejoiced to be able to see him again but we did not speak much with each other. He was otherwise friendly to me and said, "I have come

"I have come to tell you that one of these streams is also equally yours and upon it you too will some time ascend into heaven."

to tell you that one of these streams is also equally yours and upon it you too will some time ascend into heaven."

Whereupon he again ascended into heaven. After this admonition I thought that I would soon die, but am still alive today. I have been afflicted by many a trial for which I have not been able to sustain the required resistance....

Alas, where is the precious time. Alas, where are the beloved people, who formerly lived in humility and meekness, in love and unity and in love for one another? They are all buried and together with them the humility and meekness.

A completely different generation has arisen in their place, which shouts out its pride and arrogance, and because of this affliction, the fruits

"Alas, where are the beloved people, who formerly lived in humility and meekness, in love and unity and in love for one another."

of God are dying out, together with the love of fellowman. Because man does not love God nor heed His Word, shallowness takes root in the soul whereby all manner of apostasy rises up in the heart. Your siblings, "J. and Elisb. Fehr"

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 9-17.

Jakob Wiens (1767-1845).

Jakob Wiens Sr. was married for the first time to Sara Dicken. They had one daughter Maria born November 2, 1792.

Sara died January 7, 1795. The grieving young widower wrote in his "Familienbuch", "...my dearest treasure in life, my wedded wife, fell asleep in the Lord, and as we [firmly] believe, was transported into His Heavenly peaceable kingdom that very same night."

"Jakob Wiens (1767-1845) was a literate man who maintained a Familienbuch, a journal with genealogy and various farming accounts."

Jakob Wiens Sr. married for the second time to Sarah Brandt (1773-1861), daughter of Martin Brandt, born 1748.

Historian John Dyck has written that Jakob Wiens Sr. and his family emigrated from Prussia to Russia in 1792 (*1880 Village Census*, page 363).

Cornelius J. Funk, son-in-law of great-grandson Jakob Abram Kroeker, Winkler, has written that Jakob Wiens departed from Bohnsack, near Danzig, on March 22, 1788 (the first Easter Holiday) travelling by way of Riga, Dobrovna, Kremenchung, to Alt-Chortitz, Russia, where they arrived in the beginning of July 1789."

The family is listed in the immigration records as "Before 1812" 8. Wiens, Jakob Fuchswinkel, Landwirt (landowning farmer), to, firstly Chortitz, 2 Neuosterwick, married Dyck, Sara, Fuchswinkel, geb. 1771, Neustädterwald,... Vollmacht 1816," Unruh, page 356.

October 17, 1797, the twins Harm [Hermann] and Jakob were born, both of whom died in infancy. January 15, 1800, daughter Sarah was born. April 20, 1803, daughter Martha was born. Sept. 10, 1806, daughter Helena was born. April 13, 1810, daughter Nede was born.

Jakob Wiens was a literate man who maintained a Familienbuch, a journal with genealogy and various farming accounts. The Familienbuch truly became a family book as his wife, son Jakob and granddaughter Aganetha Wiens all recorded various records in this journal.

Jakob and Sarah Wiens had four daughters who survived and eight sons, seven of whom were named Jakob but all died in infancy except the youngest son Jakob born June 2, 1816.

Wirtschaft.

Jakob Wiens was a relatively wealthy farmer. According to the 1814 Revisions-Liste he owned Wirtschaft 5 in the village of Osterwick and his family was recorded as follows: Jakob Wiens 47, wife Sara 41, daughters Sara 14, Agata 11, Helena 8,

Margaretha 4 and servant Jakob...14. Property, 5 horses, 13 cattle, 9 sheep, 1 swine, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 2 wagons and 2 spinning wheels," Unruh, *Ostwanderungen*, page 283.

This confirms that most families in the 1874-6 emigration to Manitoba originated from the landowning Vollwirt class in Imperial Russia and even earlier.

Sheep raising for wool and mutton sales was among several important occupations for Mennonite farmers at the time.

In 1824 Jakob Wiens provided some details regarding his sheep farming referring to 23 mature rams, 4 young rams, 10 castrated lambs and 4 young lambs. Similar entries were made for 1826 and 1827.

In 1830 Jakob Wiens recorded that he had "...sold my Feuerstelle for 1259 ruble, receiving on account 402 ruble." The purchaser may have been Jakob Veer as he received a series of payments from him: Nov. 12, 25 ruble, 1831 172 ruble, June 1, 1832, 166 ruble and September 17, 100, 1833 100 ruble on April 11 and 160 ruble on June 7.

Jakob Wiens Sr. was sufficiently well-off that he was able to lend Peter Hildebrand 95 ruble in 1833 and "again 100 ruble on April 11." On June 10 he lent him 160 ruble: in August he gave Peter Hildebrand 150 ruble and before that 450."

Jakob's sister Aganetha died February 27, 1839, at the age of 74 years, 5 months and 11 days. Jakob Wiens Sr. spent a total of 13.45 ruble for her funeral including 4.25 for the coffin and 1.68 for brandy. This entry begs further explanation in light of Henry Schapansky's statement that Agatha and her family lived in Altona, Molotschna. Had Agatha for some reason come to live with her brother in the Old Colony?



Peter Classen, Arithmetic text, Danzig, Prussia, 1764. Photo courtesy of Ethel Abrahams, Frakturmalen, page 18.

Death.

Jakob Wiens Sr. died on December 31, 1845. This note was recorded by his wife Sarah.

In 1846 Jakob Wiens Jr. recorded settlements regarding 10 loans ranging from several rubles to 50 made to Cornelius Unrau, Wilhelm Friesen, Gerhard Sawatzky, Aron Peters, Suderman, Franz Funk, Striemert and Heinrich Funk (Rosengart). These entries appear to have been made by Jakob Wiens Jr. relating to monies owing to his father's estate. e.g. "January 22, 1846, the loan made in 1831 with Heinrich Funk from Rosengart, settled, balance owing 7.31 ruble."

Sarah Brandt Wiens died on September 14, 1861, at 3 p.m. at the age of 88 years and 8 months. She was the mother of eight sons and five daughters, grandmother to 52 children and great-grandmother to 40. This entry was made by son Jakob Wiens. The families of Jakob's four sisters have yet to be identified.

Jakob Wiens Jr. also recorded here the genealogy of his maternal grandparents, confirming the strong matriarchal component typically found in conservative Mennonite culture.

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Peter Wiens (b. 1770), “Rechnenbuch”

Introduction.

Jakob’s younger brother Peter Wiens (b. 1770) was a school teacher in Czathkau, Prussia.

Peter Wiens maintained a *Rechnenbuch* (an arithmetic teacher’s manual) illustrated with beautiful *Fraktur* art.

In the words of one educator, “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,” *Preservings*, No. 6, page 26.

This characterization certainly applies to Peter Wiens’s “*Rechnenbuch*”.

Apprenticed teachers typically started compiling a “*Rechnenbuch*” or teacher’s manual as soon as they started teaching. The subject material progressed from the basic to the more sophisticated. A few of the title pages were usually dated, allowing historians to trace the chronological evolution of the work.

The *Rechnenbuch*, 1787.

The earliest dated page in Peter Wiens’s “*Rechnenbuch*” was page 3, dated 1787. This preliminary section, pages 1-9, consisted of general tables and definitions. Page 4 contained a chart with values and names of various currencies, an exposition of time (the calendar year, months, weeks), units of area, weights and measures, etc. It was presumably added after the primary section was completed in 1786.

The “*Rechnenbuch*” proper starts on page 10 with a beautifully illustrated title page, “Anno 1770 den 2ten Maius uhr vor mittag bin ich Peter Wiens Geböhren,” followed by the

“The *Rechnenbuch* is not simply a mathematics text but a fine example of a man’s artistic and creative genius.”

elementary topics of addition (“*Addieren*”) (page 11), subtraction (page 19), multiplication page 25, and division, page 35.

Page 48 starts a multi-phase section on cubic measurements and weights, with subsections on adding, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

The elementary or first form of the “*Rechnenbuch*” was completed in 1786 when



In 1787 at the age of 17, Peter Wiens prepared a puzzle used for learning various calculations, the secret of which was encoded in the proverb underneath “*Gleich wie man einen Tuhm, Durch Staffeln musz ersteigen, So musz das Ein mal Eins. Denn weg zum Rechnen zeigen.*” Who can figure out the meaning of the riddle? At the bottom is a table used to learn Roman numerals, “*Rechnenbuch*”, page 3. The “*Rechnenbuch*” is filled with beautiful multi-hued *Fraktur* art, revealing the love of colour and gaiety of conservative Mennonites, as did the treasured coloured art pieces typically displayed in the inside of the covers of the beautiful chests (*Kjisten*) that they later brought along to Russia, functioning as a private family shrine.

Peter Wiens was only 16, not an uncommon age for a novice teacher at the time.

With the section starting on page 78, “*Regeln mit ganzen zahlen*” (rules with whole numbers), the problems become more complex, reflecting a more advanced level of study or second form. This is followed by “*Addition with fractions*” page 94, and Subtraction with

“The use of Latin phrases...echoes Medieval times when Latin was the universal language of the educated...”

fractions”, page 100, “*Dividieren in Bruchen*”, page 111, and “*Addieren in Bruchen mit Kleinen Sorten*”, page 127.

These sections are dated January 3, 1787, indicating that teacher Wiens, now 18 years old, had moved on to the second level in his teaching career.

The final part of the book (page 152) reflects a third level of complexity with instruction on Prussian coinage, currency exchange (page 135), interest calculations (page 160), calculating for trade (page 165), etc.

Latin terms are used to describe the last two subject headings reflecting some classical education and knowledge: “*Regula False*” (page 170), and “*Regula Cecis ad [?] Verginim*” (page 175).

The use of Latin phrases used throughout the *Rechnenbuch* echoes medieval times when Latin was the universal language of the educated and learned class.

The same “*Rechnenbuch*” was used for all four levels or forms of study in the traditional Mennonite confessional school system. Presumably the various levels of complexity in the arithmetic curriculum corresponded with the four forms, namely, the *Fibeler* (the *Fibel*), *Geschichtler* (Bible stories), *Testamentler* (New Testament) and *Bibler* (Old Testament), each level being known by the reading text used. Graduates of this system were thus able to boast they had only completed Grade Four, really a complete misnomer.

Scope.

But the “*Rechnenbuch*” was far more than a teacher’s manual to be used solely for arithmetic. Each problem had multiple pedagogical objectives and was intended to provide instruction in moral values as well as history. The problems and

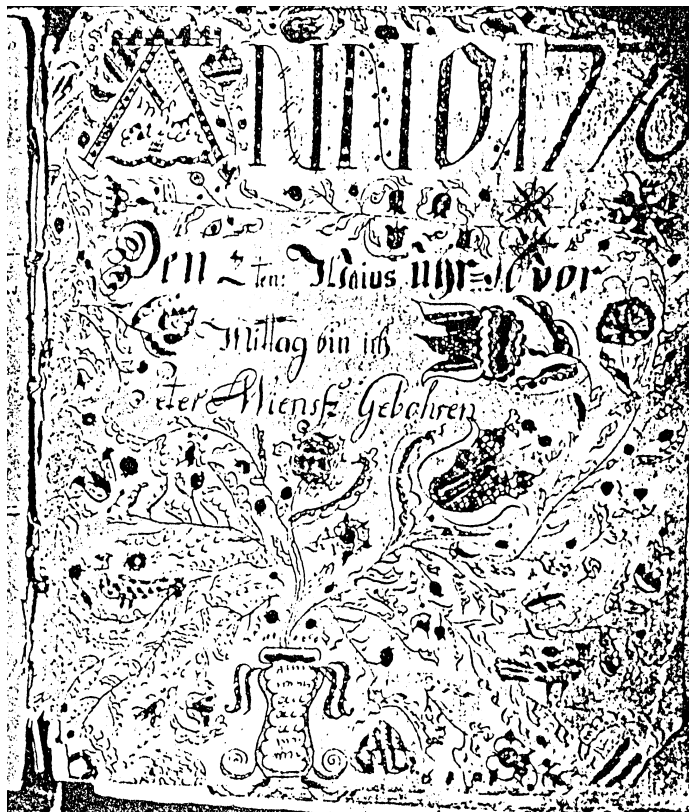
puzzles provided practice in calligraphy skills (embellished handwriting) and instilled a love of art and colour.

The “*Rechnenbuch*” also provided instruction in geography. Some of the problems were set in different cities; e.g., a problem on page

“Each problem had multiple pedagogical objectives and...provide[d] instruction in moral values as well as history.”

159 starts, “There are in Amsterdam from Danzig...,” or “Danzig to London...,” page 158. Presumably the reference to various European localities would lead to appropriate discussion on the geography of these places during the lesson.

Also of interest is the old rounded script or scroll used by Peter Wiens and typically found in Mennonite writings dating to 18th century



Title page of the Peter Wiens "Rechnenbuch". Although preceded by a short section of general charts, weights and measures, the mathematics text itself started on page 10, "Anno 1770 den 2ten Maius uhr vor mittag bin ich Peter Wiens Geböhren." followed by "Addieren" (page 11). It is a shame that the beautiful Fraktur artwork of Peter Wiens and other Mennonite teachers cannot be reproduced in all its multi-hued beauty. A collection of these pieces would make a beautiful coffee table book on the Mennonite Fraktur art tradition.



A colourful work of Fraktur art illustrates the section heading for "Interest Calculations" (page 160) of Peter Wiens's "Rechnenbuch". Again a riddle introduces the material to the students inspiring wonderment and interest. The many multi-hued illustrations in this teacher's manual speak for a love of colour and art instilled in students already at the elementary level. The centuries' old tradition was ended, or at least suppressed, by social reformer Johann Cornies (1789-1848) in the 1840s, at least in part as a result of pietist influences among Russian Mennonites.

Prussia. By the latter part of the 19th century a more pointed vertically orientated script was commonly used among the Mennonites in Russia.

The presentation of the material from the "Rechnenbuch" was interspersed with proverbs and short poems which the teacher undoubtedly recited for the students by memory as occasion availed itself.

The following piece from page 129 serves as an example:

"...disproving the myth that teachers in Mennonite confessional schools were only from the lower socio-economic classes..."

"Was ein Fleisziger Hausz Vater adirt, Ein ungehorsamer Son Substrahirt, Ab schon ein Gott wird multiplierin, Segnet es Gott nich; Wird es dividiert."

On page 69, the compiler has noted, "End of the multiplication in Muntz (coinage), Maasz (cubed) and Gewicht (weights). Peter Wiensz, Gattzau, d. 5 April Anno 1786."

This would confirm Henry Schapansky's identification of Peter as the son of Hermann

Wiens listed in the village of Czathka in the 1776 Konsignation or census. Hermann Wiens was a wealthy farmer with a servant, again disproving the myth that teachers in Mennonite confessional schools were only from the lower socio-economic classes with no other career options.

"...the Mennonite confessional school system...affirm[ed the]...inherent goodness and wholesomeness of children created in God's own image."

The Fraktur artwork of Peter Wiens reflects a love of colour and gaiety intrinsic to the Mennonite confessional schools.

The Peter Wiens' "Rechnenbuch" is one of the better examples of this genre of Mennonite literary work. It is comparable or perhaps even superior to the extant "Rechnenbücher" of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82), Fischau, and Jakob Isaak (1815-66), Schönau, in the Molotschna.

Significance.

Unfortunately Peter Wiens came to a tragic end. Cornelius J. Funk, son-in-law of great-grandson Jakob Abram Kroeker, Winkler, has written that at some point, Peter Wiens disappeared without a trace.

The scope of his "Rechnenbuch" dating back to 1786 in Prussia, was to provide a foundation in mathematical skills and other subjects in all facets which students might encounter during their adult lives. It provides evidence the Mennonite confessional school system was highly developed. It was a firmly entrenched pedagogical tradition, affirming the inherent goodness and wholesomeness of children created in God's own image.

Apparently conservative Mennonites in Prussia were pioneers in the field of universal education just as they were in the area of grass roots democracy.

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Christopher Dock ca. 1700-71

Christopher Dock.

Prussian Mennonite school teacher Peter Wiens was born about the same time as another great pedagogue, Christopher Dock (c. 1700-71), died in Colonial America.

Christopher Dock, Shippack, Pennsylvania, has been widely recognized in Swiss/South German Mennonite literature as well as in American popular culture as a Godly man who rewarded scholarship and good behaviour by presenting exquisite *Fraktur* gifts to his students.

“Winning love was the focal point of the teaching and instructing technique of Christopher Dock. This was an astounding idea back in a time when the stick ruled above all else. He drew pictures for his students and flowers as their reward, made little booklets for them whereby he tried to make tradition and the rules for conduct meaningful for the children,” *Weltweite Bruderschaft*, page 168. Most of this would have applied equally to the Russian Mennonite school teachers of Jakob Wiens’ generation. It was only later after the Johann Cornies reforms and the emigration of 1874 that they became known as harsh disciplinarians, where form superseded substance.

In stark contrast to his co-confessionists in the Russian Mennonite tradition, the writings and teaching materials of Christopher Dock are prized and sought after by educators, archives and libraries in Pennsylvania. His essay, “School-management” (*Schulordnung*), written in 1750 and published in 1770, “was the first American treatise on the art of school management? It had a profound influence on the Mennonite confessional school tradition and colonial pedagogical methodology and Christopher Dock was considered the American Pestalozzi.

“Winning love was the focal point of the teaching and instructing technique of Christopher Dock.”

Manitoba, 1875.

Of the three Mennonite denominations which came to Manitoba in the 1870s, the Reinländer (Old Kolony) were the only ones who brought with them a significant secondary (*Zentralschule*) education tradition.

The work of Peter Wiens and nephew Jakob compares favourably to that of Dock, something which the critics of the Russian Mennonite pedagogical tradition were presumably not aware of, hence demonstrating their own ignorance and hidden agenda.

In Manitoba, Anglo-conformity, brainless stampeding after alien religious cultures and bigoted stereotyping of conservatives have



Colonial schoolmaster, Christopher Dock (c. 1700-71), Telford, Pennsylvania, rode on horseback between the two schools which he served. Dock has been described as a godly man and legendary teacher: “Character and Godliness were the chief objectives in Dock’s school.” Illustration courtesy of Shippack School (*Herald Press*, 1999).

combined to rob Mennonites of their equally noble historical heritage.

Russian Mennonites (at least those who adopted Separatist-Pietist and so-called Evangelical religious cultures), by comparison, have tended to disparage the conservatives and their traditional confessional schools in particular.

This is a rather bizarre attitude considering the tens of thousands of successful matricarchs, farmers, entrepreneurs and church leaders the system has graduated over the centuries. Presumably these bigoted attitudes reflected something intrinsically insidious in Separatist-Pietist and Fundamentalist Protestant religious cultures.

Aeltester Johann Funk.

Those involved in the Mennonite Educational Institute at Gretna in 1890, and after, such as Aeltester Johann Funk and Inspector Heinrich Ewert, must take a large part of the blame. They highjacked the Old Kolonier educational tradition spiking the agenda of higher education by tying it to Anglo-conformity and

“Presumably these bigoted attitudes reflected something intrinsically insidious in Separatist-Pietist and Fundamentalist Protestant religious cultures.”

the adoption of alien religious cultures such as American Revivalism and Separatist-Pietism.

There are those who point out that Aeltester Funk and Inspector Ewert did not support the proselytizers who had beset the pioneer Mennonite community in Manitoba by the 1880s and that the adoption of alien religious cul-

tures was not their agenda. They argue that Funk and Ewert merely sought to bring about reform by improvements in the educational system.

However, this argument is belied by the facts. Although they did not directly support either the Brüdergemeinde and/or General Conference missionaries, their language and methodology indicated they had their own version of Revivalism and/or Separatist Pietism which they promoted. One is mindful of the old maxim, “If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and walks like a duck, it probably is a duck.”

“...Aeltester Johann Funk and Inspector Heinrich Ewert,... highjacked the Old Kolonier educational tradition spiking the agenda...”

Heinrich Ewert, for example, said of the conservative Mennonites in Manitoba that “they were in as much need of help as the heathen in Africa,” *Die Schule Must Sein*, pages 21-22. Such attitudes were evocative of teacher Tobias Voth in the Ohrloff Zentral Schule founded by Johann Cornies in 1822. Voth was a fanatical Separatist Pietist who used his position as teacher to advance his pathetic religious culture, an action of immense stupidity and crudeness typically unacceptable to parents.

Bergthaler Revivalism.

Jakob Hoepfner (1850-1936) was one of the early leaders in the Bergthal “revivalist” movement. As a teacher in Hochfeld, he followed the methodology already modelled by

teachers in Russia such as Tobias Voth. He adopted the teachings of Separatist Pietism and employed the promotional motifs of Revivalism such as highly emotional oratory, Bible studies, Sunday Schools and new hymns, to disseminate the same, (Klippenstein, "Heritage Postings, Sept. 2000, page 2).

The traditional Mennonite schools already used the Bible, Bible studies and the *Gesangbuch* as the only curriculum. The children who graduated from these schools were thoroughly indoctrinated in Biblical teachings and Christian values. Clearly the issue was



Winning love was the focus point of the teaching and instructing technique of Christopher Dock. Dock died in 1771. "He was found on his knees [in prayer] in the schoolroom, but his spirit had departed," Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. Two, page 77. Photo courtesy of Weltweite Bruderschaft, page 166.

not one of teaching biblical values and faith, the issue was over the type of religious culture which was to be taught—their own traditional Gospel-centric faith or that of Separatist Pietism-Revivalism which basically denied the Gospels.

The issue of education had already torn huge rifts in the Mennonite community in Imperial Russia. Preserving their own Gospel-centric faith and educational tradition was one

“...the issue was over the type of religious culture which was to be taught...”

of the main reasons why many conservatives had immigrated in 1874-76.

The fact that Hoepfner introduced the methodology of Revivalism and Pietist teachings, indicated he neither understood nor appreciated the Gospel-centric motifs of his own confessional tradition and instead sought to suppress and replace them. Nor was he sensitive to concerns of the conservative Mennonite community already deeply traumatized by a century of earlier attempts at using the schools as a way of introducing alien religious cultures and turning children against the faith of their fathers and alienating them

from their communities and extended family networks.

It is understandable that such measures would deeply concern parents who had great appreciation for their own Gospel-centric faith and who specifically wanted their children educated and instructed within that tradition.

Hoepfner was one of the early supporters of Mennonite Educational Institute at Gretna, presumably seeing it as another weapon in the fight against traditional Mennonite Gospel-centric faith and culture.

The history book of the Berghthaler church reconstituted under Aeltester Johann F. Funk, proudly trumpets the assertion that “A small minority thought in terms of spiritual renewal...[which] did not merely aim to preserve the past. It was a genuine, far-sighted and redeeming effort to rediscover the nature of the church and its mission in the world,” *Adventure in Faith*, page 78.

Based on their own words and conduct it is obvious that these “loco-focos” did not waste any time studying the writings and teachings of the conservative faith tradition in seeking information about “the church and its mission in the world.” Presumably they did not want to be confused by the facts.

At the very least their agenda was disassociative of the long standing educational tradition of the conservative Mennonites. There is no evidence that these self-styled reformers sought to gather information about

“...the time has come to consider the Mennonite pedagogical tradition based on its actual merits and not merely on prejudice and bigotry...”

that tradition and/or to renew or reconstitute the same. In that sense, they revealed a fundamental lack of understanding of their own faith and culture (perhaps ignorance is too strong a word).

Conclusion.

In the past, supporters of the Mennonite Educational Institute, Gretna, routinely promoted the myth that the traditional Mennonite educational system was worthless and without merit and that it could only be redeemed by the adoption of outside methodology and the public educational system.

Would it not be better to build on the proven paradigms of past centuries, to recognize its many strengths, and rather try to improve the system as was done in colonial Pennsylvania?

This adds to the importance of the stories of teachers such as Jakob Wiens and Peter Wiens under whose tutelage the system worked so well. Perhaps the time has come to consider the Mennonite pedagogical tradition based on its actual merits and not merely on prejudice and bigotry and to look for ways of improving the system instead of constantly

denigrating it.

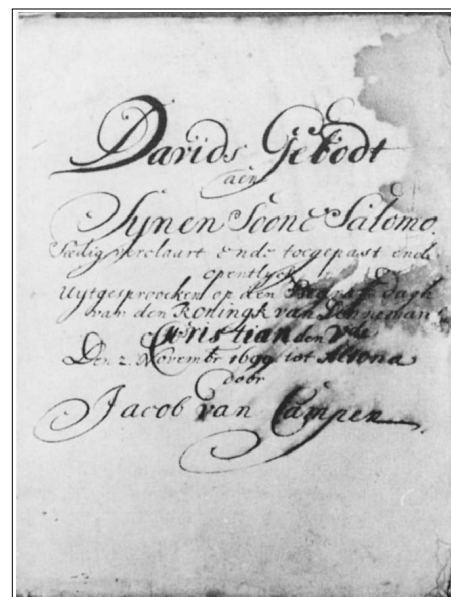
The question is of great significance. In Latin America some 150,000 Mennonites still have the privilege of operating their own educational system with the opportunity, therefore, of immersing their children in the ways of genuine Gospel-centric faith and their own cultural motifs and traditions which God hath wrought.

Recognizing the Mennonite confessional schools as legitimate and then seeking even modest improvements, would have immense consequences for the Mennonite community over the next century. However, this would be far too radical an idea for many Canadian Mennonites (particularly those who have adopted the “Stompin’ Tom” variety of religious culture) whose vision is restricted to destroying these communities and/or their culture, largely in the pathetic hope that they can add a few members to their particular denomination.

For Further Reading:

Plett, *Saints and Sinners*, pages 44-45, 158-168, and 99-101.

A. Ens, “Mennonite Education in Russia,” in John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, 1989), pages 75-97.



Jakob van Campen, “Vorschrift,” Altona, Germany, 1699, Photo courtesy Abrahams, Frakturmalen, page 33.

Protestant Fundamentalists have often mocked conservative Mennonites for their practice of silent prayer. One Reformation writer encouraged silent prayer on the grounds that the relationship between God and man was far too important for the believer’s voice and that of the community to be appropriated and/or controlled by a worship leader. The Editor.

Jakob Wiens (1816-88), Hoffnungsfeld, Manitoba

Introduction.

Jakob Wiens was born in 1816 to Jakob Wiens and Sara Brandt, owners of Wirtschaft 5 in the village of Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia.

May 20, 1835, Jakob Wiens was baptised upon the confession of his faith.

September 8, 1836, Jakob Wiens married Katherina Klassen, born 1817. She was a sister to David Klassen whose son Jakob RGR 272-1 and daughter Katharina, Mrs. Ludwig Esau (S1A-237) later lived in Hoffnungsfeld, W.R.

Katharina's mother Katharina, nee Dyck, was married to a Klassen and later to a Pauls. She was born Oct. 15, 1776, and died on Jan. 3, 1852, at 10 a m.

Katharina Klassen was baptised upon the confession of her faith May 20, 1836.

Jakob Wiens recorded that "On January 11, 1838, at 9 p m. we experienced quite a strong earthquake, although we suffered no damage."

Jakob Wiens was a school teacher in Russia. In 1841 Jakob and Catherina Wiens moved from Osterwick to Kronsthal where he served as a teacher.

On page 24 of his uncle Peter's "Rechnenbuch" Jakob made a notation, "Jakob Wiens, Schullehrer in Kronsthal, May 21, 1841," preceded by "Peter Wiens, Gathzau, Anno 1786, Prussia."

In 1844 Jakob Wiens purchased a half Wirtschaft from Hermann Neufeld for 1000 ruble.

On November 8, 1844, Catharina became ill and was bedridden until the fall of 1849.

Familienbuch.

Jakob Wiens Jr. continued the "Familienbuch" commenced by his parents, recording therein details of his marriage, children and grandchildren.

In 1868 Jakob Wiens recorded the following in the Familienbuch:

"I, Jakob Wiens, was born on June 2, 1816, at 1 p m., the youngest of my siblings, and the only one of eight brothers who lived (past infancy) and am now 52 years of age. During this time I have experienced many happy days as well as sad times, actually years, so that I can say with Job--I have worked whole months for nothing and hard nights have been many, but our dear God has graciously helped until now and will continue to help so that when our goal is reached, He will provide a blessed end."

Journals.

Like Christopher Dock (d. 1771) in Shippack, Pennsylvania, Jakob Wiens Jr. was a professional teacher whose journals and letters describe a Godly man. His story speaks for the Mennonite pedagogical tradition where the primary goal was the instilling of Godliness and moral character in young innocent hearts.

The fact that Jakob Wiens preserved and used the "Rechnenbuch" of his uncle Peter indicates the respect he had for his elders as well as the

confessional tradition within which he practised his profession. Evidently he thought so highly of his uncle's work that he did not see the need to compile his own "Rechnenbuch", traditionally the first task of a young teacher.

Jakob Wiens did something equally impor-



Circa 1860. Jakob Wiens (1816-88) and Katherina Klassen (1817-85), Kronsthal, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. This is one of the older photographs found in the Russian Mennonite tradition. Jakob Wiens appears to be about 40-50 years old in the photograph. Photo courtesy of Grandfather's Diary: enroute to Canada (Winnipeg, 1961), title page. The photo was also published in the Steinbach Post, June 21, 1950, page 6, submitted with a letter from Mrs. Jakob Enns.

tant. He transcribed various historical and theological writings collecting these writings in a journal. Presumably they formed a resource of materials, paralleling the Rechnenbuch, which he used in the course of his teaching.

"Like Christopher Dock...Jakob Wiens Jr. was a professional teacher whose journals and letters describe a Godly man."

Record keeping and the gathering of writings in journals was a common practice among conservative Mennonites. In this regard Jakob Wiens was continuing an ancient tradition among his people.

March 20, circa 1840, Jakob Wiens Jr. bound the journal together with his uncle Peter's "Rechnenbuch".

The journal includes a compilation of various medical recipes, devotional items, short histori-

cal vignettes, poetry mostly written around 1840, and, of course, the immigration account which is published as part of this article.

It may well be that Jakob Wiens did most of the work of compiling the journal prior to 1840 at the start of his teaching career

The medical prescriptions and ancient folk remedies recorded by Jakob Wiens indicate he served as a medical practitioner/advisor in addition to his teaching profession and farming (pages 35-57).

Vignettes.

Many of the items collected by Jakob Wiens in his journal were short vignettes presumably used in the classroom.

The first item documents various deaths in the Chortitza Colony in the 1848 cholera epidemic: "At its peak, five people died in one day 24 in total. Among these 13 were married through which seven became widowers and seven were widowed."

The next 34 pages consist of historical writings regarding the founding of the Mennonite settlements in Imperial Russia, including the official invitation, the Privilegium, and the agreement made by the delegates and government.

The next section (pages 35-57) consists mainly of medical prescriptions and remedies, although several items of moral literature are interspersed. The morality literature, pages 58-109, is described below.

Pages 83 to 116 consist of writings of a historical and theological nature.

On page 83 Jakob Wiens refers to a severe windstorm which hit the Chortitza Colony July 22, 1842, and details some of the damage caused.

Several pages dealing with millennial teachings are followed by a number of songs copied from the *Christenboten*, for encouragement under the Cross ("Zur aufmunterung unter dem Kreutze") (page 88), a 1873 letter to the Czar by Old Colony Aeltester Gerhard Dyck and other leaders outlining the Mennonite faith (pages 95-98), a letter by Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-92) regarding war from the *Friedensbote* (pages 98-101), and several songs.

Concluding this section is a letter from Johann Dyck, Osterwick, dated Dec. 15, 1876, discussing mutual friends. Dyck recalls how Wiens had been so downcast and sentimental the last time he had visited his place, saying goodbye.

Dyck also mentioned that in his last letter Jakob Wiens had written he was making a map of the entire colony and that he would send it.

This is followed by two devotional pieces: "Of the salvation of the believer in eternity" and "The longing of a soul for release" (pages 155).

Pages 115-116, contain a poem "Sittenregeln für Schulkinder" once memorized by every child in the Mennonite confessional educational system and recited in most schools every morning: "Das erste was du tust, Wenn du aufstehest fruh, Ist ein Gebet zu Gott; Kind dasz vergesse nie" (The first which shall be done, each morn' when

you arise, to give a prayer to God, Child forget this n'er).

The 28 stanzas of this poem portrayed the ideal deportment of a good child, reflecting the high view of creation and human worth underlying the Mennonite faith (see below).

The biggest single item in the journal is the emigration account, pages 117 to 151, published with this article.

History.

The journal closes with two larger historical pieces, "The first emigration of Mennonites to Russia from the Danzig region, Part One, a short description of the first emigration from Danzig and the journey to Chortitz" (pages 154-167). This seemingly is a shortened version of the Peter Hildebrand account, published in English by the MMHS earlier this year

Jakob Wiens did not copy the entire account presumably because he did not wish to affirm and validate Hildebrand's negative and pejorative portrayal of the 1789 Chortitz pioneers (see Henry Schapansky, "From Prussia to Russia," in *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 9-14, and available on the HSHS web site: "www.hshs.mb.ca").

The second piece (pages 168-174) is a short village history of Kronsthal, possibly the 1848 Gemeindebericht, which Jakob Wiens as the local teacher would have written himself.

Kronsthal was founded in 1809, one of later villages in the Chortitz Colony, started to alleviate overcrowding in the existing villages. Since most of the settlers came from Kronsweide and Rosenthal the name chosen was a combination, one syllable from each of the mother villages (page 169).

The monograph provides a short survey of the difficulties faced by the settlers in terms of droughts and other misfortunes as well as types of farming, etc.

Presumably both pieces were used by Jakob Wiens to teach students the history of their own village.

Morality Literature.

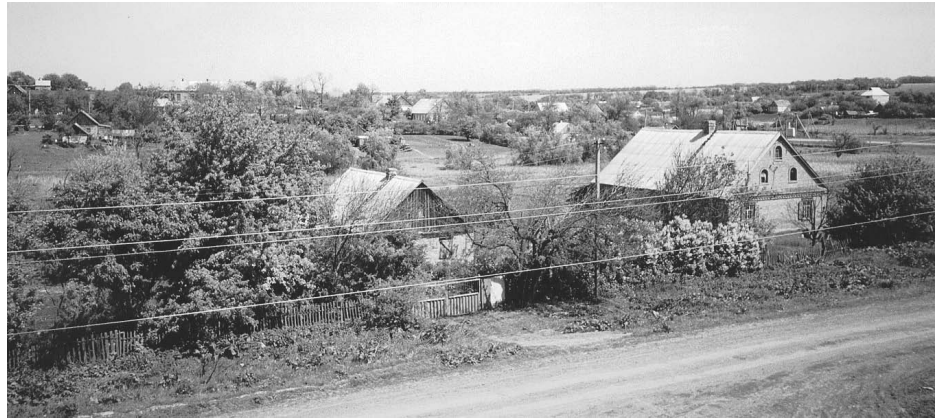
By 1840 the canon of conservative Mennonite devotional literature was well defined and highly evolved. Although anchored firmly by the *Martyr Spiegel* and *Gesangbuch*, the canon included a surprising range of writings.

Closely associated with print culture was a category of devotional material I have described as "morality literature", and used extensively in the conservative Mennonite tradition as observed in the Ohrloff-Halbstadt, Petershagen-Lichtenau, and Kleine Gemeinden in the Molotschna, see *Saints and Sinners*, pages 146-147.

Morality literature consisted of short handwritten stories, biographies and/or anecdotes which generally brought forth a moral lesson.

The genre served as a secondary devotional literature. Being less regulated this allowed new material an avenue to enter the canon represented by the more defined print culture.

In accordance with ancient tradition these manuscript items were gathered and disseminated by handwritten transcriptions much like the monks of medieval times.



The village of Osterwick (Dolinskoye), Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia, today Ukraine. The photograph was taken from the second floor of the Peter Schulz manor home, view to the east. Photo by Delbert Plett, May 2000. Schulz was the owner of the large factory founded by his father Dietrich Schulz in 1880.

Morality literature was used in the classroom by teachers to instill moral, ethical and religious values.

The morality literature collected and used by Jakob Wiens constitute one of the most fascinating sections of his teacher's journal.

Some examples: Page 58, "Praise God, the winter is past," page 59, "My heart springs itself upward--Spring," page 61, "How magnificent is the Evening Glow--A Spring Evening," page 62, "Oh, how the world stands in the Evil - Good Friday," page 63, "Today Christ has risen, Easter," page 64, "Oh Father! Abeyance of Your Kindness? A nice rain after a long drought," page 67, "Lord I come to praise you. On New Year's Day," page 73, "Praise God with Contentment - The Rainbow," page 75, "Praise God I want to Praise You--After a nice rain," page 77, "Praise God I want to Praise You--at the end of the year," page 80, "Oh God, who has maintained us--June 2, 1842."

The material used by Jakob Wiens would certainly be worthy of in depth analysis as to its origins and content. Perhaps it would be suitable to be used as curriculum material in modern-day Mennonite communities which still control their own educational systems.

"By 1840 the canon of conservative Mennonite devotional literature was well defined and highly evolved...[including] a surprising range of writings."

Pedagogy.

The numerous devotional pieces which Jakob Wiens collected were presumably material used in the classroom. They clearly describe, therefore, important elements of the conservative Mennonite pedagogical tradition shortly after it was transplanted from Prussia to Imperial Russia in 1789.

The fundamental characteristic of the morality literature gathered by Jakob Wiens was its

inherently positive nature. It was evocative of the theology of conservative Mennonites that children were born into the world as wholesome, redeemed and fully soteriologic human beings. This in turn went back to Reformation times when Anabaptists in the Low Countries (Netherlands and Belgium) refused to follow simplistic Protestant creed focusing on the depravity of man, taking instead a high view of the human creation.

This was not merely an obscure theoretical

"...the morality literature...was evocative of the theology of conservative Mennonites that children were born into the world as wholesome, redeemed and fully soteriologic human beings."

doctrine, debated by Aeltesten over faspa, but truly the foundational teaching of an entire culture. This is clearly manifested as it was being taught in Mennonite confessional schools in Imperial Russia in 1840, three centuries after the beginning of the tradition.

The positive Mennonite view of the human condition as described in the teacher's manual of Jakob Wiens stands in sharp contrast to that of the Protestant Reformers, and particularly that of 19th century Separatist-Pietism and/or Protestant Revivalism, which held forth the notion that human beings were born as totally depraved, condemned and worthless creatures.

The latter notion, of course, was used as the foundation for a whole range of strategies instilling guilt and anxiety in young children, scarring many for life, and making them pliable subjects for the manipulations of their leaders. For example, a guest speaker at a local womens religious meeting in Steinbach this past summer boasted in her credentials that she had had a "conversion experience" at the age of three, something which would be regarded by many as evidence of child abuse.

It is evident that Jakob Wiens was a gifted educator, a rational and intellectual man. He had a vision of building God's community through



Peter Schulz manor home built in 1912 or 1914, west end of Osterwick. The sister Mennonite villages of Osterwick (Neuosterwick) and Kronsthal are now jointly referred to as Dolinskoye in Ukrainian. Photo by Delbert Plett, May 2000.

the instilling of Gospel-centric teachings coupled with a sound elementary education for all.

For further reading:

Sjouke Voolstra, "The colony of heaven: The Anabaptist aspiration to be a church without spot or wrinkle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries," in Piet Visser, *et al.*, editors, *From martyr to muppet: A historical introduction to cultural assimilation processes of a religious minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites* (Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pages 23.

Recollections.

Daughter Helena Wiens Kroeker later described some of her experiences while living with her parents in Kronsthal, Imperial Russia.

"My childhood and youth in my father's house, together with my six brothers and sisters, was a happy one. We lived in a four room house with floors of yellow soil covered with white sand. The house was on a little plateau on a hill in Kronsthal, Russia. From the valley below, a winding road came past our house, then passed the windmill and went up to the top of the hill.

"Balmy breezes wafted sweet aromas all around from fragrant lilac blossoms and fruit trees, such as pear, cherry, plum, apple and "Krushktj", which surrounded our house.

"To water the trees was mostly my duty. Countless times I ran up and down that hill with pails of water. Our orchards and vegetable gardens with their sand-covered pathways presented a picturesque view.

"School was a source of great joy to me even though I missed many days because of frequent severe toothaches. How I loved my teacher. Learning was a delight.

"Christmas was always a time of special joy. We learned our "Wuenschke" well and then our parents came to the Christmas program. How the tree sparkled with its decorations of glittering

candles and "Zuchermarzipan".

"Were our childhood years mainly characterized by play? No! We learned to work as well. At the age of six years I drove my father's horses while he worked as a land surveyor. At the age of 12 I was housekeeper because my older sister helped at my brother's place and mother was sick.

"Together with the other work, there was the caring for and breeding of silkworms. For this purpose three roosts were put up in the living room. Daily the worms had to be fed. The lovely silk which they produced was sold at a good price. We used part of the silk to knit fine gloves and stockings."

From Irvin Kroeker, *Wiens Family Register*, page 36-7.

Survey, 1860s.

In a letter published in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, October 26, 1887, Jakob Wiens relates an anecdote regarding surveying work he did in Russia.

"During the 1860s, after Czar Alexander II had abolished serfdom (or slavery) in Russia, each estate owner had to give his former serfs four desjation (almost 11 acres) of land per male soul. There were not nearly enough sworn-in [registered] surveyors in order to do all the necessary measuring and to divide the land among the farmers; the people at that time were still completely without education."

"I had previously already occupied myself extensively with surveying among Russians and Germans and was already well known. Consequently I had to survey out and divide the land for the farmers of most of the estate owners in the region of the Old Colony. Thus, I also came to a Russian village, Rasumowka, not far from the German Colony Nieder-Chortitz on the Dnieper which was part of the huge estate belonging to the Russian General Miklatschewski."

"It was in late summer and for a long time there had been a great drought. Because of lack of water, there was nothing to say, but the earth was hard as a stone. The farmers were supposed to plow furrows between their allotments but the plow could not be forced into the earth, rather it only scraped the weeds off on top."

"At the beginning of the week I started and looked forward to Friday, that I would end [the project] on Saturday. But at midday, the Narrost (village mayor) advised that we could not survey on Saturday. They had united themselves that the next day they would pray to God for rain in the church at Bilenko, the main village of the estate"

"I presented to them that they could wait with this until Monday, a few days would not matter. But they answered, 'No! And even if we would want to postpone the praying, we still could not survey, for the administrator has summoned us to help with a wolf's hunt and only released us because of the prayers.'"

"With this I was satisfied and drove home on Friday evening. Sunday morning it was already dark and by 10:00 o'clock it started to rain gently and rained the entire day".

"When I returned again on Monday, it had rained even harder there than by us, for now they could not plow deep enough to find dry earth. They said they had been right in the middle of their prayers when it started to rain."

"Now what shall we say hereto? The unbelievers will say, it is only coincidence"

"But I say, the Lord carried out His promises here, which He has given in so many places in the Holy Scripture."

Millennialism, 1873.

At the bottom of page 83 of the journal Jakob Wiens starts a section dealing with the millennial teachings in vogue among many of the Mennonites who remained in Russia.

Those who converted to Separatist-Pietist religious culture adopted the chiliastic teachings of Jung-Stilling that Russia (the east) would be the refuge of the Church in the endtimes and that the Russian Czar would be its Saviour.

Jakob Wiens refers to the publication of Claasz

"[Imperial Russia]...has harboured socialism and nihilism which always becomes more powerful in spite of sword, torture, prison and Siberia."

Epp's book setting forth the Separatist-Pietist understanding of the endtimes, writing, "It is amazing that exactly now as we come to the last emigration year, the booklet *Die entsiegelte Weissagung des Propheten Daniel und die Deutung der Offenbarung Johannishas* appeared and is restraining many from emigrating. According to his admonitions and commands, he [the author] must be a very Christly person. But his prophesying goes too far, for he prescribes quite an exact time when everything shall come to pass, when in actuality the time and hour re-

mains hidden from mankind?”

Jakob Wiens quoted Deuteronomy 20, verse 18, “that those who prophesy falsely shall die.” His observations show a keen perception and understanding of scripture.

As a typical Old Kolonier, Jakob Wiens expresses himself in a kindly manner regarding Claasz Epp even though possibly tongue-in-cheek. In the view of conservative Mennonites, Claasz Epp, his father David Epp, and, indeed, most Separatist-Pietists, were in the words of Kleine Gemeinde theologian Heinrich Balzer “... seized of a perverse spirit,” *Golden Years*, pages 227-9.

Wiens thanked the gracious God for having compassion by allowing at least some of His people to depart from Russia. He noted the statement in Epp’s book that “Russia will not experience the coming tribulation since it was spared from the aforementioned Revolution.”

To this Wiens responded, “It [Russia] has in no way been spared, it has merely not yet come to such a universal eruption. For a long time already it has harboured socialism and nihilism which always becomes more powerful in spite of sword, torture, prison and Siberia. Indeed, one should flee the deserts of Samara and Bakkara...And is it possible that the beloved God has only one place of refuge prepared in middle Asia for His own, and where only few from America can flee? Truly he [Epp] has many followers here although only few among us.”

“Has He not likewise prepared for them the beautiful west, where no armies are urgently pressing? Yet, we want to submit this to Him who will govern all.”

Wiens’ astute analysis of the situation could well serve as an encouragement to many in the present day who are so busy stampeding after alien religious cultures they have forgotten about Christ and His gift of redemption for those who follow Him and His teachings.

On pages 86 and 87, Jakob Wiens copied an article by Johan Rohmer “The star of Bethlehem” revolving around the prediction of an American professor that a total eclipse of the sun and moon was to occur in 1887 and how this related to endtimes predictions of the Second Coming.

Emigration, 1876.

In 1876 Jakob Wiens and family emigrated from Imperial Russia. Jakob Wiens served as co-leader of a contingent of Old Colony Mennonites crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S. S. Sardinian arriving in Quebec City, Quebec, June 19, 1876. Travelling on the same vessel was grandson Jakob age 13 and daughter Helena age 20 and son-in-law Abraham Kroeker 22.

Jakob Wiens kept a careful record of the journey from Imperial Russia to Canada and the first few weeks in Manitoba. This account was translated and published in 1961 by great-granddaughter Nettie Kroeker, 85 Kelvin Street, Winnipeg 5, Manitoba. It is this published version which is reproduced here.

Hoffnungsfeld.

Jakob Wiens and his family arrived at Fort Dufferin on June 19, 1876. Jakob and son Isaak

were entered in the listing of members of the 1875-1880 Reinländer (Old Kolony) Gemeindebuch, page 5, as No. 10 and 17, respectively.

Daughter Helena later recalled that Jakob had served as one of the surveyors for the infant settlement.

After several weeks of looking for a suitable site, Jakob Wiens and his family settled in the village of Hoffnungsfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba. The village included part of the area of the present-day City of Winkler.

Recollections.

Daughter Aganetha Wiens Ens later described some of their experiences during the early pioneer years:

“Her father was leader of the group. After a long and hazardous journey they landed in Canada

of her married brothers and sisters with their children lived in it the first winter.

“In spring the land was prepared as good as possible. There were only two or three ploughs in the whole village. Seeding was done by hand and ripe grain was later cut with a scythe. Mother did her share of work in the fields and in the home.

“Food was very poor in the first years. It consisted mainly of flour and water, two ingredients which were fashioned into as many different dishes as possible. Many people died as a result of malnutrition. The loss was especially great among the children. Then a grim typhoid epidemic took many adults – mothers and fathers – leaving many orphans.”

From Irvin Kroeker, *Wiens Family Register*, page 39.



The graveyard of the village of Kronsthal, Chortitza Colony, with the village street visible in the background in the valley of the middle Chortitza River. According to Rudy Friesen, Into the Past, page 106, the gravestone on the left is that of Jakob Zacharias (1827-88). The high escarpments contain the yellow clay used by the Mennonites for making their much sought-after bricks and tiles. Photo by Delbert Plett, May 2000.

in June 1876. In a small steamer they made their way down the Red River, often having to be towed from the banks, until they arrived in Emerson.

“There they bought a wagon, oxen and other provisions and made their way westward. In Reinland the men left their families and pushed still farther west in search of land with good water. When they came to a place about two miles southwest of the present town of Winkler they found water which was palatable.

“Mother, being the only unmarried child in the family, worked hard with them for their existence. At first they lived in sod huts dug into the ground up to the windows. The windows were grass sods piled one on top of the other for an opening, the roof was also made of sods. The floor inside slanted from the sides toward the middle and on rainy nights they had to take their turns draining water which streamed in from the roof of the hut. Many a night they made their beds in the wagons in the yards.

“Before winter came her father built a large house for which logs were hauled from the woods. The walls were all dove-tailed at the corners. There were no nails—just wooden pegs. All crevices were filled with mud, so they had a warm house for winter. She and her parents and three

Letters.

Being a man of letters it was natural that Jakob Wiens would conduct an extensive letter correspondence. It was the custom in his time for copies of letters to be transcribed into a “letter book”. Several of his epistles are extant.

June 29, 1879, Jakob Wiens wrote to nephew David Klassen in Russia. He starts the epistle by wishing his nephew the “peace of God...Whoever has this peace need never fear, even if the very oceans shall pass away and the mountains sink in the sea.....For Jesus said, ‘Be of good cheer and fear ye not.’”

“Indeed, this peace is very necessary for us and doubly for you there in Russia.”

Jakob Wiens writes that the fields and gardens look excellent and that they are expecting a good crop. He has recently traded his oxen for a team of geldings.

He continues a debate with his nephew regarding the emigration and his fears of an impending nihilistic uprising in Russia. He expresses concern over the lack of freedom of the press. It might be decades before the shattering of society there will actually come to pass. (Nettie Kroeker is seemingly quoting from this letter in her introduction to the emigration journey, re-published in this issue).



A beautiful view of the village of Kronsthal, as it exists today. The scene is representative of the Strassendorf street villages of the Mennonites in Imperial Russia. Many Mennonite buildings dating to 1900 and earlier still stand in the village. It is interesting that Kronsthal and Osterwick were also laid out as sister villages in the East Reserve in 1874, as were Rosenthal and Chortitz. Photo by Delbert Plett, May 2000.

Rundschau, 1885-88.

Jakob Wiens periodically wrote to the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, as the correspondent for the village of Hoffnungsfeld, W.R., Manitoba.

Through the assistance of Conrad Stoesz, Director, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, a number of letters written by Jakob Wiens are at hand. The same provide an interesting bird's eye view of Hoffnungsfeld and the West Reserve, but more importantly, of Jakob Wiens himself and his view of neighbours, church matters and religion.

The first four letters are datelined Schantzenfeld P.O. (Hoffnungsfeld).

In a letter dated August 31, 1885, published September 16, Jakob Wiens states it is over a month since he has last written. "The grain is as fine as it can even be...Indeed, much disparaged but highly fertile Manitoba. The Lord wishes to direct its residents to repentance through His endless goodness." With this letter is published an encouragement to school teachers with reference to the great importance of their work and also the complete text of the poem "Das erste, was du thust," setting out the ideal operations of the Mennonite confessional school system.

In a letter published No v. 11, 1885, Jakob Wiens details the suffering of brothers Heinrich (SGB1B-166) and Jakob Ensz (RGB-384-1) who died on Oct. 7 and 17th, respectively.

Wiens commented: "Indeed, the Lord speaks an earnest language with us, because we do not allow ourselves to be directed toward repentance through His goodness. For each and every one may certainly think, the like could also happen to him, and no one knows whether they will then have the mental ability or the grace for repentance; wherefore, 'Heut lebst du, heut bekehre dich, ob morgen kommt, kann's endern sich,' etc."

In a letter published January 27, 1886, Jakob Wiens acknowledges he has not reported for some time, "and you will discover in my further reports the reason for the torn-away pen for which I now again plan to grasp."

Further to the death of Heinrich and Jakob Ensz, he notes a third brother Johann Ensz, also

his son-in-law, fell sick shortly thereafter. Elisabeth, the daughter of Heinrich died Oct. 30, and shortly thereafter, David Driedgers' 17-year-old son David, fell sick. "He was anxious regarding his salvation, but finally also found peace in the blood of Jesus. Oh, that he would remain therein until his end"

In a letter published February 3, 1886, Jakob Wiens recounts the sad story alluded to in the earlier letter, the passing of his beloved wife of 50 years, Katherina nee Klassen. "After son-in-law Johann Ensz had lain sick for 3 1/2 weeks, so bad that the family on several occasions stood around his bed awaiting his death, my wife became sick, but not of typhus [Nervenfieber]; she was very sickly and weak already for a long

"This child also went over [to death] comforted, rejoicing that it would there meet the beloved Saviour and the beloved grandmother."

time, but was still up out of bed and doing some work. Her legs and feet were swollen, which sometimes caused her pain. But now however the infection also spread up her body and also internally, so that she had to lie in bed although her sickness in the beginning was not very severe."

"I immediately sought medical advice for my wife and obtained some medication but it was of no help and we could soon see what the outcome of this would be. It was extremely hard for me to tear myself from the one with whom I had been joined in love for almost 50 years....The sickness quickly gained strength and became very hard, so that all of us agreed with her innermost wish and prayed for her release. This prayer was also heard, for already on the 10th day of her sickness, at 5 o'clock in the morning, November 27, 1885, came the hour of her release."

By 1886 Jakob Wiens Sr. was teaching in Schönhorst, near Gretna (Jakob J. Wiens, letter to *Rundschau*, Dec. 22, 1886.)

In a letter published August 11, 1886, still

datelined July 15 Hoffnungsfeld, Jakob Wiens laments "as I am now old and as the writing, particularly the dictation, is becoming difficult for me, I have already decided to quit with my reports and to leave it for others."

Nonetheless "because the workers are also few" Wiens continued reporting. "The unmarried Peter Wiebe (at J. Bergmann's in Reinland), born in and from Neuendorf in the Old Kolony), died quietly on the preceding Sunday morning, without that anyone noticed, and therefore has gone home to the eternal rest, which he had already yearned after for a long time."

"On June 5, I...drove to Edenburg, first to Franz Ensz, farmer, where I met the Honourable Peter Giesbrecht from the East Reserve, the neighbours Peter Wienses and others...I stopped in Krongart at Heinrich Dycks...Gnadenfeld and visited the old acquaintance Cornelius Kroeker, who moved from Krongart, O.K., to Bergthal...in Schönhorst I had to ask for directions which occurred by a Abr. Wiens, son of Heinrich Wiens, whose wife is born Aganetha Schroeder... from here I got to Edenburg,...and drove up at the Honourable Heinrich Wiebe, whom--together with his family--I found hale and hearty...I visited also his aged mother who had the misfortune recently to have been run over by a horse, and was consequently prostrate in bed. I also met there a widow Harder, formerly the wife of Johann Wiebe, who was the school teacher in Neuosterwick for many years....the next morning I drove to Gretna, the store of David Peters (from Schönhorst, O.K., Rus.)...on the following Sunday,...Ohm Peter Giesbrecht from

"As a typical Old Kolonier, Jakob Wiens tended to see the members of his community in terms of their spiritual gestalt,..."

the East Reserve visited us and brought a moving sermon."

"June 16, I made a trip to Rosenfeld together with my sister Mrs. Joh. Klassen, and visited an old friend of my youth, formerly a Mrs. Joh.

Neufeld (now a widow Friesen), born a Katharina Klippenstein, from Neuosterwick, O.K., Rus... from there we drove to [Alt]-Bergthal and visited the Church teacher [minister] the Honourable Abr. Schroeder...in the evening we drove back to Rosenfeld and drove up at friend David Wiebes. In the evening we visited the old acquaintance Peter Zacharias...the following day we drove to the beloved Brandaeltester Peter Epp in Schönthal who gave me papers to take along to our Brandaeltester J. Bergmann, Reinland... from here we drove to Bergthal and stopped in at the beloved Aeltester Joh. Funk... from there to Kronsthal visiting Joh. Buhlers."

"On the following Sunday, June 26, 20 souls--10 male and 10 female--were united with the Gemeinde through the holy baptism, a beautiful baptism...On June 25, an aged boyhood friend, the Honourable Franz Dyck from the East Reserve visited me and on the day following I drove with him to behind Kleefeld..."

Jakob Wiens also writes they are experiencing "a drought such as they have not seen in all the years of being here". He reports the grain is poor, but the corn is quite good so that there will be enough feed. Wiens sees this as a warning from God to repent, "for our Heavenly Father will also receive us as children and instead of punishment [provide us] with blessing."

In the next letter, datelined Gretna P.O. (Schönhorst), published April 6, 1887, Jakob Wiens reported that Sunday he had driven to Edenburg to the church, "and after dinner I was at Heinrich Wiebes, who had been in Hoffnungsfeld for a ministerial election on Thursday, the 17th...the majority votes for minister fell on Franz Sawatzky, Hoffnungsfeld, and Jakob Heppner, Schantzenfeld, son of the deceased Jakob Heppner, Waldheim, and for deacon on Jakob Toews, near Reinland."

After reporting some family news about a child at Abraham Kroekers' and the remarriage of son David's widow, Jakob laments regarding the new alien religious cultures through which Satan was undermining the Gemeinden in the West Reserve, "And that which I have discovered in addition thereto I shall keep for myself, for it could constitute itself into a splinter, the beam in my own eye being too great, and the operation which the doctor must implement to

remove it too difficult, that I should take it upon myself to remove the splinter from another I will say only so much, and in fact through the exchange of many facets of faith, in respect of which, there are many who consider they alone are right and disparage the others, which has been occasioned by appearances [outward rituals] and prophecies."

"[Therefore] all those who wish to be saved, let us watch and pray and to take the Holy Scrip-

partake of some of the proceedings but arrived too late, the roads were too bad. He drove up at Wilhelm Rempel's where he met many acquaintances who had come for the dedication service.

Rempel passed on a greeting from the Honourable Cornelius Pauls, Kronsthal, O.K., Russia, "which made me great joy." He asked for letters from his former neighbours, "and I will not remain indebted in answering of the same".

The work of Separatist-Pietists in the West

Reserve again comes painfully to Jakob Wiens attention. When he finally arrived at home he finds two children sick at Abraham Kroekers, "and also something more which caused me great pain, however, I will not hang it on the great chimes, rather will only say this much regarding same: If only each and everyone sought to remove the beam from their own eye, they will find out of what it consists, and shall no longer endeavour to tear with force the splinter or beam from their brother's eye (whereby it only becomes lodged more firmly), and rather will endeavour to remove the same thing with love and patience."

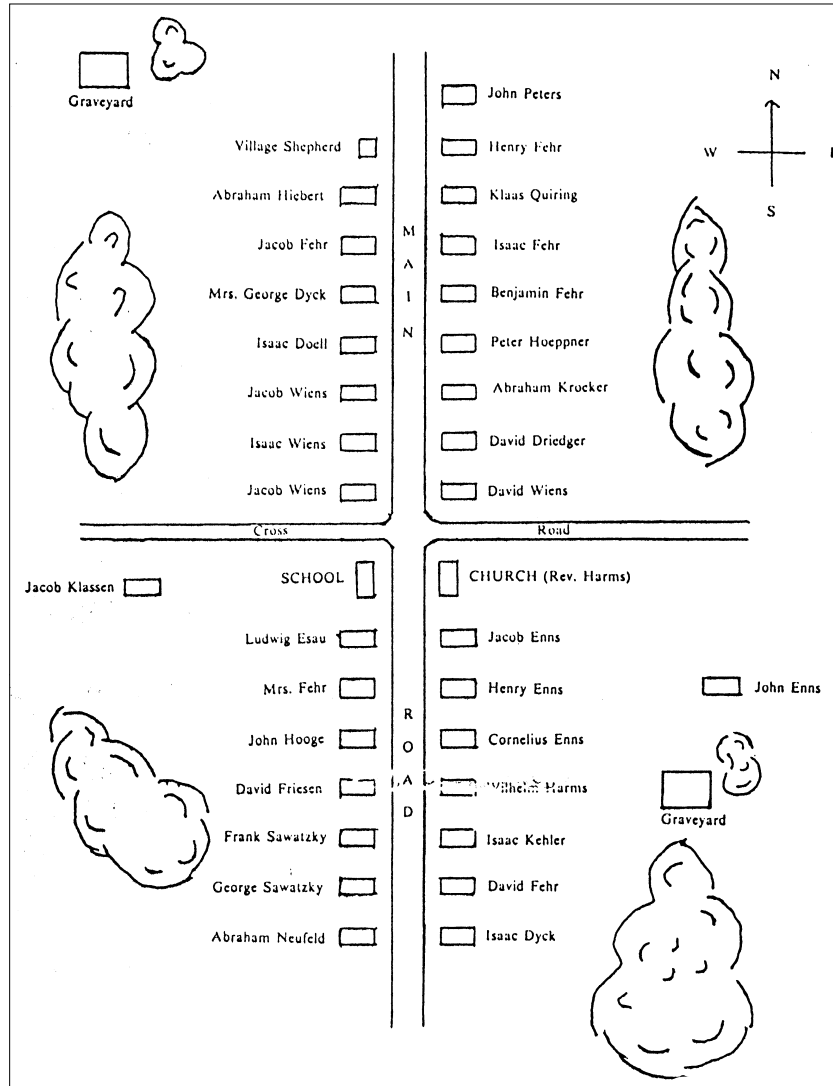
After reporting on the maiden sermons of the newly elected ministers, Jakob Wiens refers to the dedication of the new meeting house in Hoffnungsfeld on the Third Holiday: "Wilhelm Harms brought the introductory sermon and the beloved Aeltester Johann Funk, the dedicatory sermon on the text Nehemiah 5:19.... When the worship service was over, I received from Peter Heppner, Waldheim, a letter from Johann Hildebrand, Island of Chortitz, Russia, who also directed therein a greeting toward me...."

The next letter, published June 15, 1887, is again datelined Schantzenfeld

P.O. (Hoffnungsfeld), Jakob Wiens reported that "within the space of eight days, three of his grandchildren have died."

"May 9, daughter Katharina died at Jakob Dycks, formerly Mrs. David Wiens, at the age of three years and five months. Shortly before her death she said to her mother, an angel had come to her and had taken her along to heaven, where she had also seen the Saviour, and where it was very beautiful and where she would gladly go, and for which they are all exceedingly glad."

"Behold, all you mothers! How wonderful it is, as soon as your children are first able to comprehend something, when you tell them some-



Map of Hoffnungsfeld, two miles southwest of modern-day Winkler.

ture alone as the only rule for our walk, for the time apparently is here of which the Lord in Matth. 24, 23-24, and Mark 13,22, has said, "...to seduce if it were possible even the very elect. In both references He draws it to our attention that He had made us aware of this. `Wie grosz wird uns're Freude sein, Wenn wir Ihm treu geblieben...'"

The next letter published May 4, 1887, again datelined Gretna P.O. (Schönhorst), opens with Jakob Wiens returning home April 7 to Hoffnungsfeld for the Easter Holidays. As he approached Reinland he discovered a new meeting house was being dedicated. He hurried to

thing about the loving Saviour and of the heavens, how you thereby take from them their natural fears of death, and simultaneously carry out the command of the Lord, which He gives through the prophet Isaiah (Chapter 45, 11), 'Show my children and the work of my hands to me;'

"May 10, the oldest daughter at my children Johann Ensenz died at the age of three years and ten months. This child also went over comforted, rejoicing that it would there meet the beloved Saviour and the beloved grandmother."

"...during these days Jakob Giesbrecht in Rosenort, born in Neuosterwick, O.K., and immigrated from Fürstenlandt, died..."

The forgoing reveals the wonderful difference when children are taught the loving goodness of God, instead of being scarred with hateful creed about being born condemned and worthless in the eyes of a wrathful judge and that innocent children must have some kind of phoney conversion experience to reconcile themselves with God. In most somewhat "enlightened" cultures the latter would be regarded as child abuse.

The incident reflects also so much of the educational philosophy of the Mennonite confessional school system as already seem in the curriculum materials of Jakob Wiens.

Wiens goes on the express again the deep spiritual concern typical of conservative Mennonites, "Oh beloved! Let us not delay these preparations [to repent], rather even today let us direct ourselves to our Saviour with genuine repentant prayer. And especially you parents and school teachers, let us certainly be mindful of the many commands of God, such as for example, Deuteronomy 11,18,19, Isaiah 45,11, Matth. 19,14, and in many other places more. How shall we feel at the Judgement Day, if someone who is condemned would come to greet us and say 'You father or mother, you are the cause that I must go into Hell, for you have never told me about the need for conversion or of prayer, rather you only held me busy working.' Or, 'You school teacher, you did in fact teach me to read the Holy Scripture, but you have never or certainly only very seldom and then very imperfectly, instructed me regarding its contents, and I might have converted myself had you done so....Oh, brother, how horrible this would be! Wherefore let us pray daily to our beloved God, that He might want to arm us with the Holy Spirit, so that we are competent to truly direct His children, whom He has entrusted to us, unto Him, for of our own strength we are not capable."

On the 26th of May Jakob Wiens drove to Schönhorst to pick up his goods, "...to Jakob Schroeders, son of the deceased Johann Schroeder, where I stayed the entire winter, and organized my possessions." Presumably Wiens had been teaching in Schönhorst.

In his letter published July 27, 1887, Jakob Wiens reports: "in this rich work filled time I must be one of your most productive reporters for you, since I am no longer working any farmland," indicating that he has disposed of his property. "But," he writes, "I have little energy to write anything organized..."

"June 25, at 8 o'clock in the evening, Heinrich

Dyck in Kronsart, son of Peter Dyck, Schöneberg, and later Michaelsburg, Fürstenlandt, died."

Again Jakob Wiens' thoughts quickly turn to the spiritual realm. "On June 27 I attended the funeral, which was very sad, the like of which I had seldom seen. The widow and all the children were grieving severely, but especially two of the adult daughters who at one time fell one over the other in distress, which was painful to observe."

As a typical Old Kolonier, Jakob Wiens



c. 1860. Jakob Wiens (1816-88) Kronsthal, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. An enlargement of the photo of Jakob Wiens and wife Katharina. Photo courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, The Wiens Family Register, page 4.

tended to see the members of his community in terms of their spiritual gestalt, "But, and this is the joyful news, I am told that during his sickness the beloved friend prayed almost continually and so childlike as a child, respecting which his mother requested for same, which he had very gladly done, until he too could finally say, the grace of God had enveloped him." What a wonderful testimony to the faith of the Old Kolony people.

Jakob Wiens provided the personal news: June 29, he and sister, Mrs. Joh. Klassen, drove to Rosenfeld. In Rudnerweide they went to Joh. Penners who was sick: "For a number of weeks her mother, a widow Krause, a daughter of Abraham Dyck, who had the Dnieper crossing at Einlage, stayed with them." According to Jakob Wiens' letter of January 25, 1888, he stayed at the Penner home while teaching in Rudnerweide.

In Rosenfeld they drove up at David Fehrs. Fehr gave him a letter to read from his brother, the Honourable Isaak Fehr from Schönhorst, Russia. In Rudnerweide Wiens had read a letter from Bernhard Klippenstein, Blumengart, Rus-

sia.

On the 30th they went to Joh. Klassens' in Rosenfeld, "this beloved friend is forsaking his beautiful garden and breaking down his fine buildings and is going on the land"

For the letter published August 24, 1887, see "East Reserve" following.

In the next letter published October 26, 1887, Jakob Wiens reports that every month Br. John G. Staufer, Quakerton, Pa., sends him 50 copies of "Himmels Manna" (an Old Mennonite devotional paper) to distribute here, which task he shares with Bernhard Loewen, Schantzfeld. On the 8th he drove northeasterly of Hoffnungsfeld to distribute among those living individually and scattered, with the intention of going to Rudnerweide after he had driven around there to conduct Sunday school there.

While he was having coffee at Wilhelm Loewens, formerly from Neuenburg, he experienced pain in the hernia which had afflicted him since coming to America. He departed on his wagon but soon the pain was so severe he stepped down attempting to force the rupture back. By now he decided to head for home instead of Rudnerweide hoping he would make it there before the worst pain struck. After great suffering which he describes in horrible detail he finally makes it home to Hoffnungsfeld, where his daughter Mrs. Johann Enns puts him to bed. The doctor is called and after three or four hours of applying towels heated in hot water the hernia popped back in.

During this incident Jakob Wiens reflects on dying and that "If it pleases the beloved Lord, he is quite willing to depart from here. Would only that through the redeeming blood of my Saviour He might help me over unto the eternal rest, in true faith and trust, where I will praise and thank Him in all eternity." Here Jakob Wiens manifests the peaceful "Gelassenheit" (submittedness) characteristic of Old Kolonier spirituality.

Jakob Wiens also addresses again the predator religious cultures which were attempting to alienate people against the Gemeinden in the West Reserve. He notes that he often hears the complaint, "Things are not good in the Gemeindeg.".

The advice Wiens had for these detractors could well be noted by those in the modern-day who are suffused with the message of separatism and tearing apart communities called forth by God, "Dearly beloved, your complaining is useless, but rather do everything possible that you yourselves can do for improvement in the Gemeindeg. Unite yourselves often in faithful penitent prayer, and soon things will get better"

Another area in which predators were seeking to create divisiveness was by spreading the complaint, "The schools have deteriorated."

Again the response of Jakob Wiens is positive: "Indeed, but why don't you yourself direct more energy and earnestness towards same and unite yourselves often to a righteous prayer that the beloved God with His Spirit might everywhere convict and call forth school teachers and that through the same with love for God, and through them [instruct] the children entrusted unto them with wisdom and understanding and then matters with the schools will also soon im-

prove. Indeed 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James 5, 16."

The next letter published January 25, 1888, is dated Rudnerweide, Gretna P.O.. Jakob Wiens misses his former homeland and laments he hears so little from his friends and relatives in Neuosterwick and Kronsthal, Russia.

Again he turns to an issue that is festering in the West Reserve, namely, the intrusion of predator religious cultures seeking to dismember and alienate its Christian communities.

"I wish," he writes, "that the Lord Jesus Christ might gain the influence in all our hearts, so that the call 'behold here is Christ' and 'The Lord has only one church which are we,' might cease. And rather that we might confess that there is certainly only one Gemeinde and that all those belong to this Gemeinde who have submitted themselves to Him through genuine repentance and faith, regardless of the Gemeinde or name by which they outwardly belong."

Here Jakob Wiens has provided an excellent description of the "true" Church of God as understood in conservative Mennonite theology. He affirms that the only biblical requirement for salvation is genuine repentance and faith.

It appears that those seeking to attack the Reinländer (Old Kolonier) and Bergthaler Gemeinden (later the Sommerfelder) and to turn people away from the Gospel-centric faith described by Jakob Wiens and to convert them to Separatist-Pietist and/or American Revivalist religious culture with all their legalistic rituals and unbiblical doctrines, will certainly have much to answer for on the coming Judgement Day

East Reserve, 1887.

In a letter published in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* August 24, 1887, Jakob Wiens reports on a trip he made to the East Reserve accompanying Rev. Johann Baer, from Pennsylvania, on a journey of spiritual visitation. The letter provides a unique look at a number of areas of interest for the Mennonite community in southern Manitoba: the relationship between the West and East Reserves, between Bergthaler and Old Koloniers, and their sense of spirituality and hospitality.

Although lengthy, the epistle is reproduced here in its totality because of its significance, especially to readers from the East Reserve who will be enchanted by Wiens' descriptions of their various ancestors. Publishing the complete letter also provides the reader with a feel for Jakob Wiens' evocative writing style, his way of thinking, his sense of morality and spirituality and his impressive knowledge of his people and their interconnectedness and folklore.

The reader will note that Jakob Wiens is rather restrained regarding the religiosity of his people and their spiritual stature. This introspective modesty was typical of conservative Mennonites, who followed the biblical mandates to allow their Christian walk and discipleship to speak for itself. Fortunately their lives and conduct were such that they did not need to continually announce they were the followers of Christ as is common in certain other religious cultures whose constant verbalizing seems to demonstrate that

they had no genuine faith.

Schantzenfeld P.O. (Hoffnungsfeld)
August 12, 1887

I had promised the Prediger Johann Bär, already mentioned in my previous report, to drive with him to the East Reserve. We left, therefore, as promised, departing from home on Thursday, July 22, in order to seek him out in Edenburg.

After I had stopped for a while in Blumenhof by the copper smith Jakob Wiebe and finding him well, and had stopped in Gretna at the merchant David Peters, who previously lived in Schöneberg, Russia, I drove to Edenburg and stayed at the home of Peter Wiebes for night. I also visited a number of acquaintances, namely Ohm Heinrich Wiebe [the delegate], Ohm Jakob Ham, who however was on the field, and Cornelius Sawatzki.

Friday, the 22nd we left Edenburg. We fed our horses in Dominion City, a small attractive city on the railway on the other side of the Red River. From here we turned eastward going inland, then again northward and traversed fine

"After dinner Ohm Gerhard Wiebe [Chortitz] drove with me to Rosenthal...."

prairie with luxurious grass growth; also the grain stood beautifully, but there was only little as the land is not settled very much.

Finally we came to the Miquitor River, but the same was so swollen that we had ourselves brought over by a man with his boat upon which we loaded our possessions. His half-grown son then kneeled on our wagon seat and drove through the water, it reached almost the back of the pony. From here on there was very poor mostly stony way with much bush.

At 6 o'clock we arrived at Jakob Wiebes, brother to Peter Wiebe in Edenburg, where their mother, the aged widow Harder, had directed us. After the coffee we went to Peter Klassens, nephew to my son-in-law Abraham Kroeker, where also the mother, the half-sister of my son-in-law was present; we were heartily received here and had to promise to stop in on our return journey.

Presently we drove on after we had stopped in at Cornelius Toews in order to deliver a greeting from the widow Heinrich Toews, Krongart. But we arrived in Grünthal instead of Gnadenfeld, a poor bush-covered land. Finally we arrived in Gnadenfeld where we stayed overnight at the Honourable Peter Giesbrecht [Minister].

Saturday, the 23rd. - Today after breakfast I went to Jakob Braun, step-son of my neighbour Peter Dyck in Kronsthal, Russia, where I was heartily received and spent the entire day. Brother Bär and Peter Giesbrecht drove to Hochstadt to the Post Office, but came there later as well.

Sunday, the 24rd. - Today, before and after dinner, we were at the assembly in Grünthal. Before dinner the Honourable Aeltester David Stoesz made the introduction and Johann Bär the sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:24, 25. In the afternoon, Peter Giesbrecht gave the introduction and Johann Bär the sermon on Acts 16, 30.

Before dinner he showed us how we are to conform our Christian life so that we may be seized of the treasure and that in the battle against Satan, world and sin, we refrain from all shallow vanity and that we must therefore battle so that we might seize or take hold of the crown of eternal life. After church we went to Prieszen, brother-in-law to Peter Giesbrecht, and for night I went to Peter Giesbrechts. This dear friend is very weak and sickly.

Monday the 25th - In the morning we left Gnadenfeld. Because of business matters we stopped in at the widow Franz Dyck, Schönesee. From there we drove to Hochstadt, where we were at Peter Loewens for dinner; Mrs. Loewen is the former Mrs. Wilhelm Esau, Neuosterwick, Russia. Loewen is very sick. From there we drove to Chortitz to Ohm Gerhard Wiebe.

Tuesday the 26th - Today after breakfast, Br. Bär and I drove to the Honourable Aeltester David Stoesz [Bergthal]. We received a very friendly welcome and stayed there for dinner. After dinner we drove to Schönthal. Here we saw the overflowing wells; they produce so much water they can power mills.

We drove up [to the front door] at Ohm Cornelius Friesens but he was in the field. His wife asked us to wait a little, which we did not do. We drove on, for which we were later sorry: and I hereby ask for forgiveness.

Having arrived again in Chortitz, I went to Heinrich Wiebes for night. The wife is a daughter of the deceased Heinrich Dyck, Krongart.

Wednesday the 27th - Today until dinner, nothing. Today Br. Bär drove to Winnipeg. I stayed around at Ohm Gerhard Wiebes. After dinner I went to Peter Klippensteins for several hours to visit the aged school sister Agatha, nee Enns, who was at her children Peter Klippensteins. The sister is still quite active. I received a friendly greeting.

Thursday the 28th - Before dinner, nothing. After dinner Ohm Gerhard Wiebe drove with me to Rosenthal, where only two families, namely, Peter Friesens and their step-son Wilhelm Giesbrechts, are living, to visit the former, who together with his wife, nee Margaretha Bergen from Neuosterwick, Russia, are long-time acquaintances. The two aged ones are still quite active and healthy, though they are close to the seventies. We had a pleasant discourse there for a number of hours. For night we again drove to Chortitz.

Friday the 29th - The previous night we had strong thunder but here in Chortitz only little rain. Further south, especially by the half-breeds, it apparently rained very heavily with hailstones from 4 to 6 inches in diameter, but only here and there. The grain here suffered no damage or only little.

Today we drove to Hochfeld where we visited the widow Krause who is a daughter of the Abraham Dyck who had the [river] crossing in Einlage, and her children Peter Krauses, with whom she is staying. I also walked over to Heinrich Friesen who is a teacher in the church [minister] but did not find the beloved friend at home.

I was able to have a fine visit with his wife.

She is concerned over her salvation. Oh that there could be many such as these! For Jesus calls all those that are weary and heavy laden, that he might give them rest (Matthew 11,28-29). Oh, but do come all who are weary and laden with sin. Together with me, your fellow companion, we wish to completely throw ourselves without reservations, into the arms of the beloved Saviour. He shall surely have nothing but goodness and love for us!

After dinner we found Br. Friesen at home. Towards evening I drove back again to Chortitz. When I arrived there, Br. Bär was again back from Winnipeg.

Sunday the 31st - Ohm D. Stoesz held the introductory [sermon] and J. Bär the sermon on Matthew 13, 29-30. He demonstrated from the text how the true disciples are known to God alone and that we may be eliminating as weeds much that is wheat stock, and likewise much may remain standing as wheat which are weeds, as man is not to judge. Further, how the weeds, the unbelievers, on the judgement day shall all be thrown in the fire-oven in hell, and that man should certainly convert in time, in order that everyone would rather be gathered as a useful wheat kernel in the scouring of the eternal life.

After eating dinner we took a heartfelt leave of Ohm Gerhard Wiebe and his children expressing to him our thanks for the friendly and loving hospitable lodging for an entire week, and then drove back to Bergfeld. We stopped at Hochstadt at Loewens, where I received a letter and a greeting from Mrs. Loewen to her children.

In Gnadenfeld we took our leave of the beloved friend Jakob Braun. Peter Giesbrecht and Prieszen were waiting for us in Bergfeld, and we then drove up in Bergfeld at Peter Klassens.

There in the quite spacious school building we held an afternoon worship service. Ohm Peter Giesbrecht held the introduction [introductory sermon] and Johann Bär the sermon. It was a fine assembly, the school house was completely full. Oh, that the beloved God might bless all of these sermons, so that His word would not return empty, and rather bring forth fruits unto eternal life in many hearts.

After the worship service Peter Giesbrecht and Prieszen and many other friends, of whom I knew only few, came to Peter Klassens where we discoursed until the evening.

I feel obliged here to render a heartfelt thanks to all friends and acquaintances, and also to those not known to me, for the loving and friendly hospitality, which they allowed me to experience. Br. Bär also requested that I should extend a heartfelt thanks on his behalf for the loving reception of which he was able to partake.

Monday, August 1 - Today we took our leave from the beloved friend Peter Klassen and the aged mother and submitted ourselves on the return journey around 6:00 o'clock in the morning; the road manifested that it had rained heavily there. For this reason we again engaged a Half-breed in the vicinity of the Misquitto River, who brought us over; it cost a dollar. It was a good decision for now the water reached almost over the back of my pony.

We then drove to Edenburg where I went to

Peter Wiebes for night. In the evening I went also to Johann Wiebes, where an adult son, Jakob, lay very sick.

Tuesday the 2nd. - Johann Wiebes' son Jakob died before midnight already. He was sick for five days. Age 21 years. An admonition for all, but particularly for the young people. Watch and be ready, for no man knowest the hour when our Lord will come. For also the youth are subjected to death.

After breakfast I took my leave from the beloved and drove home. [On the way] I stopped in Schönhorst, Gnadenfeld, Bergthal, Rudnerweide, Kronsgart and Rosenhof in order to requite myself of various requests and finally arrived at home around 6 o'clock in the evening where I found everything healthy and well. Praise and thanks be to the Lord for the gracious protection, for myself on the journey as well as mine at home.

And now also something of the noteworthy events which occurred at home during my absence. Twins, one son and one daughter arrived at my children Jakob Wiens' on Sunday, July 31. In Kronsthal the aged Abraham Buller, old and tired with life, has fallen asleep with a living hope of eternal salvation, after a sickness of six

“...we wish to completely throw ourselves...into the arms of the beloved Saviour. He shall surely have nothing but goodness and love for us!”

weeks and five days. The date is not known to me.

During the night from the 28th to the 29th of July, a man in Rosengard by the name of Peter Wall was struck by lightning in the room surrounded by his family. Nothing happened to the rest of the family, nor did the house burn down. One can well imagine the horrible shock and pain of the family over the instantaneous death of spouse and father.

Again a call for all, “Watch and be ready, for you know not when your Lord cometh.”

On August 6 towards evening a heavy rain with hail stones went across here for quite a distance. The hail fell in large pieces but quite far apart so that it did only little damage; at a number of places it also fell so thick that everything was destroyed. All the grain of a farmer Johann Dyck, among others, who lives in the far northwest corner of the Reserve, was destroyed.

Everyone here is busily engaged with the harvest. Some are already almost finished. The harvest for the most part will bring rich returns, it is meagre only at a few places where the weeds took the upper hand.

In closing I wish also that the Lord of all grace might suppress the weeds in the spiritual fields within our Gemeinden so that it does not take the upper hand. The way it seems there is only little spiritual life in our Gemeinde.

But praise be to God there are still little sparks and flickers among the ashes. May the Lord ignite them with the wind of His teaching and His

Spirit, that they might shine as lights in the darkness, and that thereby a fire might be set ablaze and envelope the Gemeinde (Luke 12,49).

Alas, you teachers [ministers]! Prophecy to the many dead bones. Prophecy in peace, that the wind of the Holy Spirit in strength may commence to move over the plains of the dead and imbue them with new life (Ezekiel 37). “Ruft getrost, ihr Wächterstimmen! Ruft getrost und schönet nich; Christus will ein Zeugnisz haben! Wenn’s, die Prediger vergraben, Ach, das ist ein grosz’ gericht! Ruft getrost, ihr Wächterstimmen! Rufet laut und schonet nich?”

And finally, receive all of you a heartfelt greeting from your loving and lowly friend, “Jakob Wiens Sr.”

Hoffnungsfeld, 1888.

The last letter by Jakob Wiens was published in the *Rundschau* March 7, 1888, three months prior to his death in July. He was living and teaching in Rudnerweide.

Jakob Wiens' description of the village of Hoffnungsfeld is a monument to his sense of community and the inter-relatedness of his people.

The epistle serves as a fitting closing look at Jakob Wiens (1816-88), by now a 71 year-old man, widely respected and recognized as a gracious Ohm and senior elder within his community.

After an absence of six weeks he has returned to his home “darp” to visit his children. He had planned to return to Rudnerweide on Monday February 13, but because of a storm was unable to do so. Because the residents have many friends in Russia he decided to compile a survey of the village and sent the *Rundschau* the following report:

“The village of Hoffnungsfeld is laid out from south to north. We will start at the north end on the west side of the street. We meet first of all the “Wirth” [village farm owner] Abraham Hiebert. His father was a basket weaver in Blumengart, Russia. They are healthy and they are enjoying themselves, for they already have many children old enough to work, which are very necessary here for progressing materially.

The neighbour is Jakob Fehr, son of Benjamin Fehr from Rosenthal, Russia. They are well, but their oldest and only son is weak and somewhat lamed by arthritis (Gicht); nonetheless, he works. They also have three grown-up daughters.”

From here it goes to the widow Gerhard Dyck, she together with her children is also well. Gerhard married the daughter of Ludwig Esau, Helena, and is still living at home, and Peter is still unmarried. This in particular is information for the beloved friend Jakob Dyck, Steinau, Russia.

With the same I express my thanks for the letter, and only wish that he might have written more about Kronsthal and Osterwick. His sister has also received his letter. I add another heartfelt greeting.

From here it goes further to neighbour Isaak Doell, born and from Neuenburg, Russia: things stand gloriously here. [They have] A multitude of children that I believe they themselves would have to count to know exactly how many there

married my daughter-in-law, Mrs. David Wiens. They are all well, Also the aged mother of his wife is also well, although weak.”

“Now we come to my children David Driedgers. They have two grown sons and two half-grown daughters. Thus they are not lacking in workers. They are also well with the exception of the wife, who often has severe headaches. Their oldest daughter has married to Jakob Dyck, son of the widower Gerhard Dyck.”

“From here it goes to my other children, Abraham Kroekers, whose oldest children are still in their school years. Therefore they are still lacking in workers. But as they are healthy things are going reasonably well.”

“Now follows the aged Benjamin Fehr who lives alone with his son Benjamin. His wife died in February 1886, approximately two years after my wife. He has also longed for a change but it has not yet been possible for him.”

“Now it goes to Isaak Fehr, son of Benjamin Fehr. His wife is a sister to the wife of David Fehr; they are well and things are going quite good for them.”

“Leaving here, we next meet Heinrich Fehr, Isaak Fehr’s brother, and they are well and things are going quite well.”

“We now come to the last Wirth, Johann Peters, Benjamin Fehr’s son-in-law. Now, he was well known in Kronsthal, Russia, and he is still the same. They are also well and there is no need regarding the temporal.”

“Now it also needs to be noted that in the planting [of trees] and regarding its school regime, Hoffnungsfeld is one of the best villages in the entire Reserve. Nonetheless, the wheat here is not without weeds either; but over all, the Lord here too has His own. There are also threats to tear the village apart for there are those who wish to move on their farms.”

“On the 14th the snowstorm had acquiesced to warm weather, and although it was cold I brought myself on the way and also arrived hale and hearty at the place of my profession, namely in Rudnerweide, and again brought my school instruction forward on the 15th. This engagement is only with very weak strength and should in fact be applied in a much stronger way but the good school teachers are very rare here.”

I thank the beloved friend Bernhard Klippenstein, Blumengard, Russia, for his greeting, and greet him together with his family and all friends and acquaintances. His aged sister is in Reinfeld at her son Johann Neufeld; I have not seen her for quite some time, but we have often exchanged greetings; she is well. Heinrich Harder’s children are also well with their entire family.

In closing I bid the friends in Russia to also write to the “Rundschau”. Receive everyone, here as well as in Russia, a heartfelt greeting from “Jakob Wiens Sr.”

Poetry.

Jakob Wiens was also a poet. Most of his poetry dated back to 1843 during his early years as a school teacher in Kronsthal, Imperial Russia. A number of these poems have been collected and published by great-granddaughter

Nettie Kroeker in a booklet entitled *Gedichte aus der Alte and Neue Heimat*.

After arriving in Manitoba, Jakob Wiens wrote a poem about the village of Hoffnungsfeld, W.R. This poem is reproduced here as an example of his poetry work.

Hoffnungsfeld

- 1) O Hoffnungstern, zu Bethlehem geboren
Den wir uns hier zu unserm Heil erkoren,
Auf dich ruht unser Blick und nicht auf Geld;
Drum sei mit uns auf unserem Hoffnungsfeld.
- 2) Die Reis’ ist hin; die Reis voll Mueh and Sorgen,
Gefahr, Angst, Noth, die drinnen lag verborgen;
Du hast in allem stets an uns gedacht,
Und gluecklich uns nach Hoffnungsfeld gebracht.
- 3) Wir haben nun die alteWelt verlaszen,
Und sind gereizt nach vielen langen Straszten;
Bis ueber’s Meer, tief in die neueWelt,
Und uns gesitzt in unserm Hoffnungsfeld.
- 4) Da haben wir den Ruheort gefunden,
Sind von der Last der Reise nun entbunden;
Doch bleibet Mueh in dieser ganzenWelt,
Und also auch in unserm Hoffnungsfeld.
- 5) Drum liebster Gott, der uns so treu gefuehret’
Und deszen Heulf wir deutlich oft verspueret,
Nimm ferner uns an diene Gnadenhand,
Fuehr uns hinauf ins ew’ge Hoffnungsfeld.
- 6) Du bist, Herr Christ, fuer uns einst Mensch geboren
Has uns zu deinem Gnadenlohn erkoren;
Drum nimm uns hin, fuehr uns ins Himmelszelt,
Hinauf zu dir ins rechte Hoffnungsfeld.
- 7) Doch wird es dann nicht Hoffnungsfeld mehr bleiben,
Drum laszt’s uns hier schon Ruhestadt umschreiben,
Bis dasz wir einst vor deinem Throne dort,
Dich preisen an dem rechten Ruheort.
- 8) Zu dieser Ruhe endlich zu gelangen,
Laszt uns mit Ernst an Jesum Christum hangen,
O fuehr uns Herr aus diesem Hoffnungsfeld,
Einmal zu dir ins ew’ge Ruhezelt.

By Jakob Wiens (1816-88), Hoffnungsfeld.

Translation:

Field Of Hope

- 1) Oh Star of Hope in Bethlehem born
Whom we on earth with faith adorn;
To thee we cling (and not for gold);
Abide in this our hope-filled fold.
- 2) The journey’s done; ‘twas filled with pain
But now we know we feared in vain
Despite our dread you brought us through;
To this land of hope anew.
- 3) We left behind our older world
To find a new on paths unfurl’d;
Across the sea to unknown plains-
Thou gavest hope for spirit’s gain.
- 4) At last we found a resting place
Which freed us from our journey’s pace;
And yet the sorrows of the earth;
Remain here at our humble hearth.
- 5) “Pray God, (from whom the way we learned,
And still too oft his guidance spurned),

Lead on with Thy great hand of grace,
To our eternal resting place.

(Translation by the Irvin Kroeker. The translation of the poem is interesting as its original point has almost totally been lost.)

Recollections.

Peter Wiens, Meadow Lake, Sask., later recalled that his grandfather Isaak Wiens had purchased his father’s (Jakob Wiens’) favourite horse at his auction sale:

“When great-grandfather’s auction sale took place, grandfather bought his horse and buggy. Great-grandfather had always been such a good neighbour that whenever he met a friend on the road he would stop for a chat. Of course grandfather did not think of that when he bought the horse.

“When he made the purchase, a whip with a piece of tin at the end of it, came with the buggy. The tin was for making the right impression on the horse it was used on.

“Of course, uncle David, who was a small boy at the time, had to play with the whip. While he was doing so he suffered the misfortune of flipping the piece of tin into his nose, which of course was a good Wiens nose. He tells me that he really let the world know of his pain by the way he howled for pity.

“On their first trip with the newly purchased horse and buggy, grandfather and Uncle David met a neighbour. The horse stopped just as suddenly as he had always done. But grandfather and uncle David had not expected it so they landed on the ground between the horse and cart.

“Their blood pressure went up very quickly and grandfather promptly gave the beast a good lesson in horse training with the whip. The lesson was that the horse should only stop when commanded to do so.

“But knowing grandfather and his good nature, I am sure the horse got some extra oats later on to compensate for the training course.”

From Irvin Kroeker, *Wiens Family Register*, page 33.

Tribute.

To the end, Jakob Wiens continued in his profession as an educator, teaching in Schönhorst and Rudnerweide. He was well read referring to the *Friedenstimme* and *Rundschau* in his journals.

Jakob Wiens obviously took pride and pleasure in his grandchildren. In his later years he faithfully recorded in his Familienbuch, the names of his children’s spouses and all their children--45 in number, many of whom died in infancy.

January 8, 1887, Jakob Wiens, Schönhorst, wrote to his children, in-laws, and grandchildren encouraging them that “through the Holy Spirit they work for a genuine confession of sins whereupon a true penitence and repentance must follow and shall testify of the forgiveness of your sins.”

As noted frequently in previous writings, Jakob Wiens referred to the eminent return of the Saviour and admonishes his family to be prepared for their death. In these letters Jakob Wiens articulates eloquently the faith and dedication of

the Old Kolony people, resonating harmoniously with the vision of Aeltester Johann Wiebe, founder of the Reinländer Gemeinde.

After Jakob's death, daughter Aganetha Wiens Ens seemingly received the "Familienbuch" and continued the literary legacy with the following notations, "1891, August 4, I, Aganetha Ens, have written this, possibly close to my end, but by the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, I will arrive in heaven. The Lord alone knows his way with

"This was not the phoney faith of the publicans braying forth their arrogance on the street corners...."

me. He will make all things well."

The testimonial speaks volumes for the genuine biblical faith which Jakob Wiens and Katharina Klassen Wiens had instilled into their children.

This was not the phoney faith of the publicans braying forth their arrogance on the street corners (nor of those rolling on the floor in Voodoo trances, spewing forth gibberish), rather the deep and abiding faith of those who actually knew their Lord and having committed themselves to Him, proceeded with hands firmly fixed on the plow with His teachings as their only rule and inspiration.

Death, July 9, 1888

Jakob Wiens of Hoffnungsfeld, Manitoba, died on July 9, 1888, at 4 a. m. in the morning. He died from the bursting of a hernia after a time of suffering lasting for two days and three nights. He had achieved the age of 72 years and 25 days, fell asleep with the living hope of salvation in the Lord. The funeral took place the following Wednesday.

Source: Wm. Rempel, letter to the *Rundschau*, July 18, 1888, page 1.

Legacy.

The story of Jakob Wiens is also remarkable for the fact that his legacy can be claimed by all three of the major Gemeinden in the West Reserve. He grew up within the Old Kolony and was a pioneer member of the Reinländer Gemeinde which founded and built the West Reserve. His spiritual ethos and orthodox religious conviction and social conservatism resonated harmoniously with the vision of Old Kolony leaders such as Aeltester Johann Wiebe.

For some reason, possibly because of his children or that he was teaching in their schools, Jakob Wiens was fellowshipping with the Bergthaler Gemeinde by 1885. He was later entered in the Sommerfelder Gemeindebuch, indicating that his faith and beliefs conformed with those who sought to preserve the faith of the fathers. There is no hint in his writings of any dissatisfaction with Wiebe's Gemeinde, and therefore one concludes the change was not associated with theological issues.

It is unfortunate indeed that the West Reserve Bergthaler Gemeinde under Aeltester Johann F. Funk, Alt-Bergthal, and Inspector Ewert chose

to reject the strong pedagogical tradition which Old Coloniers had brought with them to Manitoba, as represented by capable individuals such as Wilhelm Rempel, Bernhard Toews, Jakob Fehr, and Jakob Wiens.

Instead of using the Old Kolonian tradition of secondary education and enhanced teacher training to strengthen and promote Orthodox Mennonite faith and culture, Aeltester Funk and Inspector Ewert chose to hijack the tradition by using education as a vehicle for renewal as they defined it and by spiking the agenda with a program of Anglo-conformity and the adoption of alien religious cultures as manifested by their religious language and the methodology of their reform program.

It is clear that Jakob Wiens was a conservative who capably advocated Mennonite orthodoxy in the West Reserve. He most certainly was not a separatist nor did he have any sympathy for

"It is unfortunate...[that] Aeltester Johann F. Funk... and Inspector Ewert chose to reject the strong pedagogical tradition which Old Coloniers had brought with them to Manitoba...."

the alien religious cultures by which some in the West Reserve were being seduced, even amongst his own children.

The Sommerfelder Gemeinde evidently revered the memory of Jakob Wiens and entered him in the Sommerfelder "Gemeindebuch" (S1A-236). This must have been done posthumously as he died several years before the Sommerfelder Gemeinde was organized in 1892.

Conclusion.

The story of Jakob Wiens (1816-88) speaks for the proud literary tradition among conservative Mennonites and Old Coloniers in particular going back 500 years to the Reformation. It refutes the endeavours of many over the past century who have tried to denigrate the Old Kolony people as illiterate in order to make them more vulnerable to predator religious cultures.

The favourable financial position of the Wiens family also dispels the myth that teachers in the Mennonite confessional school system were only those who had no other employment opportunities. The reality, in many cases, was they were above average, intelligent young men who loved children and for whom teaching became either a career or an important stepping stone to ecclesiastical advancement.

The teaching career of Jakob Wiens compares favourably with that of Peter Klippenstein (1831-1904), in the Bergthaler/Sommerfelder tradition (*Preservings*, No. 13, pages 114-116), and Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99) in the Kleine Gemeinde tradition (*Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 55-58).

The work of these teachers should be compared with other individuals in the 19th century who attended Separatist-Pietist Bible Schools in

Europe where they were brainwashed with apostasy and false teachings and then returned to their home communities seeking to disparage the followers of Christ and to tear apart their communities and families.

In contrast teachers such as Peter Wiens and nephew Jakob exerted every effort to build up their communities, making immense contributions to their people and culture by instilling Gospel-centric teachings into several generations of students and by imparting to them wisdom and moral strength in preparation for successful living and committed Christian discipleship.

All too often it has been those who sought to

"The...financial position of the Wiens family also dispels the myth that teachers in the Mennonite confessional school system were only those who had no other employment opportunities."

disparage their own faith and culture who have been lauded in the history books of the Russian Mennonites. It is regrettable that eyes have been closed to the work of individuals such as Jakob Wiens (1816-88), whose understanding of biblical truth and literary abilities clearly rated second to none.

Christopher Dock (d. 1771) was credited with beautiful artwork as well as enshrining a proud pedagogical tradition in Colonial Pennsylvania. Among Russian Mennonites this honour must be divided between the artist Peter Wiens (b. 1770), whose beautiful colourful *Fraktur* combined with rhythms and riddles created wonderment and interest among his students, and his nephew Jakob Wiens (1816-88), whose collection of morality literature affirmed the conservative Mennonite belief in the intrinsic beauty, goodness and wholesomeness of the child, created in the image of God.



Dirck Bergmann, Arithmetic text, village near Heuboden, West Prussia, 1789. Photo courtesy Abrahams, Frakturmalen, page 19.

Jakob Wiens Descendants

Katharina Wiens Driedger

Daughter **Katharina Wiens** (1839-1906) married David Driedger (1839-1925) also from Kronsthal, Chortitza Colony, Russia. The



Katharina Wiens Driedger (1839-1906), Greenfarm, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, The Wiens Family Register, page 49.

family immigrated to Manitoba in 1876 and settled in the village of Hoffnungsfeld with her parents and siblings.

Around 1886 the family moved to what later became the Greenfarm school district.

“Katharina was a lover of flowers. She was not one to complain or grumble. If something grievous would happen she would handle the situation with wisdom in her calm quiet way.” A granddaughter remembered her carrot syrup.

The family later belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, S1A 244.

The information for this family sketch is courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, pages 30-31.

Isaak Wiens 1842-1920.

Son **Isaak Wiens** (1842-1920) married Aganetha Peters (1843-1909), daughter of Jakob Peters and Aganetha Warkentin.

In Russia Isaak Wiens owned a blacksmith shop where he employed six men building wagons. His wife used to fry pancakes for them on a frying pan. Isaak made the iron parts while Ludwig Esau, married to his cousin Katharina Klassen, made the wooden parts.

Isaak Wiens was the original owner of SE4-3-4W, the quarter section where the Town of Winkler was later built. Isaak Wiens obtained the land by Grant from the Crown on September 6, 1883. In 1892 the C. P. R. wanted to build its railway across the land and lay out a railway siding and name it “Wiens”.

The story is told that the Old Kolony church did not approve of such aggrandizement and “pressured him to disassociate himself from the site.” As a result Isaac Wiens traded the land for another

quarter owned by Valentine Winkler, and the new siding was called “Winkler” instead. The Old Kolonier leaders were astute enough to know that building a railway through Hoffnungsfeld would certainly lead to its disintegration and dismemberment, which conflicted with its vision of strengthening the body of Christ, His community.

Isaak Wiens was a successful farmer with the highest assessment in Hoffnungsfeld in 1881, almost twice the village average. He owned the only threshing machine in the village.

The family later moved to Rosenbach (Rosebach).

In 1900 Isaak Wiens wrote the following report of his farming operations:

“Rosenbach, Nov. 29, 1900

“Dear Sir, I came to Manitoba in 1876 with my family. Had three children [six]. “They are all married now and have families of their



Isaak Wiens (1842-1920) married Aganetha Peters (1843-1909), Hoffnungsfeld. They originally owned the SE4-3-4W where the modern-day Town of Winkler was founded. Photo courtesy of Winkler: A Proud Heritage (Winkler, 1982), page viii.



Isaak Wiens farmyard in Rosenbach. Note the winter fuel drying. Photo courtesy of Winkler: A Proud Heritage (Winkler, 1982), page 25.



Isaak Wiens' daughter Anna married Wilhelm Enns and they were the parents of Peter W. Enns founder of Triple E Mobile Homes, Winkler, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Winkler: A Proud Heritage (Winkler, 1982), page 68. Peter's mother Anna Wiens Enns evidently became the custodian of her grandfather's teaching journals.

own and are prospering. Amongst us we have 50 horses and 50 head of cattle, and we have 1920 acres of land. We own three farms in the North-west Territories, and consider ourselves worth in all about \$45,000. The freedom we have in schools and religion could not be better Manitoba and the North-west are good places for people to come to, because they can prosper. It is a little colder than southern Russia, but it is dry and the cold is not felt much, It is a very healthy climate here.” “Isaac Wiens”

From J. F. Galbraith, *The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Morden, 1900), page 48.

After the death of Mrs. Aganetha Wiens on Oct. 2, 1909, Isaak married the widow Johann Peters, nee Agatha Neufeld (1840-1916).

After her death Isaak married for the third time to the widow Heinrich Heinrichs (1849-1940).

The Isaak Wiens family later belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, S1B-164.

Isaac's son Isaac Wiens (1867-1933) married Tina Fehr (1870-1949). They belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. Their granddaughter Ann Wiens Plett, Giroux, is currently on the board of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Jakob Wiens b. 1840

Jakob Wiens (b. 1840) was well educated. It is believed that he attended the Zentral Schule, the secondary school in Chortitza, Russia.

Following in the footsteps of his father and great-uncle, he served as a school teacher. He also compiled a teachers' manual dealing with German grammar, the family record and collected songs and hymns.

In 1860 he married Margaretha Wiebe, whose father operated an oil seeds press. She died in 1869 with only one son surviving.

In 1870 Jakob Wiens married Sarah Nickel, daughter of Johann Nickel (1826-1902) and Margaretha Fehr, Waldheim, W.R., formerly Schönnenberg, Chortitza Colony, Russia. Her sister Helena Nickel married Jakob B. Koop (1858-1937), Neuanlage, E.R., see *Preservings*, No. 11, pages 43-46.

In 1878 Jakob Wiens immigrated and settled



Jakob Wiens (b. 1840), Hoffnungsfeld, Manitoba, and Herbert, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, page 49.

in Hoffnungsfeld, W.R. In a letter to the *Rundschau*, January 19, 1887, he reported that he had formerly been the school teacher in Edenburg. Later he taught in what became the Greenfarm school district.

He took over as local correspondent to the *Rundschau* after his father, using the initial "J". In a report datelined "Plum Coulee, published May 15, 1901, he reported that Isaak Wiens, Rosenbach, formerly Kronsthal, Russia, Jakob Funk, Schantzenfeld, from Kronsweide, Russia, Peter and Wm. Peters, Winkler, formerly Neuendorf, Russia, and Jakob Toews, Winkler, formerly from Nieder-Chortitz, Russia, were departing the same date for a visit to the old homeland in Russia, among the first Manitoba Mennonites to make such a journey. In the *Rundschau*, Aug. 14, 1901, Jakob J. Wiens provided a report of the actual trip.

In 1902 the Jakob J. Wiens family moved to Rosthern, Sask., from where he wrote the *Rundschau* December 24, 1902, reporting the death of his father-in-law Johann Nickel at the home of his children Cornelius J. Nickels in North Dakota. Jakob Wiens also reports that he is again teaching school (wages \$30 per month) and also farming. In 1904 the Jakob J. Wiens family moved to Herbert.

Jakob Wiens was remembered as a kindly man who always "gave rich presents and fine



Rev. Jakob M. Wiens (1863-1933), Herbert, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Remember Our Leaders, page 25. After raising a fine crop in 1928, he chose to donate \$700 to the Leprosy Mission rather than buying a new car. See "Jakob M. Wiens Family," in *Excelsior Echos*, pages 1173-5.

treats to the children." He had an old violin which he played very well accompanying himself with a bass voice.

He also owned a shotgun which he used very well. "One day when he was quite old and shaking with palsy, a prairie chicken flew across his yard. He reached for his gun and shot at it." He missed; presumably one of his last hunting ventures.

The information for this family sketch is courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, pages 31-32.

Jakob's son Jakob M. Wiens (1863-1933) was called to the ministry in Winkler in 1905. He moved to Herbert, Saskatchewan in 1906 where he served until his death.

David Wiens 1850-86.

Son David Wiens married Katharina Wiebe, daughter of Johann Wiebe. They immigrated to Manitoba in 1876. They settled in Hoffnungsfeld where David Wiens died in 1886. His widow remarried to J. J. Dyck. The family moved to Rosthern in 1899. Only two children--David and Isaac--were born of the first marriage. Isaac (b. 1885) remembered attending school in Hoffnungsfeld where his teacher in 1892 was C. B. Fast, presumably the son of Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), teacher in Waldheim, W.R., in 1881. In 1963 Isaac lived in Sardis, B.C. Brother David Wiens (1877-1936) took out a homestead near Laird, Saskatchewan.

The information for this family sketch is courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, pages 34-35.

Sarah Wiens Ens 1854-78.

Daughter Sarah Wiens married Jakob Enns (1850-85), son of Knels. In 1876 the couple crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the S. S. Sardinian together with her parents, nephew Jakob (age 13), sister Aganetha, sister Helena and her husband Abraham Kroeker.

Sarah and her husband had two children, Catharina (b. 1876) and Cornelius (1877-1954). Sarah Wiens Enns died shortly after the birth of her son. Jakob Enns remarried in 1879. After his death his widow married for the third time to Abram Froese, see RGB 384-1.

Daughter Catharina Enns married Carl Hintz. Son Cornelius Enns was a teacher for three years in Manitoba and then moved onto a homestead in Saskatchewan. Later he sold the farm and operated a hardware store in Laird, Saskatchewan. From 1915 to 1936 he farmed at Borden, and then retired in Hepburn.

The information for this family sketch is courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, pages 34-35.

Helena Wiens Kroeker

1856-1946.

Daughter Helena Wiens married Abraham Kroeker (1854-1906), from Neu-Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, in 1875.

Helena Wiens Kroeker later described her courtship and wedding.

"...One night Abram Kroeker escorted me home and came into our house. Father's concern was real. What kind of youth was Abram. To court his daughter he must be a man of honesty, hard labor, thrift, integrity and noble ambition."

"The next morning father went to Neuosterwick to investigate. The information he received from Abram's employer was satisfactory. After that Abram was frequently seen at our house."

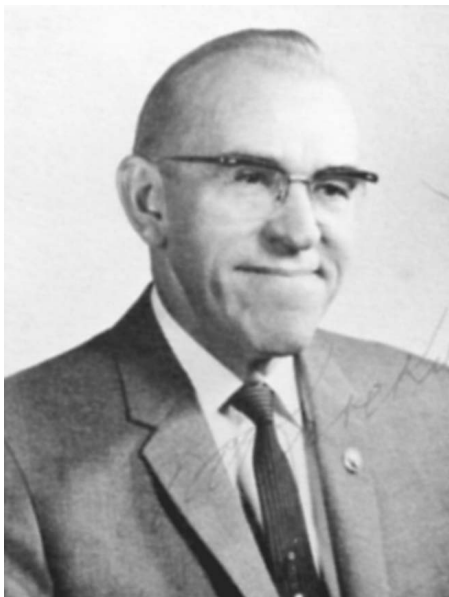
"On a beautiful December day the wedding took place (1875). How my heart thrilled as I walked to the wedding altar beside the man of my ideals and love. It was a fine wedding with a meal of `Zweiback, Kringel and Kuchen.'"



Helena Wiens Kroeker (1856-1946), Winkler, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, page 49.

Aganetha Wiens Ens

(1860-1926)



A. A. Kroeker, teacher, businessman, farmer and pastor, who founded the well-known "Kroeker Farms", Winkler. Photo courtesy of Winkler: A Proud Heritage, page 140.

The following year they immigrated to Manitoba with her parents and settled in Hoffnungsfeld, West Reserve.

In 1892 Helena and her husband converted themselves to Separatist-Pietist religious culture and joined the Winkler Brüdergemeinde.

Her children were involved with the early growth of Winkler. Son-in-law Johann Dyck (1874-1937) owned the Winkler flour mill. Together with brother-in-law Jakob Kroeker, he operated the Dyck and Kroeker general store. Jakob, together with younger brothers Abram and Peter owned Kroeker Brothers, operating a general store and General Motors franchise.

When the partnership dissolved in 1928, son Abram took over the farming operation which became the well-known Kroeker Farms, operated today by son Donald Kroeker.

The story of Abram A. Kroeker's financial success, richly peppered with condescending and incorrect observations about his Old Kolony roots, was written by Wally Kroeker, "Abe Kroeker Whole-Life Entrepreneur," in Redekopp and Redekopp, editors, *Entrepreneurs in the Faith Community* (Waterloo, Ont., 1996), pages 37-58.

Another son-in-law Heinrich Neufeld (1876-1947) founded a printing business later sold to Peter T. Friesen, Steinbach, and today known as "Triangle Printing".

After the death of Jakob A. Kroeker, son-in-law Cornelius J. Funk, Winkler, received custody of the Jakob Wiens journal.

The information for this family sketch is courtesy of Bert Friesen, *The Kroeker Family Genealogy* (Winkler, 1998), 93 pages, courtesy of Donald Kroeker, Box 1450, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4B4.

Nettie Kroeker who published the Jakob Wiens travelogue, poetry book, and *Far Above Rubies*, was the daughter of Jakob A. Kroeker and Irvin Kroeker was her nephew, son of Peter

Daughter Aganetha Wiens married Johann Ens on March 30, 1880.

For the first year after their marriage they lived and worked with her aging parents. The next year they rented the farm.

Being the youngest and still at home, Aganetha became custodian of her parents' Familienbuch.

They lived in Hoffnungsfeld and later Winkler.



Aganetha Wiens Enns (1860-1926), Winkler, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Irvin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register*, page 49.

The Johann Ens family converted to Separatist-Pietist religious culture and joined the Winkler Brüdergemeinde in 1892.

Aganetha later recorded some of her memories for her children extracts of which were published by Irvin Kroeker, *Wiens Family Register*.

Aganetha's daughter married J. L. Dyck, Winkler.

Sources:

Jakob Wiens, "Wiens Family Record 1824-1903" ("Familienbuch"), unpublished family records, translated by Ed Enns, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, 1997, 10 pages.

Jakob Wiens, Journal, unpublished diary commencing with notations by uncle Peter Wiens, approximately 400 pages, most recently in the possession of Grace Schellenberg, Winkler, and currently on deposit at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Irwin Kroeker, *The Wiens Family Register* (Winnipeg, 1963), 49 pages.

Nettie Kroeker, editor and translator, *Grandfather Wiens' Diary: en route Russia to Canada* (Winnipeg, 1961), 17 pages, courtesy of Rev. Ben Hoepfner, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Nettie Kroeker, *Far above Rubies* (Winnipeg, 1976), 268 pages.

Nettie Kroeker, *Gedichte aus der Alte und Neuen Heimat* (Winnipeg, n.d.), 14 pages.

John C. Reimer, "Our Schools," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 235-247.

Ethel Abrahams, *Frakturmalen und Schoenschreiben The Fraktur art and penmanship of the Dutch German Mennonites while in Europe 1700-1900* (North Newton, Kansas, 1980), 158 pages.

Plett, "Education in the East Reserve 1874-1920," in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, pages 1-30.

John Dyck, "Hoffnungsfeld, Community and Phenomenon," in A. Ens and J. Peters, editors, *Volume Three of the West Reserve Historical Series*, publication forthcoming.

Telephone interviews with Phil Ens, Winkler, and Andrew Enns, Winkler, September, 2000.

Membership list of Reinländer Gemeindebuch, 1875-1880, courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R.R. 1, Box 79, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.



Coloured drawing of homestead of Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901), Blumenort, W. R., Manitoba, father of Wilhelm Rempel (1846-1931), Reinland, W.R., first teacher of the "Mennonite Teachers' College," Gretna, Manitoba, 1888-89. Drawing by grandson Johann Rempel (1899-1990), Blumenort, W.R., Manitoba. Photo courtesy of George E. Rempel, *Rempel Family Book* (Altona, 2000), 506 pages, front cover. To order, send \$33.00 plus postage to 804-325 6th Street, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 1G5.

Grandfather Wiens's Diary enroute, Russia to Canada

Diary of Jakob Wiens

Publisher's Foreword to "Grandfather Wiens' Diary: Enroute Russia to Canada" (Winnipeg, 1961), 17 pages.

"....Faith of our Fathers, living faith, We will be true to thee till death."

This booklet is lovingly dedicated to my brothers and sisters, their children and grandchildren who have greatly enriched my life.

Our grandfather--and great-grandfather--Mr. Jakob Wiens, was born in Kronsthal, South Russia, in 1816. In 1876 he and his family, together with a group of other Mennonite families, migrated to Canada. To leave relatives, friends, and a comfortable home, and go to a distant country, to him hitherto unknown, was not without many difficulties and obstacles. Friends warned them, relatives blamed them, but they remained firm and determined.

Why then did they leave? The purpose is stated in a letter which grandfather Wiens wrote after his arrival in Canada, in answer to a letter received from Russia. Among other things he says:

"....What you wrote about the difficulties in regard to our migration to Canada is partly true. It is painful to sever friendship ties. But what if a man will have to leave his wife and children and take up arms? This will certainly happen. What if the nihilists shall gain power and overthrow all government?

"In the near future Russia is facing a time of horror. A powerful revolution will break out in which these terrorists will take part. The close of the 19th century will witness a "schauderdrama" in comparison to which the French Revolution at the close of the 18th century was mild.

"These horrors, however, will end. But when we will stand before God on the Day of Judgment, we will give account of ourselves. What if He will say: 'I gave you a way to escape the giving up of your faith, but you treasured your earthly joys, possessions, and friends more than Me--you are therefore not worthy of Me.'

"To keep the true faith in Russia, to my judgment, is impossible."

During the voyage to Canada, and in the beginning while settling here, grandfather wrote a diary. The following pages of this pamphlet are a translation of what he wrote. Care has been exercised to keep the emotional atmosphere as much as possible, true to the original. Facts and incidents, are kept as he wrote them.

Grateful acknowledgement is herein given to the friends who assisted in the preparation of this booklet and especially to Miss Kay Martens for her untiring effort in the typing of the manuscript.

This translation has been made with thankfulness to God, who led our forefathers to Canada, where we have freedom and liberty to worship God. May the integrity, thrift, fear of God, and trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord, found in our grandfather, manifest itself in us, his descendants.

The Publisher [Nettie Kroeker], 85 Kelvin Street, Winnipeg 5, Manitoba, n.d. [1961].

May 12, 1876 - Early in the morning, Peter Brauns, with whom we had peacefully lived together for several months, took us to the harbour. Here the steamer, owned by Jacob Tieszen, Cherson, awaited us. A large crowd had gathered. Some came out of curiosity, others because of strong friendship ties between them and those departing.

The leave taking was stirring indeed. Many of those departing had no hope of ever again seeing their loved ones in this life. The Rev. Gerhard Dyck gave an appropriate farewell message, several songs were sung, last adieus were said, and we set sail. The steamer left at 7:53 a.m.

At 10:30 a.m. we passed Teeresowki, and at 12:49 a.m. Nikopol. Here too, many friends and acquaintances stood on the shore to wave their last farewells. Soon after the setting of the sun we passed Chakowna and came to Cherson during the night. We remained in the steamer for the latter part of the night.

May 13 - In the morning our goods were loaded onto another steamer. At 8:45 a.m. our vessel left Cherson, It was a cloudy morning and some rain fell. The strong Southwest wind increased into a violent storm. Our boat was thrown up and down, back and forth--like a little nutshell. The waves of water seemed to cover us. Passengers and sailors screamed and panicked. Still, through the gracious help of God we landed safely in the harbour of Odessa. Upon arriving we went to the railroad station where we spent the night.

May 14 - At 10:00 a.m. we left Odessa. The crops do not look very promising--worse than those we left behind. Yesterday, however, a drenching rain watered the thirsty land. The scenery is mountainous. Toward evening the panorama becomes more and more romantic. Oak and linden trees are abundant. Motto for today: "Go in peace and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou has asked of him," 1 Sam. 1:17.

May 15 - Saturday - During the night we passed Balta. We are now sailing alongside a beautiful valley. It is a wooded area, increasingly it looks more like our own country. The grain fields are lovely.

Arrived in Podwolojijhiska, Galatia, at 9:00 a.m. Mr. Spienne [Spir o] of Hamburg, agent for our steamer, arrived at noon. Motto for today: "...Knowing that tribulation worketh patience," Romans 5:3.

May 16 - Motto: "I will be base in mine own sight," 2 Sam 6:22. The people of Fürstenlandt have arrived and together we continue.

May 17 - Motto: "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be not afraid, I have overcome the world," John 16:33.

Passed Lemberg at 5:00 a.m. and Peremiol at 9:00 a.m. The scenic valley is surrounded with high wooded mountains. The broad valley clothed with a velvety green not known in our country, the linden, birch and evergreen trees on either side of the train, and other natural picturesque sights cause us to marvel at natural beauty hitherto unknown. We have lived in a country comparatively poor in natural scenery.

The beauty beheld here, however, is only that of nature. We do not as yet realize what problems may confront us in our new home. Still, with thankful hearts we look up to God, trusting Him to give us a

home comparable to the one we've left behind--and after this life eternal joy. Amen.

Passed Krakau at 4:00 p.m. and arrived at the boundary Oseigim, where we remained for the night. **May 18** - Motto: "Do you love me?" John 21:17.

Left Sowizim and passed Mislowski and Kalowiz. The blue lilacs and the apple trees are in full bloom--at home they were finished blooming long before we left. Arrived at Beslau at 12:00 a.m., and left again at 5:00 p.m. At Liegnit we stopped for half an hour to repair some machinery.

May 19 - Motto: "Teaching others, dost thou not teach thyself?"

Arrived at Berlin at 6:00 a.m. and left again at 9:00 a.m. after a tour through the town. The next two stops were Hagenau and Buether. Apple trees, lilacs and tulips have begun to bloom. Rye and other grain fields are still in the early stages of growth. On our way to Hamburg, we passed through wooded areas of evergreens, birch, and "Aulenwaelder". At Hamburg we were conducted to the immigration stations. Here we were served a tasty "Rindsuppe". For sleeping quarters we received a room with a table and six beds--a bed for every two people.

May 20 - Motto: "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him," Psalm 34:8.

Money exchanged and payment to ship taken care of.

May 21 - Friday: Little David Wiens was born to the David Wienses this morning, 8:00 a.m. Motto for

"The close of the 19th century will witness a "schauderdrama" in comparison to which the French Revolution at the close of the 18th century was mild."

the Wienses: "The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee nor forsake thee," Deut. 31:6. The promise fulfilled. My motto: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," Phil. 3:14.

Exchange of money: a rubel equals 63 cents in gold. Boarded the ship at 6:00 p.m. Mrs. Wiens is taken into a first class cabin. She is doing fairly well. Left Hamburg at 11:00 p.m.

May 22 - Motto: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world," John 1:29

Quiet and calm in the morning, wind started in the afternoon and increased much towards evening. Many are sea sick.

May 23 - Pentecost: Motto: "Forget me not," Isaiah 44:21

Storm during night--strong winds today The ship rolls back and forth because of contrary winds. As we near the shore the wind subsides more and more. **May 24** - Motto: "The Lord, thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not leave thee nor forsake thee," Deut. 3:6

Landed in the harbour in the morning where we unloaded. The customs officers were quite rude--this seemed to be rather typical of the people in England. After everything was loaded into the freight train, we left Hull at 1:00 p.m. Mountains, valleys, timberlands and grain fields are picturesque to be-

Part Three: Biographies

hold as we ride along. Large bean fields come to view--summer wheat has not yet come up.

We pass through tunnels--there is a darkness for a few minutes. Mountains are numerous, but these are not wooded. Rather, they are covered with grain fields. We passed through a longer tunnel. . . crossed steep huge mountains. . . went over tall bridge. . . tunnel again. . . tunnel. . . tunnel. . . At 8:00 p m. we arrived at Liverpool and were conducted into the immigration halls.

It seems to me that in the whole country of Russia we do not have as many factories as we've seen during this one trip from Hull to Liverpool. The large cities are mainly composed of factories, the smoke of which causes a dense and dark atmosphere. The people we have seen on this journey are more brutal than any we met with previously.

May 25 - Motto: "Follow peace will all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," Hebrews 12:14.

On this day John Friesen brought us the Pentecost message from God's word.

This afternoon five families have been set apart for the purpose of staying behind. The Driedgers are among them.

May 26 - Wednesday - Motto: "A true Christian presses toward the mark," Phil. 1:3

Jacob, son of David Wienses, is very sick.

We've been to the railroad station. What a tumult and noise! There is screaming, whistling, switching of trains, people running back and forth, etc., etc. One is reminded of the coming judgement. There is a deep desire to be back on the quiet land, where instead of the tumult and noise, we hear the song of the lark.

The railroad station consists of a very long, broad building covered with glass. Horses here in England are from five-and-a-half to six-and-a-half feet high, with very strong legs and large hips. We have seen that more than 200 "pud" is loaded onto one horse. The streets are paved and the houses are made of square bricks one-and-a-half feet in diameter.

The David Wienses and Isaac Wienses have been registered to stay behind.

May 27 - Motto: "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me," Isaiah 49:16.

At 10:00 a m. we all left for the harbour. The tumult is indescribable. At 11:50 a m. we boarded the little ship which took us to the big ship, which we boarded shortly thereafter.

The harbour opens up into a wide river on the other side of which is a large factory city. The density and smoke of this city is worse than what we've seen before. At 8:45 p m. we left anchor and sailed. "Lord Jesus, go with us and be Thou also with those of our children staying behind"

May 28 - Motto: "Christ, my all in all!"

Early in the morning we sighted the shore of Ireland. Soon we sailed alongside it. This island is very mountainous--the mountains towered from 300-400 feet in height. These are covered with grain fields.

As we sailed along, the wind again increases and there is considerable rocking of the ship. At 6:30 p m. we sailed into the harbour. Some passengers disembark while others board the ship. At the setting of the sun, 9:30, we have sailed 190 miles.

May 29 - Saturday - Motto: "He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted. . ." Luke 4:18.

The shoreline of Ireland had disappeared--thus we have lost complete sight of Europe. We are now

completely severed. The wind is as strong as yesterday, but the physical atmosphere is cleared. Sailed about 220 miles today, or a total of 410 miles.

May 30 - Sunday - Motto: "Jesus knew what was in man," John 2:25.

The night was stormy--the storm continues today. The water billows surge up to 20 feet in height or even more. The waves dash up and down, but in the distance the sun is smiling through, bringing a picturesque view. It reminds us of the city of God about which we read in Revelation: "O God, how great and wonderful is Thy power! How glorious Thy majesty! How unspeakably great Thy grace and kindness! We poor, weak and sinful human beings are kept on the ocean in a nutshell by Thy power--and Thou dost even remove all fear from us."

Our ship, the Sardinian, is 450 feet long and 40 feet broad. The water is mostly calm, but through the crash of the waves high crested ridges of water are formed, frequently higher than the ship. A sight, terrible and beautiful to behold presents itself, when in the clear sunlight one views the storm-tossed ocean. Looking at the top of the masts, 100 feet in height, as they rock back and forth, first towering above all else, then lowering again, the omnipotence and majesty of God is beheld and marvelled at. The storm increases and it is very cold. Latitude, 54 degrees 51' N. Longitude, 121 degrees 35' W. Have sailed 220 miles--720 miles in all.

May 31 - Motto: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee," Psalm 55:22.

The storm has increased and the wind has turned northwest. During the night the water surged onto the ship, and even today there is hardly a dry place on deck. The ship thrusts back and forth--even more than yesterday.

Latitude 53 degrees 57' N. Longitude 25 degrees 19' W. Have sailed 243 miles today--945 in all.

June - 1876

June 1 - Tuesday - Motto: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them," Mark 11:24.

The storm has increased, billows surge to 40 and 50 feet in height, covering the masts, the sky is dark and the whole sea clothed in mist. "But though the waves dash and roar, and the mountains cave in, we shall not fear; the Lord is with us, and His right hand will hold us."

Latitude 52 degrees 51' N. Longitude 35 1/2 degrees W. Have sailed 255 miles, or 1200 in all.

June 2 - Motto: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thine house," Acts 16:31.

The storm has subsided and it is comparatively calm. All on board are encouraged--yesterday nearly all were seasick, but I was again spared. At 8:00 a m. a sailing vessel passed us in the distance.

This is my birthday--I am 60 years of age. In the midst of the ocean, the Lord, in his grace, permits me to reach this age and have this birthday. "O Lord, guide our ship into a safe port in the near future, and keep the ship of our life, as long as we sail, close to the wounds of Jesus. Then guide it into the safe haven of eternal blessedness. Amen"

It has been a good day, though somewhat misty. Now, toward the evening, it is clearing and we see the blue sky above.

June 3 - Thursday - Motto: "Our conversation is in heaven," Phil. 3:20.

A heavy fog engulfs us this morning. At noon death again enters our ship. A child of Hermann Kehlens of Kronsweide died as a result of measles.

Katherina, daughter of the Jacob Ennses, also had the measles.

June 4 - Friday - Motto: "Remember the Lord Jesus Christ. . . continuing instant in prayer," Romans 12:12

Yesterday the deceased child w as placed in a coffin and lowered into the ocean. Last night another child died--that of the Jacob Walls, Neuendorf.

The foggy weather continues. At 8:00 a m. we passed an iceberg approximately 26 feet high. The wind decreased and the ocean is calming down.

By the grace of God we have escaped a tremendous danger. At noon, Johann Peters and I were standing on the front part of the deck, looking out into the distance, trying to spy something on the ocean. Periodically, a whistle was given from the ship which was answered with a whistle from the right. Two sailors were standing on the front part of the deck looking out into the mist.

Suddenly one of them turned to the captain and screamed. With both hands the captain immediately grabbed the telegraph wheel, causing the ship to sail backwards.

We looked forward to what Mr. Peters thought was a ship coming toward us.

But what was that?

A high towering white cliff rose up right before us.

"AN ICEBERG," I screamed.

The sailors beckoned us to come, and ran toward the middle of the deck. Not far from the center of the deck I remained standing--waiting for the things that were about to come to pass.

Slowly and more slowly the ship moved.

Higher and closer the iceberg came until it drew up along the left side of the vessel.

The highest peak, somewhat over 100 feet in height, bent over the masts. Suddenly, the collision came.

CRASH!

It was intensive, but not to the degree I had expected it would be.

Massive pieces of ice fell on the deck--but only from the side of the iceberg and not the tip. The vessel, already sailing backwards, was hastened on in this backward direction through the impact of the collision.

Everyone now hurried to help clear away the ice. After about half an hour, the deck was cleared. Mainly the forefront of the deck had been covered.

The metal railing was broken down. The heavy bars, 1 1/2 inches in diameter, were bent like thin wire while the wooden parts were completely shattered. The main body of the ship was unharmed. The noon meal we were about to partake of before all this happened was just about cold by now.

The collision must have been terrible. The iron shaft of the big anchor, standing out several feet above the left "Schiffsband", almost one foot in diameter and eight inches in thickness, was broken off. This anchor was the tool in God's hand which He used to save us. As the iceberg neared the ship, this shaft rubbed against it till the anchor broke off, thus lessening the power of the collision.

June 5 - Motto: "Give me, my son, thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," Prov. 23:26

Direction - northwest. Fog on the ocean--higher up it is clear

Death again entered--this time it is a child of the Isaac Reimers, Adelsheim. At 4:00 pm, we spied the shore of Newfoundland. Sea mammals are seen.

The peaks of the high mountains are covered with

much snow. Toward evening the velocity of the wind increases and our vessel rocks back and forth. During the day it was calm. Latitude 46 degrees 57" longitude 57 degrees 40". Sailed 200 miles today or a total of 2180.

June 6 - Motto: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee;...., Isaiah 41:10.

At 7:00 a.m. the shoreline of America is in sight. At 8:00 a.m. several whales are seen, spouting water into the air. At 9:30 a.m. we greet America by hoisting the flag of the ship. The coast we are nearing now has a long outstretched fishing village on its shore. Shoreline and mountains are covered with trees. At places the ocean seems to go way inland, and the shore into the ocean. Mountainous cliffs, several hundred feet in height, stand out majestically. Evergreens and other trees partly cover the mountains, while fishing villages are seen along the shore below. The coastline is more or less the same as we continue our journey. Further inland we pass higher snow-capped mountains.

June 7 - Motto: "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind," Romans 12:2.

Land is seen on either side of the ship, indicating that we are in the gulf of the St. Lawrence. To our right the land resembles that which we passed through yesterday. To our left we see villages, grain fields and trees. Huge fish are seen in the water. At noon a thunderstorm is followed by rain. A safe landing is reached at Quebec at 3:00 p.m.

In the immigration hall we are served with a tasty beef soup.

The scenic city of Quebec is partly situated on the side of a wooded mountain, and extended in the narrow valley of the river down below. The grandeur is enhanced by the fragrance and beauty of the blue lilacs, now in full bloom. At 8:00 p.m. we boarded the train.

June 8 - Motto: "Whosoever abideth in Him, sinneth not," 1 John 3:6

We now continue our journey in America. The woodlands we pass through are plentiful and exquisite in beauty. Level country, grain fields, trees, houses, hills and also smaller mountains are viewed in rapid succession. The grain is still in its early stages of growth. A variety of wild flowers adds to the romantic scenery. Roses and lilacs are in abundance. What refreshing sights we behold!

At 11:00 a.m. we enjoy a delicious breakfast at an immigration hall in Ontario—we had brought the cheese and bread from Quebec.

The speed of Canadian trains surpasses any we have known. Why, in 48 seconds we travel one mile or, five miles in four minutes. As we continue through the day, we notice that the scenery is about the same. Travelled 300 miles today.

June 9 - Motto: "I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him," Ps. 91:15.

7:00 a.m. Toronto—had a good breakfast. While we were eating Mr. Fehonz dropped in.

Toronto is a large city, and judging by German and English cities, a fine city—compares well with Russian cities.

I travelled five miles inland today—my purpose was the exchange of money. I realized, however, that I'd have long to wait.

Merchandise is cheap. I bought a pair of rubber boots for \$2.50, an axe for \$1.00, little axes for 50 cents up to \$1.25 apiece. In quality, these exceed those in Russia.

June 10 - Motto: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," Luke 22:29.

My High priest, do not stop to pray for me,
My Teacher, grant my life be saved through Thee;
My King, O that as overcomer I before Thy throne may stand."

Before leaving Toronto, we had a service at the station. An American Methodist city missionary gave the message through an interpreter. It was a good message, but would have been appreciated more if we could have understood the English language.

At 10:00 a.m. we left Toronto and one hour before sunset we boarded the ship at Colingwood.

June 11 - Friday - Motto: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth," Luke 2:14.

At 6:00 we stopped at Montreal [transcription error?] to take wood. Toward evening we sailed into Lake Huron southwestwardly over the lake and then northward. The shoreline is steep, high and covered with evergreens and pinewood. Woodlands are very dense in America—at least from what we've seen so far. We had no conception of this in Russia.

June 12 - Saturday - Motto: "Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ," 1 Peter 1:13.

At midnight we stopped to take in more wood. Towards morning the river, along which we sailed during the night, broadened out into a sea. We continued: at times sailing northward, at times southward, sometimes in narrow waters which again broadened out. Now and then we passed a little hamlet or town but mostly wooded areas. After sunset we passed through the gates—I could not observe them well, however, for Jacob Enns was quite sick with cholera.

June 13 - Sunday - Motto: "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine," Isaiah 43:1.

Mr. Enns had a good night and is much better today. The morning is beautiful, the water calm and smooth like a mirror. We are sailing northwest. It is cold and misty. We notice high mountains in the distance. At 11:30 a.m. we again take in wood. Sailed on the open sea all afternoon. Direction northwest.

June 14 - Monday - Motto: "...if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," John 12:32

It rained during the night. At daybreak we sighted land. Soon after sunrise we stopped at a little town to take in wood. From 8:45 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. we stopped at Findore. Almost throughout the day a heavy fog surrounded us.

June 15 - Tuesday - Motto: "O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in Him," Psalm 34:8

The gulf near Duluth, where we arrived at noon, was largely covered with ice. The shoreline, however, is arrayed with the loveliest green trees and other luxurious growth. At 1:30 p.m. we arrived at Duluth. It was 4:00 p.m. by the time we had unloaded all our baggage from the ship and transferred it to the train which we were to board.

What a contrast in the weather, comparing that of the water with that of the land! Here we have a warm June day, while just a little way off the shore the atmosphere was cold and we were surrounded with ice.

A pleasant experience was ours as we—Jacob Wall and I—climbed a mountain. The house, garden and waterfall gave a very friendly appearance. Lovely blue lilacs enhanced the scenery. As we neared the house, a lady came out to meet us. In a friendly manner she conducted us through her apple orchard

and garden. The apple trees had finished blooming. There were strawberries, red currants, vegetables, and many other plants to me hitherto unknown.

We continued our mountain climbing but did not scale its peak—it was too high, and the distance too far. When about 500 feet above the town, we stopped. To escape a swamp, we had to jump from one stone to another. The waterfall gushing forth its water and flowing all the way down is majestic. With the aid of a telescope, we viewed the scenery down below. The water, ice, town, and wooded areas around present a pleasant sight.

Again sadness entered our group: a child of the John Harders died.

June 16 - Motto: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Luke 18:41.

Left Duluth at 12:00 noon. Alongside the railroad, to the one side we see the river with its swift rapids and currents, while the other side is closed in with mountains, from which innumerable waterfalls gush forth. Evergreens, birch trees, poplars, spruce, hazelbushes, and various other trees, shrubs and greenery cover the mountain sides. To our right we see high towering mountains, to our left ravines and deep gorges with roaring waters tearing through the railroad bridges, at places having torn away the shoreline. Deep down in the ravines the tops of evergreens beckon us. In short: while still in Russia, we read much about the 'wild-romantic' country of America—still, reality exceeded our most visionary dreams.

At 5:00 p.m. we see plains, while wooded areas decrease more and more. Meadows come to our view. Several hundred miles away from the shoreline of Lake Superior we disembark and spend the night at Brainard.

June 17 - Thursday - Motto: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and to such as be of a humble spirit," Psalm 34:19.

Left Brainard at 5:00 a.m. ...passed the Mississippi...meadows...grain fields... woods...grain...potato fields. Houses look neat and attractive. The grass looks similar to our grass at home.

June 18 - Friday - Motto: "Thou therefore, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Romans 2:21.

Arrived at the Red River during the night, where our baggage was unloaded and transferred to a ship. At 5:00 a.m. we boarded the ship and again resumed our journey. The river is from 60 to 70 feet wide and flows along a drastic zig-zag fashion. In rapid succession we sail east, then west, again north and then south. At noon we enter into another river, broader than this one wider than the other—approximately 80 to 90 feet wide. Both shorelines are thickly wooded, but the river bends are not as extreme as the former.

June 19 - Saturday - Motto: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," John 7:37

Today the shoreline is wooded again. At 10:00 a.m. we made our next terminal at a house. Here we took in wood. We also had the opportunity here of viewing farmlands. The barley is beginning to ear. Corn, potatoes and vegetables all show vigorous healthy growth.

Between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. we stopped at Pembina River. At 3:00 p.m. we arrived at David Klassens. At 4:00 pm, through the gracious help of God, we landed at Dufferin. Here we were escorted to the immigration halls.

It was shortly after our arrival that I was saved from what could have been a fatal injury. Together

Part Three: Biographies

with the David Klassens I drove to a town beyond the Red River to buy flour. On our way back, going down the steep shore of the river, the harness tore, with the result that the wagon upset, giving me a heavy blow. My left hand was badly injured and for awhile I was threatened with unconsciousness because of a severe blow to my neck. This was all that happened. Had the wagon struck me from another angle, which could have easily happened, I would have been killed instantly--another visible evidence of God's protection.

June 20 - Sunday - Motto: "The Lord thy God will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy," Zeph. 3:17.

This was a day of rest. Have seen barley, like we never saw in Russia, not even during the best years. Also saw a gopher, somewhat darker than those in Russia--otherwise nearly the same.

June 21 - Monday - Motto: "...continuing instant in prayer," Romans 12:12.

Bought the following: a cow with its calf for \$39.00, an iron stove with equipment for \$28.50, a shovel for \$1.00, two pails for 65 cents, a coffee mill for 50 cents, soap for 25 cents, matches for 30 cents and two plates for 20 cents.

June 22 - Tuesday - Motto: "Walk in the way of holiness," Isaiah 35:8.

Bought a pair of oxen for \$139.00.

June 23 - Wednesday - Motto: "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye," Matthew 7:5.

Purchased the following today: a wagon for \$64.00, a kettle for \$1.70, a grindstone for \$1.64, a wrench for 80 cents, wagon grease for 50 cents, and wood for the wagon for \$2.00.

At 2:00 p.m. I went along to Reinland together with Peter Wiens, Wilhelm Esau and Jacob Wiens. Stayed in a wayside inn overnight. The meadows are a lovely green.

June 24 - Thursday - Motto: "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble," 1 Peter 5:5.

Arrived at Jacob Wiens in Reinland at 11:00 a.m.

June 25 - Friday - Motto: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest," Matthew 11:28.

Repaired implements today.

June 26 - Saturday - Motto: "Our conversation is in heaven," Phil. 3:20.

Fetches a load of wood and brought lots of strawberries with us.

June 27 - Sunday - Motto: "Jehovah said: I am with thee; fear thou not," Isaiah 41:10.

The first time we attended church in America--Jacob Wiens gave the message.

June 28 - Monday - Motto: "Tribulation worketh patience," Romans 5:3.

Went out to look at some land today. Went as far as David Fehr's place, Rosenfeld. Here we met with our friends from Russia and heard that Jacob, son of David Wiens, has died. Stayed here overnight.

June 29 - Tuesday - Motto: "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him," 1 Sam. 1:17.

Went to Emerson to do some shopping. Purchased the following: a plow for \$24.00, wood for \$12.00, four bags of flour for \$12.50, ten lbs of coffee for \$3.35, seven lbs of sugar for \$1.00, two pails for 70 cents, a pitchfork for \$1.25, one lb. "Licht" for 30 cents, 40 lbs lard for \$9.00, 11 lbs. nails for 77 cents, 60 lbs beans for \$3.00.

Left Emerson and spent the night under the blue sky.

June 30 - Wednesday - Motto: "Let us love one another, for love is of God," 1 John 4:7.

Arrived in Reinland at 4:00 p.m. and left again for Ebenfeld to look at some land. It is quite good, but there is a shortage of water.

July - 1876

July 1 - Thursday - Motto: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved and thine house," Acts 16:31

Attended an auction sale in No. 1, where cattle and wagon were sold.

July 2 - Friday - Motto: "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace," Hebrews 13:9

Have again gone to various places to look at more land sites. Stayed at John Ennses at Rosenort for the night.

July 3 - Saturday - Motto: "Our conversation is in heaven," Phil. 3:20.

After viewing some land today, we decided to move there and establish a home. In the afternoon we bought wood, a sack of wheat for \$2.32 and a sack of barley for \$3.32.

July 4 - Sunday - Motto: Read a message on the text, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart," Psalm 37:4.

Took Abram Kroeker to the Red River to fetch the children.

July 5 - Monday - Motto: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," 1 Tim. 2:4.

Took the sons of Benjamin Fehr and Mrs. Gerhard Dyck to the chosen site to dig a well.

July 6 - Tuesday - Motto: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," Matthew 7:6.

Abram Kroeker came home without the children.

July 7 - Wednesday - Motto: "Who provideth for the raven his food, when his young ones cry to God, they wander for lack of meat," Job 38:41.

A fierce storm raged during the night. This morning we had rain, hail and a thunderstorm. The hail pieces exceed a walnut in size. Two houses are torn down, in Schoenwiese a cow and in Neuenburg two oxen were killed by lightning. In Rosenort Mrs. Cornelius Peters was struck by lightning--but not killed.

July 8 - Thursday - Motto: "...but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven," Luke 10:20

Went out today to search for water--so far we have been unsuccessful.

July 9 - Friday - Motto: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee," Jer. 31:3

Tried five different places for water today--after that we returned.

July 10 - Saturday - Motto: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways," Prov. 23:26.

The children had gone to view another site closer to the woods--however, they do not like it.

July 11 - Sunday - Motto: "Without me ye can do nothing," John 15:5.

Had company today--Jacob Ennses, Abraham Zachariases and David Fehrs were here. During the evening the Isaac Wienses arrived--they landed safely here at Dufferin during the night.

July 12 - Monday - Abraham Kroekers and Isaac Wienses went to get the other children today.

July 13 - Tuesday - Motto: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the

Son," John 5:22.

Have viewed the site near the woods--liked it fairly well.

July 14 - Wednesday - Motto: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Luke 18:41.

With God's help, all our children have now arrived safely.

July 15 - Thursday - Motto: "Christ is all, and in all," Col. 3:11.

Again went out to seek water but without results.

July 16 - Friday - Motto: "Come near to me, I pray you," Genesis 45:4.

Have come to a decision to settle in Reinland.

July 17 - Saturday - Again, there are contentions regarding the site that has been chosen.

July 18 - Sunday - Motto: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him," 1 John 2:15.

The Aeltester Johann Wiebe preached the sermon here today.

July 19 - Monday - Again we viewed two sites--found water on the latter and decided to settle there. The place is to be named "Hoffnungsfeld".

July 20 - Tuesday - Took our families and possessions to Chortitz.

July 21 - Wednesday - "Follow thou me," John 21:22.

Hauled wood out of the woods and started to build.

July 22 - Thursday - Together with Isaac Wiens I went to the Pembina Mountains as far as Dakota where we bought nine head of cattle: a yoke of oxen for \$72.50, for Jacob Enns another yoke of oxen for \$60.00, for David Wiens a cow and calf for \$35.00, for Isaac Wiens a pair of oxen for slaughtering for \$40.00, for Aaron Neustaetter one cow and calf for \$35.00. Returned that night. Took very sick.

July 24 - Saturday - Rainy throughout the day. I spent the day in bed.

July 25 - Sunday - Attended the church service today. Johann Wiebe gave the message and spoke on the text: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you," 1 Peter 5:7.

Took Isaac Wienses and Jacob Ennses to Schanzenfeld, to transfer the things that were ordered.

July 26 - Monday - Mowed grass for the roof and began building the barn.

July 27 - Tuesday - Began building the well basin.

July 28 - Wednesday - Placed the well basin in the well and started cleaning out the well. Toward evening we had much rain and a thunderstorm.

July 29 - Thursday - Finished the cleaning of the well. The children from the Red River area have come home.

July 30 - Friday - Hauled two loads of wood from the forest.

July 31 - Saturday - Continued building the barn.

August 1 - Sunday - Cool weather.

August 2 - Monday - Took Isaac Wienses to Reinland. Isaac Wiens has a sore finger. The rest of us continued building the barn.

August 3 - Tuesday - Finished building of the barn. A rainy day.

August 4 - Wednesday - Moved from Chortitz here to our new site, Hoffnungsfeld. Moved into the barn. Hauled some more wood.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 17, pages 20-44.

Vorsteher Isaak Mueller: Community Builder

“Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller (1824-1912), Neuhorst, West Reserve, Manitoba: Community Builder,”
by Adolf Ens, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Introduction.

The Mennonites arriving at the immigration houses at Fort Dufferin in 1875 came from several colonies and a dozen or more villages in southern Russia. That they would become one community in the West Reserve was not a foregone conclusion. Leadership would be a key factor.

The immigrants were fortunate to have in their midst a man of the calibre of Isaak Mueller (1824-1912). At their organizational meetings at Fort Dufferin, while waiting for the signal to move out to their new homesteads, they chose Mueller as the head of their community government. To succeed in building a harmonious settlement, there needed to be a sensible, orderly series of villages

years later they bought a windmill, renovated it, and Mueller became a miller

Obervorsteher.

By the time of the emigration in 1875, Mueller had clearly gained respect in the community. He was chosen as “group leader” of 41 families (198 persons) for the long journey, keeping them together, handling the paper work at various border crossings, and exchanging their money. The record notes that he promptly returned to the common treasury the \$19.30 commission credited to him for converting his group’s Russian rubles into Canadian dollars.

Once elected as the colony’s civic leader at

villages, and kept record of what had been advanced on credit. And it was his office that administered the West Reserve portion of the government loan of almost \$100,000 made to the collective Mennonite community.

‘Kaiser’ Mueller.

To regulate these initiatives and see to an orderly development of the community, Mueller issued a steady stream of instructions to the village mayors. Since these were hand written and laboriously copied for each village, they were succinct, even terse. “Those who receive bread from the community and own dogs are to get rid of them or they will have to buy their own bread,”



An artist's sketch of Fort Pembina just south of Fort Dufferin on the Red River. This is where the Mennonite immigrants purchased their supplies. Photo courtesy of Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

and appropriate infrastructure. But there also needed to be an understanding of and commitment to the goals of the church leaders.

Mueller, from Chortitza, and Aeltester Johann Wiebe from Fürstenland, represented the two colonies with the largest number of immigrants. During Mueller's 11 years as Obervorsteher (Reeve) of the Reserve, there was no issue on which these two leaders publicly disagreed. During that decade the open prairie was transformed into a series of villages surrounded by fields and pastures and linked by roads and trails.

Imperial Russia.

Six years before Isaak Mueller was born, his father left the Hutterite community in south Russia to join the Mennonites. His mother died when he was not quite four and his father, when Isaak was 12. Waisenamt (Orphans' Bureau) administration and inheritance regulations among Mennonites provided orphans a fair chance to succeed in life. Isaak Mueller married Gertruda Wall of Neuhorst, Chortitza, when he was 19. Six

Fort Dufferin, Mueller moved energetically to divide immigrants into groups of 15 to 20 families for each new village. His family was part of the founding group of Neuhorst. Like all the other immigrants, his first concern was to prepare shelter and supplies for family and livestock. But he had to think also of the 300 other families and their needs.

The government's survey of part of the reserved land was still incomplete and the homestead application office not properly in operation. Hence, Mueller and his assistants - Franz Froese and secretary Peter Wiens - had to register homestead applications. Other aspects of the settlement's dealings with the various levels of government also rested on Mueller's shoulders.

During the first winter, the church congregation decided to build its first meeting place. It was Mueller who sent directives to each village Schultz (mayor) instructing every household to provide clearly specified materials and labour. It was his office that ordered food staples like flour and potatoes, distributed them to the individual

he wrote in 1877. “And those who smoke are to ease up, for it seems there is always money for tobacco but not for bread.” This style earned him the nickname “Kaiser” Mueller.

But he was also compassionate and generous, urging those better off to help the poorer ones, and leading by example. He ordered fruit tree seedlings and sold them cheaply (15 cents for apple, 6 cents for plum and cherry). He acquired timber lots so that building material and firewood could be cut. And he maintained good relations with the federal and provincial government officials. Indeed, he was so well-liked by the community that when he announced his retirement in 1886 after 12 years as Obervorsteher, he still received only nine fewer votes than his successor, even though his name was not on the ballot.

About the Author.

Adolf Ens recently retired as professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg. He is the author of *Subjects or Citizens? The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa, 1994), 266 pages.

Credits:

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Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), 1921 Delegate

Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), Sommerfelder Delegate, a Brief Sketch by Delbert F. Plett Q.C., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

The name of Bernhard Toews (1863-1927) one of the Sommerfelder delegates to Paraguay and Mexico in 1921 first came to my attention when friend Abraham W. Hiebert, Asuncion, Paraguay, sent me a copy of his recently published journal covering the delegation expedition--see Dr. John J. Friesen, *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 133-134, for a review of this publication.

I did some cursory research in an effort to track his genealogical roots to get a sense of who he was, but to no avail. As I talked to some of Bernhard Toews' descendants in the Steinbach and Winnipeg area I got a sense of the enigmatic person that Bernhard Toews was and my interest was tweaked. About all I got from his grandchildren was that the Bernhard Toews family had lived in the village of Weidenfeld, W.R.

Background.

The name of Bernhard Toews was not to be found in either the "Bergthaler Gemeindebuch", the ship lists or the 1881 census, as published in the *Bergthaler Gemeindebuch*, the standard reference for anyone of Bergthaler/Sommerfelder background.

This, of course, did not make sense, as Bernhard Toews had acted as the delegate of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde. I called John Wall, Morden, Manitoba, expert on the "Old Kolonier" and "Sommerfelder" Gemeindebücher. John did some digging and came up with the information that Bernhard's mother was Anna Wiebe, widow of "Jakob Toews of Chortitza".

Anna Wiebe was born June 3, 1822, and married to Jakob Toews of Chortitza, Imperial Russia. They had two sons Bernhard and Heinrich. After the death of her first husband, Anna married for the second time to Johann Bergmann (b. 1825), Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, BGB A 165/S1A 252.

Bergmann was a well respected man who had "supervised the entire sale" of the properties in the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia--Klaas Peters, *The Bergthaler Mennonites*, page 90. In 1877 the Bergmann family emigrated travelling on the S.S. Sarmatian, BGB page 325. They settled in Reinland W.R. where he was one of "early Reinland's wealthiest citizens." Bergmann was the first owner of the Holland-style windmill in Reinland (Peter Zacharias, *Reinland*, page 129).

Toews Ancestry.

Bernhard Toews and brother Heinrich were listed in the 1881 census with the family of Johann



Bernhard Toews (1863-1927) and his first wife Katarina Funk Toews (1865-1903). Mrs. Toews was the daughter of Bishop Johann F. Funk, Alt-Bergthal, W.R., Manitoba. The Toews family pioneered in Gnadenthal, W.R. in 1886. Photo courtesy of John J. Friesen, "Gnadenfeld 1880-1924," in J.P. Redekopp, Chair, Gnadenfeld 1880-1980 (Altona, 1982), page 8.

Bergmann in the village of Reinland, BGB 386-114. Bernhard Toews was baptized on June 2, 1884.

Genealogist Henry Schapansky has written that the matter of Bernhard Toews' ancestry "... is a tough one. The Jakob Toews who married Anna Wiebe, could be the Jakob Toews (1819-72) of Chortitz. His line goes like this: Abraham Toews (1747-87), Tiegenhagen 1776: 4 sons. Son Isaak Toews (1774-1831), second marriage to Maria Klassen (1795-1830). Son Jakob (1819-72). Isaak (1774-1831) came to Russia circa 1795 and settled at Chortitz. His first wife was Anna Klassen (1766-1814), widow of Abraham Bühler."

In his journal [page 17], Bernhard Toews refers to a trip to Niverville on February 12, 1921, and that "my uncle Kornelius Friesen also just happened to be in Niverville and took us along to his place." This raises some fascinating questions. Was Jakob Toews possibly related to Peter Toews (1806-86), patriarch of the Alt-Bergfeld, E.R., Toews' (see Editor's Note, *Preservings*, No. 14,

page 40), or is he referring to someone other than Waisenmann Kornelius Toews Friesen (1860-1929), Osterwick, E. R., or is the reference merely a generic expression of respect?

Marriage 1885.

Bernhard Toews was married on January 8, 1885 to Katharina Funk (1865-1903), daughter of Johann Funk (1836-1917) and Susanna Rempel (b. 1842). BGB 156. Susanna was the granddaughter of Jakob Braun (1791-1868), first Aeltester of the Bergthal Colony. Thus the traditions of community service in this family ran deep.

The marriage also represented a crossing of Old Kolony and Bergthal families, not that unusual at the time. Although Bernhard Toews had been brought up as an Old Kolonier, he was introduced to the Bergthal community when his mother married the prominent Johann Bergmann.

Katharina's father Johann Funk was the elected as the Aeltester of the Bergthal Gemeinde in 1882. As is well known, Funk was determined to move towards the adoption of American Revivalist religious culture, a trend which the majority of his parishioners were smart to see as an abandonment of their cherished faith. This resulted in most of the Bergthaler leaving Funk's church and reorganizing on "the tried and true" as the "Sommerfelder Gemeinde" so named for the village of residence of their charismatic new leader Abraham

Doerksen.

Of interest to the story of Bernhard Toews is that he together with his bride decided to remain with those who rejected her father's autocratic push towards American Revivalist religious culture opting instead to remain with the traditional Gospel-centric faith. It must have been a heart-wrenching decision for Bernhard and Katharina, which speaks of a deep and abiding faith in the truths of the Gospels.

In 1886, one year after their marriage, Bernhard and Katharina settled in Gnadenthal, a village which has been referred to by historian Dr. John J. Friesen as the "Weibernot" village as it was settled in 1880 primarily by young unmarried men (Friesen, *Gnadenthal*, page 7.)

In 1900 the Bernhard Toews family moved to Wiedefeld.

Heinrich's Death, 1902.

In 1902, Bernhard's brother Heinrich, a school teacher in Altona, gained notoriety when he shot



Annie and Helena Kehler shortly before they were shot by their teacher Heinrich Toews in 1902. Helena survived, but Annie died the morning following the incident. Photo and caption courtesy of Esther Epp-Thiessen, Altona, page 47-48.

three of his students, as well as three trustees, and one of the young girls died from her wounds. Heinrich died shortly after from lack of care for wounds (Esther Epp-Thiessen, *Altona*, page 47-48).

Remarriage.

After the death of his first wife in 1903, Bernhard married Aganetha P. Harder of Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Shortly after this, April 28, 1904, Bernhard's mother died.



Altester Johann Funk (1836-1917), *Alt-Bergthal*, W. R., father-in-law of Bernhard Toews. Funk's autocratic drive towards American Revivalist religious culture alienated the majority of his parishioners who remained true to their Gospel-centric faith resulting in the formation of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde in 1892. Photo courtesy of Thiessen, Altona, page 36.



Isaak Mueller home in Neuhorst, W.R. Isaak Muller (b. 1824) served as the Obervorsteher of the Old Kolony Gemeinde in Fürstenland, Imperial Russia. He was elected as Obervorsteher for the Old Kolony Gemeinde in the West Reserve in 1875. He was nick-named "Kaiser Mueller" for his strong organization abilities and genius for leadership. Next to Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Mueller stands as one of the architects of Old Kolony culture and faith as it was redefined after the settlement in Manitoba. Mueller's thatched roof house stood in Neuhorst until 1959. Photo by Elma Kehler, courtesy of Gerhard John Ens, R. M. of Reinland, page 28. Many other prominent leaders and gifted people have come out of the Old Kolonier culture including Alfred van Vogt (whose science fiction books sold in the millions) and Jakob Penner, Steinbach, founder of Penner Foods.

Teaching, 1909-20.

Bernhard Toews received a good education in the "old" homeland where he attended the "Central School" (a secondary school) in Chortitza, Imperial Russia. He was a literate and articulate man. He maintained a journal which demonstrates his keen observation of life around him and his ear for picking up what people were saying.

His "Central School" education uniquely qualified Bernhard Toews as a school teacher, this being more education than most district school teachers had. From the comments he makes in his journal, it is manifest that he had a love for his students and an ability to inspire in them a love for the Christain faith.

Imprisonment.

Prosecutions against Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan who relied on the guarantees given by the Dominion Government in 1873 ran into the thousands in 1920 to 1926. Ministers and teachers were imprisoned for their faith.

On January 2, 1920, Bernhard Toews was imprisoned in Winnipeg by the Manitoba Government as part of its campaign to eradicate Plaut-Dietsch/Mennonite culture and Gospel-centric faith from southern Manitoba.

Rather than fight or start an insurrection as most cultures would when their guaranteed rights are arbitrarily suppressed, most of the conservative Mennonites decided to immigrate where they often faced hardship and even death to survive in their harsh new environments. As a result very few of the victims of this cultural oppression have written about their experience.

Bernhard Toews' journal is the only first hand account of the prison experience of these martyrs currently available. As such it is an extremely important document, estblishing the varacity of that

which conservative Mennonites in Manitoba have often only been able to whisper about.

Hopefully the publication of Bemhard Toews' account will encourage others who are aware of such documents or who have oral traditions about their family's experiences to bring tham forward so they can be added to the historical record.

Delegation, 1921.

In 1921 Bernhard Toews served as a delegate for the Sommerfelder Gemeinde to South America. The portions of his journal covering the expedition to South America and Mexico were recently (1997) published in a third edition by the "Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, Paraguay." A review of this publication by Dr. John Friesen, C.M.B.C., Winnipeg, was published in *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 133-134.

Death.

In 1926 and 1927 the Sommerfelder emigration to Paraguay was finally coming to pass.

The Bernhard Toews family was all packed and ready to depart when Bernhard fell sick. He needed to have a bladder and kidney operation. He died on November 12, 1927, followed only six weeks later by his second wife, who died on December 16, 1927.

Apparently, there may be additional journals and or parts of journals by Bernhard Toews (which have not yet been published nor made available to archives and researchers). Anyone with information regarding such journals is asked to contact the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. at www.plettfoundation.org

Part Three: Biographies



The sketch titled "flag-raising for an empty school" speaks for the harsh oppression implemented by the Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments in 1919-1926. While citizens were being stripped of their property rights and ministers and teachers were jailed, public schools--often inferior in quality--were being imposed on the people in direct contravention of the rights granted by the Dominion Government in 1873. Often these schools stood empty at taxpayers expense, i.e. the same people whose own legitimate schools were forcibly being shut down. Drawing courtesy of Frank H. Epp, *Men. in Can.*, page 332.

Descendants.

Five of the Bernhard Toews children had already left for Paraguay--Johann, Heinrich, Jakob, Abraham and Kornelius--the rest stayed in Canada. Son Heinrich B. Toews was married to Maria Wiebe (1889-1984), who described her experiences moving to Paraguay in a book form, see Dr. John J. Friesen, "Maria Wiebe Toews, Mennonite Pioneer," in *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 64-65.

Bernhard Toews has many great-grandchildren well-known in the Steinbach area including Harry Fehr, manager of Quarry Oaks Golf Course, Sue Nickel, Manager of Holiday Travel, Ben Toews, Steinbach realtor, Esther Matz and brother Otto Toews, Winnipeg teachers, to name a few.

Legacy.

Bernhard Toews made a great contribution to his faith and culture. Although he was brought up as an Old Kolonier, he was directed towards the Bergthaler by the marriage of his mother and his own. Because of his unwavering conviction in the validity of the Gospel-centric faith of the forebears, Bernhard Toews suffered harassment and imprisonment.

It is evident from his journal that he remained near to his Old Kolonier brothers and sisters in Christ, serving as a link between the two traditions which helped Sommerfelder and Old Koloniers to work together during this critical time in their history.

Bernhard Toews's journal is one of the more important examples of the writing regime of the conservative Mennonite culture.

In the end, like Moses, he was denied the opportunity to see the promised land here on earth, but was welcomed by his Lord into the heavenly paradise.

Bernhard Toews deserves to be recognized as one of the heroes of the conservative Mennonite community.

Sources:

Old Kolony and Sommerfelder Gemeindebücher, courtesy of John Wall, Morden, Manitoba.

Henry Schapansky, letter to D. Plett, Nov 26, 1999.

Mary Dueck Jeffrey, *Aeltester Johann Funk: A Family Tree with notes on his life and Work* (Winnipeg, 1980), 229 pages. The family of Katharina and Bernhard Toews is listed at pages 81-152 almost a third of the entire family book.

Bernhard Toews, "Mennonitische Chaco - Expedition 1921, Reise-Tagebuch" (Schulverwaltung der Kolonie Menno, Paraguay, 3. Auflage, Oktober 1997). 108 pages.

Bernhard Toews, "Lebens und Reiserinnerungen von meinem Vater Bernhard Toews," unpublished journal, 145 pages, courtesy of great-granddaughter Sue Nickel, Steinbach, Manitoba. A copy of this journal has been deposited with the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, by the editor.

Attention Readers:

Delegate Bernhard Toews' daughter-in-law, Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984), Paraguay and later Steinbach, Manitoba, was one of the pioneers of Canadian Mennonite writing and literature.

Her introspective account of the emigration to Paraguay in 1926 and pioneering experiences there were published in 1960 under the title, *Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse in Canada und Paraguay* (Steinbach, 1960), 83 pages. See article by Dr. John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite Bible College., Winnipeg, Manitoba, in *Preservings*, No. 10, Part One, pages 58-59, for an evaluation of this valuable work.

Readers who are interested in the womans' perspective of conservative Mennonite history and who do not read German will be interested to know that Maria's book has now been translated and published in an English edition under the title *My Recollections of Experiences in Canada and Paraguay* (Steinbach, 1999), 106 pages.

I believe a copy has been filed with the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1(204)888-6781.



Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984), pioneer woman writer. Photo courtesy of Maria Toews, *My Recollections*, page 1.



Maria Wiebe Toews (1889-1984) and her husband Heinrich B. Toews, son of delegate Bernhard Toews (1863-1927). Photo courtesy of grandson Ben Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Life and Travel Remembrances of Bernhard Toews

I, Bernhard Toews was born August 23 (Julian calendar), 1863, in Chortitz, Province of Ekatherinoslov, South Russia. My father was Jakob Toews, born April 13, 1819, and died January 18, 1872, in Chortitz, South Russia.

My mother was born Anna Wiebe, daughter of Peter Wiebe from Neuendorf. She was born May 22, 1822, and she died on April 25, 1904, in Reinland, Manitoba, Canada.

I was quite sickly in my younger years. For that reason I only attended school for the first time in Fall of 1871. My teacher for the first four years was Kornelius Enns. In each year we were altogether some 100 students. His daughter helped him somewhat with the beginning students.

On January 23, 1872, my father was buried, having achieved the age of 52 years, nine months and five days. That same evening the entire heavens became red like flames of fire. The appearance was as if the flames of fire were smashing together above in the middle of the sky. At that time I thought (and possibly many others with me) that the end of the world had come, suddenly the fire would descend upon us and soon everything would be aglow.

But the beloved God had granted me as well as the other people more time to repent, that we could convert ourselves. This was a



An early 20th century character is revealed in this photo taken at the rear of the Klaas Kroeker store in Reinland. Note the style of dress typical for the OKers at the time. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 133.

clear voice of God for us as humanity. Which simultaneously called out to us, "Today you are alive, today you should convert yourself," etc., or "prepare your house for you must die" etc.

In the fall of 1875 I started to attend the Central School. I studied in this school for two years, until May of 1877. There were some 100 students here in two rooms. In my (second) class there were 63 and in the first class 36 students. My teacher was the Honourable Heinrich Epp.

[1] Every morning he held one hour of religious instruction with us, except on Thursday when we had nature study. All the students were together in our room for this. The other two teachers were Johann Epp who

"That same evening the entire heavens became red like flames of fire."

taught German, and Wilhelm Penner who taught the Russian language, alternating, each for one hour.

February 12, 1876, my mother married for the second time with the widower Johann Bergman from Heuboden in the Bergthal Colony. We thereby also received five step-siblings.

On March 3, 1861, some 23 million serfs were freed in the Russian Empire under Czar Alexander II. In 1870 universal military service was implemented. Mennonites were given a 10 year exemption.

On May 27, 1877, on a Friday, after six [o'clock] in the evening, we departed from our old homeland by railway from Alexandrosk (17 verst from Chortitz), after all necessary preparations and travel documents had been completed, because of issues of faith.

We travelled to North America our new homeland where we had received a document from the Canadian government which guaranteed our freedom of faith, and which our delegates had received in Ottawa on the 13th of July, 1873, and brought back to Russia.

At one o'clock during the first night we arrived in Losowāja, we had to change trains. Saturday, May 28, at 6 o'clock in the morning, we arrived in Charkow. Up to here we were accompanied by my brother Peter and uncle Jakob Wiebe from Neuenberg. At around 9 o'clock we took our leave of each other, and were on our way. At 10:30 we arrived in Belgrad and at 5:30 p.m. the city of Kursk and at 11:30 p.m., the city of Ornl[d?] Here we detrained.

We had to wait until Sunday, May 29, at 3:30 p.m. before we were on our way. A conductor fell under the wheels of a railway car which crushed his stomach. On Monday May 30, at 5 a.m. we arrived [2] in Smolensk, where we bought hot water for coffee for 30 kopek. In Smolensk the grain had only just barely sprouted, they were still mowing and seeding here.

At 9:30 we arrived in Vitebsk and around 11 o'clock we travelled on with a different train. After dinner an axle started to smoke, they then drove onto the open field on a spur track. We had to clear out the wagon and move into another where it was very full. They left the railway car standing there and drove on. On Tuesday, May 31, around 10 o'clock we encountered many battlements with canons in mortared placements; and with entire barracks inside.

At quarter after four we drove through a tunnel. At 7 o'clock we again drove through a tunnel which lasted for four minutes. A 9 o'clock in the evening we arrived at Werbalo border crossing and after 15 minutes we



"By the 1890s a large degree of prosperity had come to the OK community in Reinland. In 1900 Jakob Kroeker (1836-1914), pictured above with his wife, journeyed to Russia for a visit. In an interesting travelogue, Kroeker described the trip and specially mentioned the old Chortitz church where he had been baptised". Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 125.

Part Three: Biographies

crossed over the border toward Eienrenen in Germany.

Wednesday, June 1, all our baggage was

inspected. Thursday, June 2, at 3 a.m. we departed and around 4 o'clock in the evening we crossed the Weichsel (a big river) near Thorn,

in any case it was a long bridge. At 6:30 p.m. we arrived in Bromberg.

Friday, June 3, at 7 a.m. we reached Berlin (capital of Germany). Here my [step] father hired a vehicle and drove into the city in order to see something of the sights of Berlin. At 11 a.m., we drove over a long bridge over the Spree (a large river) and arrived in Hamburg at 7:30 p.m., the port city.

[We moved] into the immigration quarters where we stayed overnight. Saturday, June 4, at 7 p.m. in the evening we were taken [3] to the ship. Along the way we saw a large fire. The fire wagons drove hurriedly along the street to the fire.

In the immigration quarters we took ourselves clothes and nourishment from our chests. Sunday, June 5, around 10 o'clock in the night we embarked upon the ship and in the morning at 6 o'clock we were on our way. We took our last look at our rapidly disappearing homeland, Europe. On the ship each person received a quantity of baked white bread as well as a piece of bacon with butter to spread on top.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon we passed by the Island of Jugoland. Monday, June 6, a child died at Isaac Doerksens, 1 year and 5 months old, from "Fallsucht" (epilepsy). It [the body] was wrapped in linen and then fastened to a heavy timber, and sunk in the ocean around 2 o'clock after dinner.

In the evening at 5:30 we landed in Hull (England). By 2:30 p.m. we were already able to see land. The ship which brought us over the North Sea was called the "Sprite". Here in Hull we had to be very watchful regarding our baggage for the people spat and laughed at us. The trip across the North Sea went well for it was completely calm. Thanks be to our beloved God for the safe journey up to here.

Tuesday, June 7 at three in the morning we left Hull by railway and at 9 o'clock in the morning (that is, after a 6 hour trip) we reached Liverpool. During this time we went through 13 tunnels. In Liverpool many people travelled by donkey. The horses were [4] very large and fat here, [such] as I had not yet seen in my life.

Wednesday, June 8, we remained in Liverpool. Thursday, June 9, the doctor examined us twice, the last time on the ship. We departed from Liverpool around 5 o'clock on the steamship "Sarmatian".

Friday, June 10, at 10 o'clock in the morning we saw the Island of Ireland on our right side. At one o'clock our ship anchored, not far from the land near the shore, for five hours. When we cast off and reached the open sea the ship soon started to sway severely as there was a great storm. The passengers were just eating supper, but the cutlery did not all stay on the table.

A number soon started to vomit. It did not take long and the people had left the table. During the night we had such a heavy storm that chests and goods slid to and fro, and the waves went high, sometimes even over the fore deck.

Saturday, June 11, it became clear The sun was shining and the storm abated. Sunday, June



This Wirtschaft belonged to Jakob Enns in Rosenort, W. R., Manitoba. The buildings were built completely new in 1917 when the original buildings were totally destroyed by fire. Photo and caption courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 16.



Many OK farmers were wealthy and owned the most modern equipment. Heinrich Unger, Neuenburg, W. R., Manitoba, threshing around the Reinland area, 1910. The man standing at the right side is Abraham Wiebe III, for many years caretaker of the OK worship house at Chortitz W. R. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 158.



Heinrich F. Froese was one of Reinland's threshing machine outfit engineers when steam power was supreme on the prairies. Photo and caption courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 159. Notice the modern Fordson tractor to the right of the steam engine. This photograph probably dates from the time when Anglo-conformity mania was sweeping the prairies and believers were being imprisoned for their faith.

12, we all awoke healthy. It was quite calm throughout the day and the ship became more stable. Monday, June 13, we again all awoke, healthy, but there was again more wind so that the ship again swayed very much. The ship which was to bring us over the Atlantic Ocean was called "Sarmatian". Tuesday, June 14, everyone was hale and hearty, there was little wind, and it drove well. [5]

Wednesday, June 15, we had heavy storm and fog already during the night and also during the day. Today a child died at Teichroeb's, 1 year and 2 weeks old. They laid it in a coffin and threw it into the sea. Thursday, June 16, it became calm during the night, and we all got up well, the beloved God be thanked. In the morning, at 5 o'clock we passed by Newfoundland to our right side. We also got some snow. We also saw icebergs.

A little later we also saw land on the other side. Although there was a strong gale, the ship did not heave too bad as there was land on both sides. Towards evening the wind abated.

"...in Dufferin we had to wait for a few days until a few friends...came to pick us up with their vehicles."

When there was no wind our ship travelled about 14 sea miles (one sea mile or knot is .9 of an English mile), and against a storm it went about 11 1/2 miles, per hour.

Friday, June 17, we all awoke healthy. The sea was flat as there was no wind and the ship calmly sailed towards the harbour in Quebec. Our ship (Sarmatian) was 300 feet long and 45 feet wide. It had 10 steam engines and 20 burners for these boilers. The machines had 600 horse power. The chimney was 15 Arschien in circumference. One Arschien was 28 [?] inches.

Sunday, June 18, we again all woke up healthy. And at half 12 noon we arrived in Quebec, hale and hearty. God be thanked therefore, we were in our future homeland. We had spent 217 hours on the ship and we had been travelling for 205 hours. After we had disembarked we were soon served dinner, some ham, buns and some cheese, etc. [6]

We did not have far to go here to the railway station, from where we departed at half seven in the evening by rail. On the train they again brought us buns together with meat and cheese.

Sunday, June 19, around 5 o'clock in the morning we reached the city of Montreal. Here we were given breakfast: buns, meat, fried potatoes and tea. After waiting for two hours we again departed. Then the train passed over a nine minute long iron bridge. At five o'clock towards evening our locomotive broke down. After two hours waiting we received a different locomotive and continued on our way.

Monday, June 20, around two o'clock in the morning we got to Toronto and at 7 o'clock in the evening we reached Collingwood. We



The four members of the Mennonite Chaco expedition pose on June 1, 1921, with the Canadian wheat they seeded in April in Pto. Casaado. From l.-r. B. Toews, Joh. Friesen, Jakob Neufeld and I. Funk. Photo courtesy of M. W. Friesen, Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno - 1927-1977 (Menno Colony, 1977), page 54.



The delegates travel inland to inspect the property that was to become the modern-day Menno Colony, now grown to a population of 8,000 and a prosperity rivaling that of Steinbach, Hanover, from where most of the settlers came from in 1926. However, in 1927 the situation was very different as 171 or roughly 10 per cent came to unnatural deaths because of disease and other hardships. Photo courtesy of Martin W. Friesen, Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis (Altona, 1987), photo section page 232 et. seq.

only embarked on the ship at half eleven in the morning. We boys had to lie on split wood. We drove along Lakes Huron and Superior to Duluth. The elevation of Lake Superior was much higher. Our ship had to pass through four locks, and was raised a little each time until we were high enough.

Wednesday, June 22, they also stopped for two hours on land, around 5 o'clock and around 8 o'clock they again stopped to land.

Thursday, June 23rd, we again awoke well. Around 4 o'clock and again at 9, they drove to land, where they stopped until midday. Here we went into the woods for a while. We picked some strawberries. This was a new fruit for

us, they tasted good. Then we travelled until 5 o'clock and stopped for half an hour. At 7 o'clock evening we drove through the four locks already mentioned, whereby our ship [7] was mightily raised higher until it could get onto Lake Superior.

Friday, June 24th, our ship docked around 8 o'clock in the morning and remained there until 5 o'clock in the evening unloading lumber [Kondholz]. When we stood up on Saturday, the 25th of June, it was raining hard, accompanied by strong thunder. After the rain came a thick fog which remained until midnight. Our ship remained standing during the time of the fog and often sounded its horn.

Sunday, June 26th, at 2 o'clock in the morning we departed. The fog was over. At 5 o'clock we stopped at land, also from 8 until 11 o'clock.

Monday, June 27, at half seven in the morning, we arrived in Duluth, safe and sound. We

“Dec. 18, 1919, I, together with four Weidenfelder and a number of Alt-Bergthalers, were summoned...[to] Altona...where a hearing was to be held...”

were glad to be back on land.

Tuesday, June 28, at half two, after dinner we left Duluth by railway. We had eaten some strawberries there in the city. At 8 o'clock in the evening we reached Braner, but soon drove further.

Wednesday, June 29th, we reached the river (Red River) at 2 o'clock after midday. We got out of the wagons which stood deep in water because of the flooding of the river. We used a boardwalk to load everything into the ship which was to take us along the Red River into Canada. Soon we departed towards our destination.

Thursday, June 20. It was quite crowded on the ship. At 3 o'clock we reached the final goal of our long journey, namely, Dufferin in Canada. We were hale and hearty. God be thanked many times over. (We had travelled for some five weeks).[8]

Here in Dufferin we had to wait for a few days until a few friends who had already arrived the previous year came to pick us up with their vehicles. The Buhlers from Kronsthal and the Bernhard Penners from Schoenwiese picked us up. We loaded our little baggage and drove into the Colony, some 25 miles mostly in water. My father bought two horses, four oxen, four cows and a wagon in Dufferin. We came first of all to Abram Buhlers in Kronsthal where we stayed for a week and where myself and Heinrich had to tend our eight head of livestock outside the village.

Then we moved to Reinland, where father had purchased a Wirtschaft for \$500.00, into our own house. Even though it was only 20x30 feet in size we felt quite at home after such a

“... we were only brought to Winnipeg from Altona by train on the 6th of January, by the Sheriff here from Morden.”

long journey. For winter we built ourselves a barn out of logs (Waldholz).

I was at home at my parents until 1885 and helped in the work for my daily bread. In January 1885, I married Katharina Funk (daughter of the Honourable Aeltester Johan Funk, Alt-Bergthal). We held the wedding ceremony in her parental home. I and my young bride moved to Reinland where we lived with my parents for 1 year and 3 months. In the spring of 1881

we moved to Peter Bergmanns in Gnadenthal, where we settled. In summer we built ourselves a dwelling house and a small barn for the livestock.

We farmed here until 1900. We sold our 3 1/2 farms here and bought 3 1/2 farms in Weidenfeld for \$14,000.00, where we moved on February 28, 1900.

September 14, 1903, my beloved wedded spouse Katharina (nee Funk) was instantaneously torn from my side through a sudden heart attack [9]. During this time 13 children were born of whom 9 were alive and 4 had predeceased their mother and passed on into eternity.

January 28, 1914, I celebrated my marriage to Aganetha Harder from Butterfield, Minnesota, in her parental home. Soon after the wedding we drove to Manitoba, my home, where we arrived on February 6 during a fierce blizzard (according to Manitoba standards).

Since we did not want to send our children to the public schools and we were not readily able to find a private teacher, I engaged myself as a school teacher. On November 18, 1909, I started to give instruction in our summer corner room with 12 students. When the Weidenfelders united themselves in fall of 1913 so far, and sent all their children to the public school, my school came to a close. Therefore I drove to Schoenau and wanted to send my children there to the private school (where I had already sent [them] before). Since they still had no teacher there, they desired that I would engage myself there as a school teacher. We

“Here in prison we were...interrogated.... Our pockets were emptied, [we were] weighed and measured, and then brought into iron barred cells.”

reached an agreement in this regard for \$30 per month.

On November 3rd I started to teach there with 22 students. I taught there in school for seven winters in so far as the Lord granted me strength for so doing. He blessed the good which I, in my weakness, was able to teach the students. The student body fluctuated between 22 and 37 during the seven years.

In March of 1919 the ministerial desired that I should lead the singing in the worship services assemblies which I also did in my weakness. [10]

December 18, 1919, I, together with four Weidenfelder and a number of Alt-Bergthalers, were summoned by court papers, to come to Altona at 4 o'clock in the afternoon to appear there before the secular authorities where a hearing was to be held as to why we did not want to send our children to the public school.

When we were being questioned, whether from henceforth I would want to send my children to the public school and I answered with “No.” The sentence was pronounced against me, to either pay \$28.00 fine or to spend 20

days in Winnipeg in the government jail, from the 2nd of January until the 22nd, 1920. All of us opted for imprisonment. But we were only brought to Winnipeg from Altona by train on the 6th of January, by the Sheriff here from Morden.

Here in prison we were still interrogated regarding many matters. Our pockets were emptied, [we were] weighed and measured, and then brought into iron barred cells. We received sufficient food, three times a day. The fare was good enough for criminals (naturally not like at home). We ate always under watch by policemen with approximately 70 to 80 men in one room. But we Germans ate alone at one table. The food was the same for all.

This was a good opportunity to reflect back on one's past life and walk. Often times I thought to myself that this was only a small foretaste of the entire tribulation which is yet to come according to the Holy Scripture. I was allowed to have my Bible [11] with me. I meditated upon many a verse, particularly [?] where it says:

“...I was allowed to have my Bible with me.”

“Even though you strive, you will not be crowned if you strive not correctly, or only those who persevere until the end shall be saved”

Instead of the 22nd we were released from the prison facility on the 21st of January, but with the warning that we should henceforth send our children to the public school, then they would leave us in peace. On January 22, 1920, I arrived at home, now I was extremely glad that I could again be with my family.

But I had the anxious thoughts already in prison, it could well be that I might be reported again within a month. I was, in fact, reported again in February, 1921, while I was on my journey to South America. At that time my wife had sent Erdmann to the public school, and also thereafter.

After the completion of my school year in 1920, I drove to see our beloved Aeltester Abraham Doerksen in Sommerfeld, regarding immigration--whether he was considering to search for a place in the world where we could conduct our instruction in our schools according to our articles of faith and where the schools could stand under the oversight of our ministerial.

To which he answered, he first wanted to have the “Privilegium” reviewed, and to England, if necessary, to see if it had any validity for the future or not. Shortly thereafter in June, I and the Honourable Abraham Friesen from Rosenheim went to see the Honourable Aeltester Johann Friesen in Neuenburg regarding immigration (to Mississippi). I could not placate myself [12] in my conscience regarding the document they had as to matters of faith. Shortly thereafter, I again drove to Neuenburg together with a few men. The second document was read to us, it was almost the same as the first.

June 14, 1920, I travelled to Rosthern to

Aeltester Aron Zacharias with a slight possibility (brought by J. J. Priesz from New York) that a document might be obtainable in Paraguay in South America which would recognize our protocols of faith.

During my trip to Rosthern, I also met the Honourable Johann Wall from the Old Kolonier on the train in Saskatoon. He had also been in New York, and according to what he said, he had a good hope to receive a document in Paraguay from the government which would be in accordance with our teachings of faith.

Shortly thereafter Aeltester Aron Zacharias came to Manitoba and the two of us went to our Aeltester Abraham Doerksen for advice, for Ohm Zacharias had already had two delegates elected to send them to South America. Whereupon we were referred to J. J. Priesz, Altona, as a somewhat experienced speaker or councillor.

We drove back to Altona and met with J. J. Priesz. He said, if Ohm Zacharias would reimburse him for the travelling expenses, he would be willing to go along. He did not want a wage, that would be covered by the experience and by being able to see the sights. He also promised me my expenses if I went along, partially out of my own desire and partially because it was Ohm Zacharias' wish.

On August 27, I was summoned to Winnipeg by J. J. Priesz in order to file for our passport papers. We drove there accompanied by Ohm Zacharias and both of his delegates,

"I was, in fact, reported again in February, 1921, while I was on my journey to South America."

[13] Ohm Jakob Neufeld and Ohm Johann Friesen. On the 20th I drove back home. On the 27th of August, I and the Honourable Johann Schroeder drove to Winnipeg as Ohm Schroeder had also decided to come along.

On September 14, 1920, it was also decided at a brotherhood meeting in Rudnerweide that I and Johann Klassen, Rosenfeld, should travel to South America as Sommerfelder delegates in order to find out if we could receive a document [Privilegium] from a government that was in accordance with our faith.

I drove to Winnipeg two more times regarding my passport papers. On December 21, I drove to Winnipeg regarding the four Old Kolonier delegates from Hague. They were to return without results. I went there to meet them but I returned home on the 24th without success for they only came through Winnipeg on the second holiday [the 26th].

Rev. Peter Zacharias, Gretna, Manitoba, recalls that his grandfather Peter J. Dyck, school teacher, accompanied numerous Old Kolony people to court in Morden as a translator. Here the accused faced charges regarding the Mennonite schools, a privilege which the Dominion government had guaranteed them in 1873.

On the last holiday, December 27th, I departed for Rosthern. Here I met with Ohm Zacharias and three delegates who had been in South America and spoke with each one in person. Freely they each said they believed it was possible to make a living there on the land which they had inspected. They were Abraham Klassen, Jakob Friesen and Franz Dück.

On December 30 we had also both spoken about South America and Mexico with the Honourable Johan Wall in his home. He had just returned from Mexico where he had inspected land for one month.

On January 18, 1921, it was decided at a brotherhood meeting in Rudnerweide by the vote of approximately 350 brethren that I and Isaak Funk, Weidenfeld, should travel to South America and Mexico, and to investigate whether there was anywhere a government where religious freedom [14] could be requested in accordance with our Confession of Faith and to inspect the lands and to determine on what terms it was available.

On February 11, 1921, we departed from our homes in order to carry out this duty imposed by the Gemeinde in so far as the Lord would grant us strength for so doing. From here [West Reserve], there was myself, Isaak Funk (and J. J. Priesz as spokesman). In Winnipeg we met Ohm Jakob Neufeld, Ohm Friesen and Ohm Zacharias from Rosthern and also Jakob Doerksen, delegate from the East Reserve.

A few songs come to mind which were sung in our home by all our children as well as guests who were visiting us, before I left on the long journey. [Bernhard Toews quotes three songs, the opening lines of which were as follows: "Herz aller liebster Vater Mein," "Lebet wohl und dient dem Herrn," and "Auf Mein Lieben Gott traue ich un angst und not."

The widely loved Old Kolony school teacher David Harder described the experiences of his people during their last years in Canada 1920-22 as follows:

"In the meantime our oppressed circumstances in Canada had not improved. Other people who lived in the vicinity of the State or Government schools and in such villages where in addition the Government had ordered the construction of new schools, were oppressed even harder."

"Nor were our ministers spared, for the aged minister Peter Friesen in Schanzenfeld together with a number of others were thrown into jail in Winnipeg for one month, because they did not wish to yield their children over to the worldly spirits. And even though most of our brethren were able to pay such punishments with money it was a plague none-the-less."

"For these reasons some of our people started to leave their Homesteads and moved to such places where they were at least temporality left in peace, because they were far enough distant from such schools?"

David Harder, *Schule und Gemeinschaft Erinnerungen* (Gretna, 1969), page 10.

I said farewell to my beloved family on February 11, 1921, at half eleven in the morning for approximately four months. My wish and prayer [being] that the beloved God might accompany us on our journey with success, and that our so very hard mission might be directed in such a way that it would serve for the well-being of our Gemeinde and our souls salvation and return us safely to our families.

In fulfilment of my wish, I had the joy of being able to greet my family, with good health, on September 2nd, 1921, at 10 minutes after 8 o'clock in the morning, the beloved God be thanked for the successful journey.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 30-37.



Notice to Readers:

Most readers in Manitoba will have received a copy of the July 24, 1999, *Free Press* insert, "In Celebration of the 125th Anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba!" 12 pages, tabloid style. Over 200,000 copies were printed and distributed in Manitoba with the July 24, 1999 Saturday paper.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* was kind enough to provide us with several thousand extra copies of this valuable pictorial sketch of the story of Manitoba's Mennonites. These inserts include ten different articles written by some of Manitoba's leading scholars and historians, including Dr. Adolf Ens, Dr. John J. Friesen, Dr. Royden Loewen, Lorilee Scharfenberg, Regina Neufeld and others. They are ideal handouts for anniversaries and other special church and community events.

Give a copy of the "125 Free Press Inserts" to friends, relatives and even strangers, when travelling in foreign countries. The recipients not only have an interesting piece of reading material but an instant reference work on your "home" culture and faith.

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Klaas Heide (1859-1926), Delegate

“Klaas Heide (1859-1926), Delegate, Schöneberg, Imperial Russia, to Grünthal, W. R., Manitoba, to Blumenort, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico,” by granddaughter Sally Harms, Box 681, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A8.

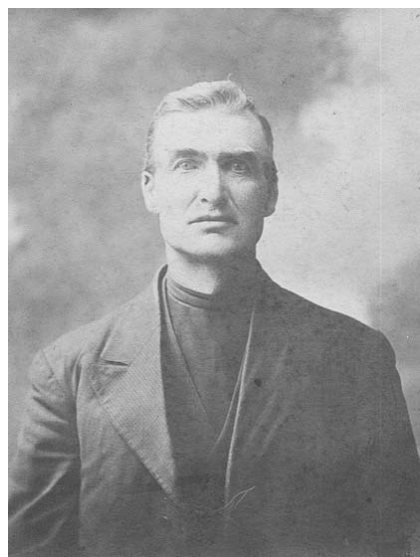
Introduction.

In 1875 Klaas Heide immigrated from Schöneberg, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. As a 16 year-old lad he came to Manitoba together with his parents in 1875, settling in Neuendorf, West Reserve. He was to become an important leader of the Old Colony people in Canada, serving as a delegate looking for land in Mexico and South America in 1919 to 1921.

Genealogy, by Henry Schapansky.

Klaas Heide was the great-great-grandson of Peter Heyde. In a letter of December 15, 2000, genealogist Henry Schapansky explains the connection as follows:

“Peter Heide is listed in the 1776 Konsignation in the village of Augustwald, West Prussia, with 2 sons, 2 daughters. He belonged



Delegate Klaas Heide (1859-1926), probably around 1910.

to the Ellerswald Gemeinde. In the list of 1776 his name has been mistranscribed as Peter Neid. He married Helena Neufeld, and appears to have come to Russia as an old man with his son Johann Heide, born 1764, (Unruh, page 340).”

“Peter Heide’s children include: 1) Peter Heide, b. ca., 1759; 2) Helena Heide, b. ca. 1760, married Andreas Wiebe, then Isaak Penner (b. 1770) of Lakendorf, Gross Werder, Prussia; 3) Susanna Heide (b. 1762), married widower Gerhard Giesbrecht (b. 1747), later Muntau, Molotschna, 1808 [Gerhard Giesbrecht was the great-grandfather of Gerhard Giesbrecht and Wilhelm Giesbrecht that settled in Steinbach, Manitoba, in the 1870s]; 4) Johann Heide (b. 1764), Halbstadt, 1808 [Johann Heide was among those who challenged Klaas Reimer, founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, at a meeting at the home of the Schulz circa 1812: *Leaders*, page 130]; 5) Maria Heide b. 1766;”

“6) Klaas Heide born June 9, 1769, married

Katharina Dyck (b. 1758), Dec. 10, 1793. Klaas Heide was baptised at Stobbendorf, Tiegenhagen Gemeinde. His wife was the widow of Jakob v. Riesen (1750-93), of Alt-Stobbendorf, near Danzig.

“Klaas Heide came to Russia in 1795 and is listed in the immigration records as follows: Heide, Class, Schottland, born June 9, 1769, Blumenort, to 1..., Chortitza, 2. Burwalde, married Dec. 10, 1793, Dyck, Catherina, widow of v. Riesen, Schottland, born July 1, 1758, Klein Mausdorf, to 1...Chortitza, 2. Burwalde, children v. Riesen, Abraham born Nov. 11, 1784, Catharina born July 24, 1787, Anna born Feb. 7, 1790, Jakob born Oct. 15, 1792. Emigrated secretly, Unruh, page 301.

“Klaas Heide settled in Rosenthal where he is listed as the owner of Feuerstelle No. 252 in 1802 (Unruh, page 252) and 1806 (Rempel). Klaas Heide does not appear in the 1808 list and may have died or moved away.”

“Klaas Heide had a son Peter Heide, born July 6, 1794: source Danzig Gemeindebuch. Peter Heide married Anna Niessen (b. 1798), daughter



Maria Driedger (1855-1908). She was from the Bergthal Colony.

of Johann von Niessen (b. 1757), of Einlage, Russia where he is recorded in the list of 1795 as owner of Wirtschaft 4 (Unruh, page 239), the list of 1802 (page 250) and in the Revision (census) of 1808: he was a wealthy Vollwirt with 8 horses and 17 cattle,” (Unruh, page 274).

Heide Genealogy by Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5.

Peter Heide (1819-91).

Peter Heide and Anna Niessen had six chil-

dren: Peter Heide (1819-91) m. Helena Loewen (1819-90); Klaas Heide (1828-85) m. Elisabeth Dueck (1829-1910); Abraham Heide (b. 1831) m. Katharina Fehr (1833-95); Susanna Heide (1832-94) m. David Thiessen (b. 1838); Maria Heide (1835-84) m. Gerhard Ens (1829-1919); and Johann Heide (1838-ca.77) m. Anna Hildebrand (b. 1839).

Peter Heide (1819-91), oldest son of Peter Heide (b. 1794), married Eleanor Neufeld (1820-41). He married for the second time to Helena Loewen (1819-90): source, *Reinländer Gemeindebuch*, page R96-1.

Peter Heide and Helena Loewen lived in Schöneberg, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia, where son Klaas was born in 1859: source *Village Registers*, page 223.

Evidently the family moved to the village of Rosenbach, Fürstenland Colony, Imperial Russia. This is confirmed by his signature dated January 10, 1873.



Sarah Redekopp, second wife of delegate Klaas Heide. She was the widow of Peter Wiebe and later Franz Dueck, see John Dyck, 1880 Village Census, page 359.

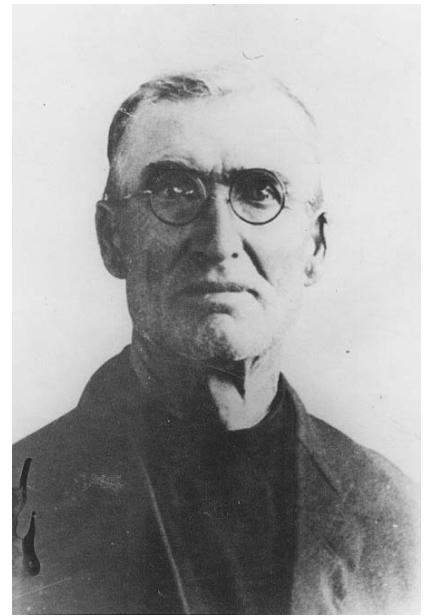
Son Klaas age 15 may have served as a school teacher or teacher’s aide as he compiled a *Rechnenbuch* (mathematics text) with numerous equations in Rubel/Kopeks, which is still extant and a priceless family heirloom.

Emigration, 1875.

In 1875 Peter Heide immigrated to America, crossing the ocean on the S. S. Canadian arriving in Quebec City on July 19, with wife Helena age 55, children Johann 19, Class 16, Elisabeth 13 and Catherina 13; son Peter Heide age 30, wife Susanna 29, and children Claas 2 and Helena 8 months.

They were preceded by Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) and his group who had arrived in Quebec City six days earlier. Following them and arriving on July 20, was another large contingent led by Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller.

Also travelling on the S. S. Canadian were Peter’s brother Abraham Heide (b.1831) and his



Delegate Klaas Heide (1859-1926), "older and wiser." Probably taken around 1919, when Klaas Heide left on his first delegation journey.

The Farm.

Klaas Heide's house is remembered as being "spic and span", as one would expect with seven daughters around. It was described by subsequent tenants as "deluxe in size and features"; namely, Grote Schtove, Kliene Schtove, sommah Schtove, Sommah Kjaek, two brick ovens, a walk-in chimney upstairs to smoke hams and sausages, two root cellars, and many fruit and shade trees.

The huge barn accommodated 40 or more horses.

Klaas Heide was a successful farmer and investor. He had land in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Mexico. He made large down payments for land in the U.S.A. in the hope of emigration.

In 1898 Klaas Heide was on the Board of Directors with the "Farmers Union Elevator Company" (Gretna: see story in Gretna History Book, page 133, 159).

Exodus.

By July of 1919 the Old Colony Churches in Manitoba and Saskatchewan had made a decision that it was necessary to move away from the "promise breaking government in Canada". The issues were language, religion and schools! The 'Privilegium' of 1873 had lost its power (Paul Schaefer, *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!*).

After several years of punitive fines and imprisonments, the leaders of the Old Colony Church decided to look for settlement opportunities elsewhere.

But where should they move to? Klaas Heide was the delegate who was a member on every delegation in the search for a new Homeland that would grant them the necessary privileges.

United States.

The first search in 1919 was just south of Manitoba, in the United States. The U.S.A. already was a homeland for many thousands of

family who settled in Grünthal, W.R. (1881 census, BGB, page 371); and sister, Maria Heide, and brother-in-law, Gerhard Ens, who settled in Neuendorf, W.R.

An account of the trip by a Cornelius Peters starting on June 10, 1875, where the families board the ship at Lipatiché, tells the tale in much detail. One memorable event is the death of Klaas' cousin Katharina, the young daughter of his uncle Peter Heide (oldest son of Peter and Helena Heide.) and the burial at sea.

Sister Susanna Heide and husband David Thiessen, settled in Schöndorf in 1876. Brother Klaas Heide (1828-85) settled in Schantzenfeld, West Reserve, in 1876.

Peter Heide Sr and son Peter Heide Jr settled in the village of Neuendorf, W.R., Manitoba, where they are listed in the 1881 census (BGB, p. 383-4).

Klaas Heide 1859-1926.

On July 8, 1877, Klaas Heide married Maria Driedger (1855-1908), daughter of Johann Driedger and Katharina Eitzen (Bankrat), RGB 146.

At the age of 19 Maria had emigrated from the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, together with her parents Johann Driedger 46 and

Katharina 58, and four more children: Johann 21, David 16, Peter 14, Abraham 7, and Anganetha 11. They arrived in Quebec City on the S.S. Peruvian in July 1874 (BGB, pages 102 and 267). Katharina, Mrs. Johann Driedger, is listed as Katharina Eitzen (widow Warkentin) from Rosengard, Chortitza Colony in the Bergthal Gemeindebuch (BGB B102, and page 267).

The Johann Driedger family settled in the village of Grünthal, West Reserve, two miles northwest of Gretna. Following his marriage, Klaas (age 18) and Maria Driedger (age 22) lived in Neuendorf with his parents where their oldest two children Katharina and Helena were born in 1878 and 1879.

By 1880 Klaas and Maria had taken up a Wirtschaft on Lot 21 in Grünthal, home of her parents, where they are listed in the West Reserve Settlement Register as well as in the 1881 census. Their registered homestead was SW30-1-1W: see Harms and Rempel, *Atlas of Mennonite Villages of the West Reserve*, page 21.

Klaas and Maria had a family of 12 children, seven girls and five boys. Maria died May 20, 1908. On July 12, 1908, Klaas remarried to Sarah Redekopp, daughter of David Redekopp, RGB 344-1.



Farm home of Klaas Heide, SW30-1-1W, Grünthal, West Reserve, Manitoba. 1898. The family motto was "Unity makes strong." This motto seemed to dominate all activities throughout Klaas Heide's life and typified the close knit families of the Old Colony people.

Part Three: Biographies

Mennonites and, therefore, this seemed a logical place to investigate probable settlement. There was much land open for settlement in Mississippi, where 200,000 acres were available. Negotiations seemed to be favourable for the Mennonites.

Land was also available in Minnesota--300,000 acres. But with negotiations going well, suddenly the border closed. No explanation was made to the delegates. Later it seemed as if the Mississippi Government was questioning the advantages towards their country if all those "Privileges" were granted. The Mennonites had already paid large sums of money to acquire land.



Gravestone located in the village of Blumenort, Mexico, Cemetery. The gravestone was handmade by grandson Klaas Krahn Heide, Blumenort, Mexico.

Klaas Heide had reserved 240 acres at \$2.00 per acre, paying \$400.00 as a down payment and another \$1000.00 on account, for a total paid of \$1480 (See Blumenort list).

Quebec.

Another avenue presented itself in Canada. The Province of Quebec seemed to be willing to accept the Mennonites on their terms. The delegates had been quite impressed with the negotiations. But when the delegates returned and presented the terms to their churches some questions surfaced. Would the Dominion Government grant them the privileges, or would they override the provincial agreement? The Quebec government could not assure the Mennonites of the security of these privileges.

In the meantime much firmer regulations were set out in the Province of Manitoba regarding schools. This made the Old Colony Mennonites wary and more determined to leave Canada, and not to pursue the Quebec venture.

Latin America.

The Delegates now directed their focus on Latin America. They made the hopeful assumption that in 21 separate countries in Latin America maybe there would be room for the Old Colony Mennonite Church to find a place to settle, preserving their non-negotiable privileges.

Six delegates were selected whose mandate it was to see if land could be purchased, and, if possible, to find a suitable place where they could

settle. Three Old Colony Churches were involved in the land search.

The delegates from Manitoba were: Klaas Heide, Blumenort, and Cornelius Rempel, Blumenort; from Hague, Saskatchewan: Prediger Johan P. Wall, Hochfeld, and Prediger Johann Wall, Neuanlage; from Swift Current: Prediger Julius Wiebe, Reinland, and David Rempel, Reinland.

The delegates spent several months in South America. The Brazilian government promised to provide lifelong free railway passes to them—second class! (Our Canadian second class compared to their first class.) The cost of land was \$1.00 to \$3.00 per hectare on a long term payment. Schools would be under Mennonite control but one stipulation was that Portuguese should be taught. The government would build houses, which could be repaid on a long term basis. The cost of the sea voyage would be a down payment, and if money was left over the remainder could be used to buy implements.

This search was unsuccessful as the delegates heard after they returned from Uruguay and Argentina. The total distance travelled was 8955 miles (see Diary "Tage Buch" by Rempel).

Journal Highlights.

Klaas Heide kept a journal (Tagebuch) during his various delegation journeys (Note Three).

September 24, 1919: "Ohm Johann Wall, Neuanlage is very sick. Appendicitis? September 28, 1919 he died. Coffin, burial place and burial clothes bought for 32,000 Reis. Ohm Johann Wall buried in a Protestant cemetery. Telegrams were sent home of this sad event"

Uruguay September 30, 1919: "The Uruguayan government promised all rights. Also enough land to settle would be made available - but no further negotiations at this time. The del-

egates would get a ruling when they returned from investigating the other countries in South America as on their agenda."

October 5: "A highlight on the trip was the first J. I. Case threshing machine seen. This felt more like home!"

Argentina: At Buenos Aires the delegates received over due mail. One heart rending letter was from the mother of the now deceased Johann Wall. It was an "encouraging letter to her son".

October 17, 1919: "Negotiations with the government did not go well over here. All children born here would have to serve in the military." The Government declared the requests of the Mennonites as "unconstitutional". No special rights were to be granted. "All people are the same and there are no special rights for any one!"

October 21, 1919, back to Montevideo, Uruguay, Hotel Moroconi, where the negotiations had been promising. The issue was the price of land from \$60.00 to \$130.00 an hectare--too high!

October 25, 1919, the delegates went back to Porte Alegre, Brazil. A message awaited them: "This land is only for our people. We do not want any new immigrants at this time"

The delegates must have been discouraged by this time. Before the delegates left South America they came in contact with an official from Mexico. This man gave them hope that Mexico was a land for the Mennonites to emigrate to. A country that would grant them their privileges and ample land to settle.

October 28, 1919: Boarded ship "Itapuca" to Rio de Janeiro. November 4, boarded ship for home.

November 24, 1919, they arrived at the Canadian border: The delegates returned home with no good news from South America but some promising news from Mexico. The land, train and ocean trips from Saskatchewan to Buenos Aires, Argentina totalled 8955 miles.



Map of Mexico on which the four delegation journeys of Klaas Heide and his fellow delegates can be traced.

Part Three: Biographies

family--four deaths occurred!

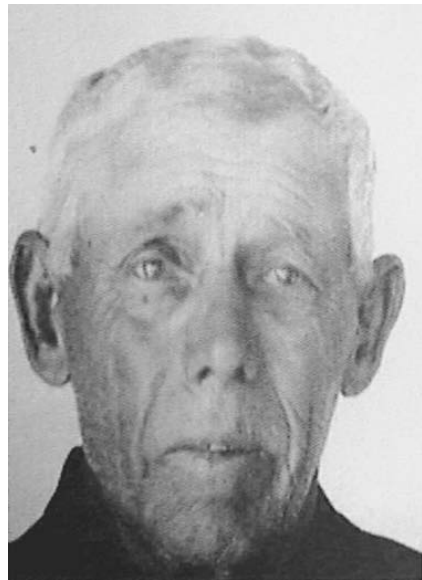
Klaas Heide died October 19, 1926 after a brief illness, at the age of 67. My mother attended this funeral. I too was at that funeral at the age of two. Apparently I fell down the stairs.

Only one month later three siblings died within one week--six days apart. The funerals of all three were on the same day: Susanna (single)



Gral. Alvaro Obregon, President of the Republic of Mexico, from 1920 to 1924. Photo courtesy Peter Rempel, ed., 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 22.

died Nov 20, 1926, age 35; Johann died Nov 21, 1926 - age 24 - leaving two children; and Elisabeth Heide Friesen died November 26, 1926 - age 40



Delegate Julius Loewen (1869-1955), Hamburg, W.R., Manitoba, was elected as a minister in 1909, RGB 50-4. He settled in Hamburg, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Rev. Loewen was married for the second time to Maria Wiebe, daughter of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905).

- leaving 10 children.

Elizabeth was preparing for the funeral kneading bun dough, when she collapsed. My mother was unable to attend this last funeral--the deaths of three of her siblings. She grieved this tremendous loss till her dying day.

Upon his death in 1926 Klaas Heide appointed his widow Sara Heide as his executor and not the Waisenamt as was customary. Uncomfortable with this responsibility, she requested that her son-in-law Abram Friesen of Reinfeld, Manitoba, should look after carrying out the will, which he did.

Sara Redekopp Heide, second wife of Klaas Heide, died July 8, 1933 in Blumenort, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Klaas Heide had purchased land near Swift Current. In his will he left a quarter section to his daughter Helena, Mrs. Abram Friesen. When the land was sold the family retained the mineral rights to the quarter section. Just a few years ago the oil rights on the parcel were sold for \$18,000.00 and the grandchildren received \$250.00 each.

Conclusion.

Klaas Heide, will be remembered for the role he played as a delegate in 1919 to 1921 in the successful search for a country to enable the Old Colony Mennonites to preserve their sacred traditions. It has been observed that Klaas Heide was perhaps the financial expert among the delegates to Mexico.

There is no doubt that Klaas Heide was an observant, intelligent and aloof man. It also appears that he was both liberal at times and conservative in other ways.

Evaluation.

Walter Schmiedehaus, German Consul and author of *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* wrote about friend and associate Klaas Heide as follows: "The personality of Klaas Heide was outstanding ("uberragend"). According to my own analysis this man has not been given the credit he deserved."

"This man did not hold a title of any kind. He was neither Mayor 'Schulze' or Preacher 'Prediger' or Manager 'Vorsteher' or Elder 'Aeltester.' He was often in the background, invisible, still the centre of all events and the Mennonite world depended on his ability to make correct decisions."

"And that was good. What Klaas Heide thought or said was right--no maybes--no vacillating of opinions."

"We have here a natural leader and our colony is fortunate to have such a leader."

"Then like a thunder bolt - we did not want to believe what was happening. He was too young. Klaas Heide was ill and very sick and the prognosis was terminal. Upon our visit we saw this man emaciated, weak, sitting on the bench ('Ruhebank') still trying to be friendly, but speaking openly of the impending event. Death was a foregone conclusion!"

"Yes my friend it must be so. The time comes for all of us when the Lord calls us home. It is good...I am ready to go!" said Klaas Heide.

"What bothers you, dear friend?"

"My people! Family matters are taken care of but I worry about my people. But why am I concerned. There is a Mightier One. He will not let our footsteps wander. He who watches over us sleeps not."

These were the last words spoken by Klaas Heide to W. Schmiedehaus.



***Cuauhtemoc Monument.** Monument erected by the City Government. Die Stadtverwaltung 1995 - 1998 und Beistand von President Jose Luis Carrasco Quintana, Widmet dieses Denkmal an die Mennoniten an den 75 Jahrestag ihrer ankunft hier auf dieser Stelle. Fuer ihre grosse Anstrengungen, mit Muehe, Arbeit und Freundschaft. Von alle Bewohner von San Antonio de los Arenales CD, Cuauhtemoc, Chih."*

***Translation.** " 1995 - 1998 The City Government supported by President Jose Luis Carrasco Quintana, dedicate this monument to the Mennonites on their 75th anniversary of settling in this place. For their valiant effort, with much diligence and work. Dedicated in friendship, from all the citizens of San Antonio de los Arenales CD, Cuauhtemoc, Chih." Translated from Spanish to German by the Jacob Heide family, Blumenort, Mexico. Jacob is the great-grandson of Klaas Heide .*





Klaas Heide and Maria Driedger house at Grünthal, close to Gretna, as it stands today, in the year 2000, for passing motorists, a landmark of bygone days.

Walter Schmiedehaus and his wife left as Klaas Heide seemed very tired. A few days later Klaas Heide went to his eternal rest at the age of 67 years 7 months 5 days (Note Four).

Descendants.

Delegate Klaas Heide had many prominent descendants including son-in-law Franz Froese (1877-1937), Reinland, who served as Vorsteher from the beginning in Mexico until his death in 1937. His son Jakob Froese, Gnadefeld, Mexico, also served as the Vorsteher of the Manitoba Plan.

Jakob Heide, President of the Union de Credito, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, is a great-grandson of Klaas Heide. Betty, Mrs. Henry Unger,

Crystal City, Manitoba, frequent MCC workers in Mexico, is a great-granddaughter of delegate Klaas Heide.

Mexican Privilegium.

“Concession made to the Reinländer Mennonite Old Colony Church of Canada, guaranteed by the constitutional power of the President of the Republic of Mexico, General Alvero Obergon, regarding the emigration of the Old Colony Mennonites as agricultural colonists (“Landwirtschaftliche Colonisten”).

The representatives of the Old Colony of the Reinländer Mennoniten Church are: Klaas Heide, David Rempel, Julius Loewen, Johann Loepky, Benjamin Goertzen, Cornelius Rempel.

The answer to the enquiry of January 29, of this year, in which they expressed the desire to emigrate to our country as agricultural colonists, I now have the honour, to respond to their specific requests in the following manner:

- 1) They will not be required to serve in the military;
- 2) Under no circumstances will they be required or pressured to take an oath;
- 3) They have the far reaching right and power, to preserve and to execute in the proper, customary, or established manner their religious heritage and beliefs, without any molestations or restrictions;
- 4) They will have full authority to establish their own schools, served by their own teachers. The government will not implement any restrictions or interference;
- 5) They will have full authority to govern their own economical endeavors as they see fit. The Government will not impose any restrictions in these matters.

The above mentioned privileges have been passed and are guaranteed by our Government and will be in force in perpetuity.

February 25, 1921. A duplicate of the official document granted to the Mennonite Old Colony Church from Canada granting the required privileges.

Signed by the President of the Republic of Mexico, “Alvero Obergon”. The original agreement was in Spanish. This is a translated version from German to English. (Woher, Wohin, Mennoniten?) Translated by the



Anna Heide (1883-1926), daughter of delegate Klaas Heide. Anna Heide was the wife of Franz Froese (1877-1937), Vorsteher of the Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Courtesy of Zacharias, Reinland, page 79.

author

Sources:

- David Rempel, “Tagebuch”.
- Klaas Heide, “Tagebuch”.
- Mennonite Encyclopedia, page 691.
- W. Schmiedehaus, *Ein Feste Burg ist unser Gott*, chapter 8 “Maenner”.
- Paul Schaefer, *Woher Wohin Mennoniten*. “Mennonite Encyclopedia on line”

Endnotes:

- Note One: In the RGB page 146-3 Katharina is listed as Bankrath (widow Warkentin).
- Note Two: I was privileged in 1997 to visit the hacienda where one historical meeting occurred. I sat in the chairs where probably my grandfather Klaas Heide or the other delegates sat.
- Note Three: In 1995 I received a copy of the diary (Tagebuch) written by delegate Klaas Heide, my grandfather, from his grandson, my cousin Klaas Krahn Heide in Blumenort, Mexico.
- Note Four: Klaas Heide, ‘A natural Leader,’ as documented in Walter Schmiedehaus, *Ein Fester Burg ist unser Gott*, pages 129-132, translated by the author: see P eter Rempel, editor. *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 165.

About the Author:

The author Sally Harms is the granddaughter of Klaas Heide, the delegate. She served in the nursing profession for 27 years, retiring in 1993. Sally is presently working on several history books:

- 1) “Abram P. and Helena Friesen” family history to be published in early 2001.
- 2) “The Klaas Heide Family circa 1740 - 2000” Hopefully to be published in 2002.
- 3) In 1999 I published a laminated cover - 117 page book, on the Peter Unger--Friesen family under the title “Friesen Fest Memoirs 1998”.
- 4) In 2000 I published a hard cover book, “The Hermann Heide family 1748-2000,” 306 pages. Note: The complete translated version of the original document by Klaas Heide and the journal of David Rempel of the trip to Mexico and South America as it appeared in the *Steinbach Post*, are available from “Harms Publishing”, Box 681, Winkler, MB R6W 4A8Tele/fax 1 204 325 4698.



The author Sally Harms, Winkler.

Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929), Delegate

“Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929), from Fürstenland, Imperial Russia, to Grünfeld, Durango, Mexico, 1921 delegate to Mexico,” by grandson Peter Goertzen, 221-10601 100th St., Grande Prairie, Alberta. T8V 4S5.

Introduction.

I never knew my grandfather, Benjamin Goertzen. He died of “Mexican fever” in the Old Colony Mennonite village of Grünthal in Durango a dozen years before I was born. However, my father and his siblings often talked about him and I was fortunate to obtain a portion of his diaries several years ago.

Family Background.

Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929) was the great-grandson of Peter Goertzen (b. 1789) and Anna Fast, RGB 305-3.

Henry Schapansky has written that the grandfather of Peter Goertzen (b.1789), was “Peter Gortzen listed in the 1776 Konsignation in the village of Usenitz, West Prussia, as a “Landwirt” or farmer with two sons and a daughter, belonging to the Tragheimersweide Gemeinde.”

“In 1782 his son Peter Gortzen (1753-1808) married Anna Rohde (1759-1808). Peter lived most of his life at Rosenkrantz, but died at Bönhoff, as did his wife. Anna was from the Ohrloffersfelde Gemeinde (Neuteicherwald) and

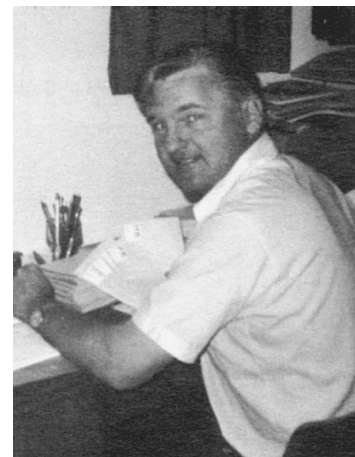
they were married in the Orloffersfelde Gemeinde. They may have wanted to go to Russia in 1804 but did not. A later entry in the Tragheimerswalde Gemeindebuch indicates Anna died in 1807 but this appears suspect. The original entry was May 5, 1808.”

Peter’s son Peter (b 1789) married Anna Fast in 1808. She may have been a daughter of Abraham Fast of Reinland, but this is not certain. They were married in the Heuboden Gemeinde, so Peter must have transferred his church membership. Peter Gortz went to Russia in 1818, first settling at Rudnerweide, then moving to Fürstenwerder, Molotschna (1835 census). By this time he had married his second wife Maria (b. 1799). His brother Johann (b. 1794) also came to Russia in 1818 and settled in Rudnerweide, Molotschna (1835 census).” Courtesy of Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5.

Jakob Goertzen (1809-86).

Benjamin Goertzen’s grandparents were Jakob Goertzen (1809-86) and Agatha Giesbrecht (1806-69), who came from Neuendorf, Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia; John Dyck, ed., *West Reserve Settlement Registers*, pages 211-2.

In 1826 Jakob Goertzen married Agatha Giesbrecht (1806-69). In 1868 he married for the second time to Anna Peters (b. 1839), widow of K o r n e l i u s Schellenberg. Henry Schapansky writes that



The author Peter Goertzen in 1976. He is the grandson of delegate Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929), Durango, Mexico. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 173.

“Jakob must have stayed in the Old Colony in 1818, or came to the Old Colony when he married.”

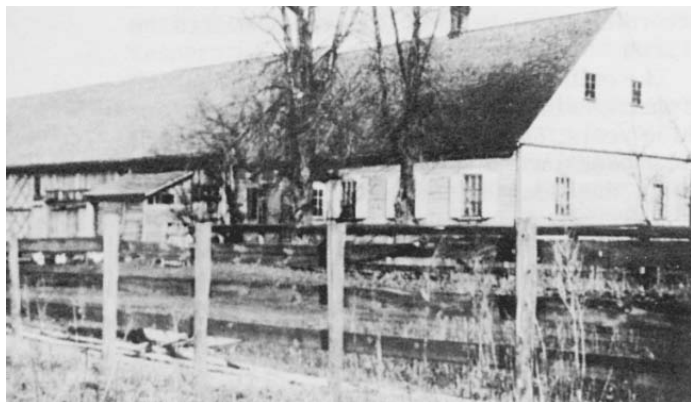
Jakob Goertzen and his second wife Anna Peters settled in Chortitz, W.R., where they are listed in the 1881 census, BGB, #394, page 398. Apparently the entire village of Chortitz was built on the SW20-2-4W, registered as the Homestead quarter section of Jakob Goertzen. In 1877 they had erected a dwelling 32x22 and a stable 25x22, see *Goertzen*, page 22-24.

Emigration, 1875.

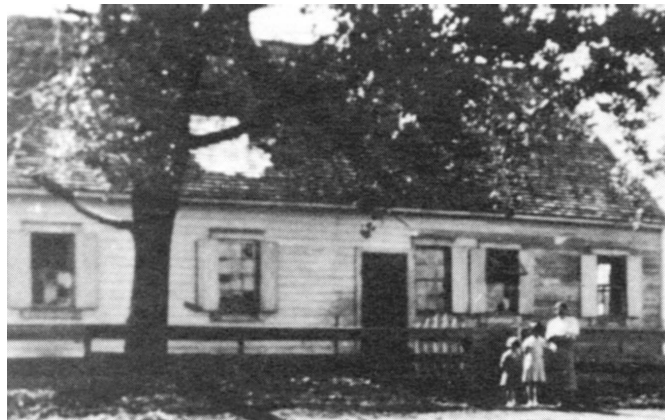
Benjamin was born to Gerhard (1837-1916) and Helena Reddekop Goertzen (1835-1905) in one of the villages on the Fürstenland in Russia and came to Canada as a two-year-old in 1875, RGB 307-3. The family travelled on the S. S. Peruvian together with Aeltester Johann Wiebe



Benjamin Goertzen - Died of Mexican fever near Durango. Justina (Teichroeb) Goertzen (right), a woman of courage and determination. Photo courtesy of Annie Braun as published in Hague Osler Reserve, page 83.



Housebarn of Gerhard Goertzen (1837-1916), Chortitz, W.R., Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 22.



The old school in Chortitz, W. R. It was originally built as the Old Colony Church School and later also used as a district school. The portion of the building to the right of the entrance consisted of the teacher’s living quarters. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 20. The Old Colony church built in Chortitz in 1881 was later moved to the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba, and restored.

Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929), Delegate

(1837-1905), with 104 families of Bergthaler and Old Colony background.

The Goertzen family helped to create the village of Chortitz, south of Winkler, Manitoba, where they are listed in the 1881 census, BGB # 374, page 397. Gerhard Goertzen must have been a substantial farmer as by 1881 he had two horses and six oxen, and two plows. In 1904 he sold his farm to son Heinrich and retired to a smaller house on the same yard.

Marriage, 1893.

Here Benjamin grew up, attended school, was baptized and married Justina Teichroeb in 1893, who had also grown up in Chortitz.

In 1899 Benjamin Goertzen and his young family sold their land in Chortitz and moved to the Hague-Osler Mennonite settlement together with their three children. They first stayed with Peter and Abram Klassens in Neuanlage. May 5, 1899, then moved on to their own homestead, SE14-40-5W3M.

In 1901 the Goertzen family moved to the village of Grünfeld which became their permanent home. By 1903 he was cropping 60 acres and owned 6 horses, 10 cattle, 5 hogs, and a set of buildings.

In the next two decades they built a large, traditional house-barn dwelling and acquired over 900 acres of farmland. Here too, the last of their 19 children were born.

Benjamin's diaries of this period are an eclectic mix of weather conditions, farm commodity prices and noting that his son Jacob was getting training on how to operate their first gasoline tractor. In the cover of one book he states that he has "written a wide variety of things" in his diaries!

Vorsteher, 1907.

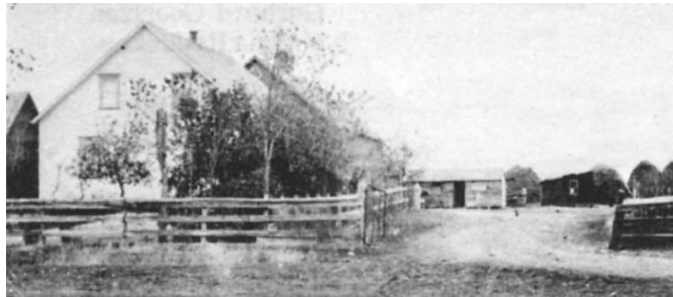
In the meanwhile, Benjamin Goertzen became Vorsteher for the Old Colony Mennonite settlement and as such became busier than ever. Once when one of their children died he couldn't even attend the funeral because of his busy schedule.

After his election the entries in his journals begin to include issues relating to the entire colony. You learn they collected money to help the needy buy seed grain in the spring, dealt with legal issues confronting the colony and the matter of car ownership of Church members. Many entries indicate Benjamin was often away attending meeting or conveying messages in

the different villages.

1907 - Nov. 17: The Church at Neuhor st was officially opened.

1916 - Sept. 5: Took the train to Saskatoon and bought a gasoline tractor for \$1,081.00 from Abram Driedger, Osler.



The Benjamin Goertzen home in the village of Grünfeld, Hague Osler, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 114.



The Benjamin and Justina Goertzen farmyard in Grünfeld village, northwest of Osler, Sask. Photo courtesy of Annie Braun as published in Hague Osler Reserve, page 83.



October 4, 1929, the widow of Benjamin Goertzen held an auction sale on her farm in Durango, Mexico. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 118.



Son Benjamin Goertzen visits his father Benjamin Goertzen's grave at the Grünfeld cemetery, Durango, Mexico, in 1960. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 118.

1916 - Nov. 18: I went to Osler-got 6 barrels of apples. Stopped over at farmer P. Klassen to discuss the rent he owes, but he wasn't home. In the evening P. Bueckert brought Johann Teichroeb over.

1916 - Dec. 13: -29 degrees in the morning. After lunch the following shareholders on the barn at the Neuhorst church were here: H. Froese, P. Wiebe, Jacob Klassen, Abram Bergen, P. Reddecopp, Jacob Froese, H. Wiebe, and G. Wiebe. D. Wall and P. Hildebrandt were not here. The entire structure with labour included, cost \$401.12. P. Wiebe's ten foot part costs \$40.90. The rest of the 8 foot portions, \$32.75.

1916 - Dec. 28: At home. After lunch the bishop Jacob Wiens came over and brought the announcements for collecting monies for those suffering in the war – and also the ones for Johann Enns and Wilhelm P. Wiebe. 1917 - Jan 30: Son Jacob and I went to Saskatoon. Jacob wanted to learn a little bit at the International Company on how to operate a gasoline tractor. 1917 - April 18: I went to Mennon. Sold butter, 30c, eggs 24c, and lard 20c. The price of wheat in Winnipeg was 2.35 per bushel, for Number 1 Wheat.

1917 - May 15: I was on the field with the boys. Jacob plowed with the tractor. Toward evening a strong, electrical storm arose. In Hague the most northerly elevator was struck by lightning and burned down.

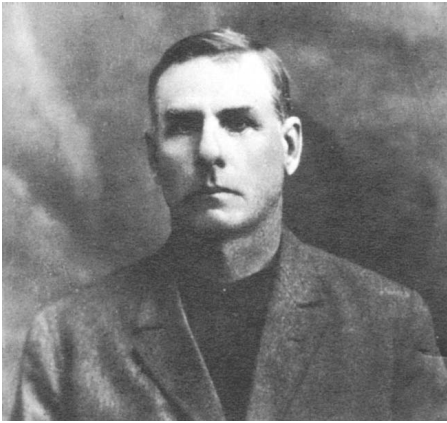
Emigration, 1921.

When the Old Colony Mennonites in western Canada began looking for new lands to settle, Benjamin was also very much involved. On January 19, 1921, Benjamin and Aeltester Johann Loeppky entrained for Manitoba where they joined other Mennonite delegates on a land inspection trip to Mexico.

From Winnipeg the group travelled south through Kansas City west toward El Paso and south along the West Coast of Mexico. In Culiacan these Canadian prairie dwellers gazed in wonder at sugar cane fields and banana plants, and were awed by the sight of the Pacific Ocean. Continuing south they went through Mazatlan, inland via burros, by train to Guadalajara and finally to Mexico City.

Here they had an audience with the Mexican President, Alvaro Obregon, and presented him with a list of conditions by which the Mennonites hoped to live in Mexico. After some delay and deliberation the President and his ministers prepared a Privilegium which outlined the con-

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Benjamin Goertzen (1873-1929), 1921 delegate to Mexico. Photo courtesy of Goertzen book, page 113.

ditions that the delegates had requested.

On the return trip they looked at some more land in Durango before heading back home to Canada, where they arrived on March 13.

Grünfeld, Mexico.

The following year the first train load of Mennonites left for Mexico. The Goertzens made the move in 1927 and settled in the village of Grünfeld, Durango Colony, Mexico.

Here was another pioneering experience. Mountains in the background, fields of corn, houses of adobe, different neighbours and a strange language - a lot of adjustments to make.

Although Benjamin was no longer Vorsteher, people still came to him for advice and information.

Robbery, 1929.

For the Goertzens there would be an especially difficult period. In the spring of 1929 several bandits broke into their home. Holding Benjamin at gun point, they rummaged through chest and cupboards and stole several hundred dollars as well as documents and other articles.

A few months later Justina wrote to her sister, Mrs. Katharina Sawatzky in Canada, and described their experience. The letter reads in part:

"It occurred on Sunday, April 7, at 9 p.m. in the evening. One of the girls said, 'The Mexicans are here.' It did not really register with me. Mexicans at such an hour?"

"My husband quickly went out with the hand-held light, shinning it into the face of the closest. It was as if this angered him, for he wound up with his rifle as if to strike him on the head. I stood behind him and grabbed him, and called, 'but do come inside.'"

"This was right in front of the door, and I had immediately noticed that there were many and heavily armed riders. Oh! I almost quiver to this very day. As soon as we were inside we closed the door. They did not make any attempt to come inside."

"But after only a few minutes they broke into the window in the Grosse Stube, bashing out the cross pieces with their large knife or sabre, and stepped inside."

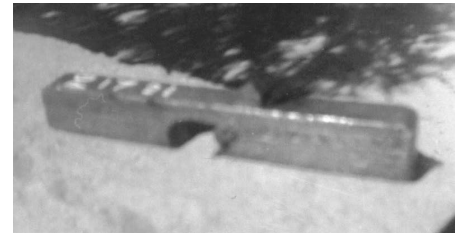
"And then, they cleaned up--money clothes, expensive suitcases with clothes and papers. I cannot nor do I want to enumerate everything. But we did have to count it, and what we knew, it was \$700.00 what they had taken. Cash money we thought approximately around 200 pesos. All the rest was Canadian, namely, dollars, not pesos," Goertzen, page 118.

Death, 1929.

Benjamin's fear and anxiety must have risen to levels not experienced before. To make matters worse, Benjamin Goertzen became very ill with "Mexican fever"

On August 19, 1929, two months later, Benjamin passed away in his home in Grünthal. He was buried in the village cemetery

Mrs. Benjamin Goertzen and her six unmarried children returned to Canada and settled on the family homestead in Grünfeld, Saskatchewan.



1721 hand planer bearing the initials "PG". A precious family heirloom brought along from Prussia to Russia, to Canada, to Mexico. See Goertzen book, page 12. The planer was brought to Manitoba by Gerhard Goertzen who passed it on to son Benjamin, who took it to Mexico where it was passed on to his son Gerhard who passed it on to his oldest son Benjamin who now keeps it in his writing desk at his home near Durango, Mexico.

Conclusion.

Dedicated to his family, community and the colony, Benjamin probably had little time for any self-interest. My father said he was a true outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting. One diary entry reports a neighbour shooting an eagle with a 'four foot wingspan'. Occasionally he would spend an evening with a friend playing checkers.

When my father and I visited his grave at the Grünthal cemetery in Mexico, I was deeply moved and couldn't help but reflect on this man's journey. From the steppes of Russia, to the Canadian prairies, and then on to Old Mexico, he had dealt with the human struggle. He died before his 56th birthday.

Descendants.

The Goertzen family was notable as there were three Aeltesten among the children. Daughter Justina married Johann Wiebe who became Aeltester of the Old Colony Gemeinde at Durango, Mexico.

Daughter Helena Goertzen was married to Abraham Loewen elected as a minister of the Old Colony Church at Hague Osler, Saskatchewan. In 1951 he was elected as Aeltester. In the 1960s the family moved to Fort St. John, B.C.

Son Isaak Goertzen served as Aeltester of the Old Colony Gemeinde in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

Sources:

Peter Goertzen, *Goertzen* (Edmonton, Alberta, 1976), 176 pages. This book has helpful information regarding the Fürstenland Colony in Imperial Russia, as well as the settlement of the village of Chortitz, W.R., Manitoba, Canada.

L. Doell and J. G. Guenther, editors, *Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995* (Saskatoon, Sask., 1995), pages 35 and 83.

About the Author:

Peter Goertzen served as the Director of the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba, from 1980 to 1993. He is currently the director of Grande Prairie Museum, Grande Prairie, Alberta.



The widow Mrs. Benjamin Goertzen and family, Grünfeld village, Saskatchewan, ca. 1942. Back row L to R, Frank and Agatha Klassen, Henry and Katharina Goertzen, Elisabeth and Jacob Wieler, Peter and Helena Goertzen, John Goertzen, Benjamin and Anna Goertzen, and Susana and Isaac Goertzen. Front row L to R, Henry and Maria Wiebe, Jacob and Anna Bergen, Susana Goertzen, Mrs. Benjamin Goertzen and Jacob and Katharina Goertzen. Missing are Justina, Helena, Gerhard, Katharina and their respective mates. Photo courtesy of Teichroeb book, page 64, Goertzen book, page 113 and Hague Osler Reserve, page 84.

Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969)

Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld, W. R., Manitoba, to Rosengart, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, Servant of the Reinländer Old Colony Mennonite Church, by Peter A. Petkau, 11 Hammersmith Rd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3Y 1G2.

Introduction.

Isaak Martens Dyck was born July 15, 1889, youngest son of Maria Martens Loeppky (1858-1934) and Isaak Dyck (1861-1944). Isaak Sr. in turn was the son of Isaak Dueck (1837-81) and Susanna Fehr (b. 1838) who settled in the village of Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba in 1875, 1881 census, BGB, page 386. The family had come from Jasykovo, Imperial Russia. In 1881 Isaak Dueck Reinland, died leaving a young widow Susanna Fehr with six children. The next year she remarried to Johann Wall, RGB 78.

Isaak Dueck (1837-81) was the son of Peter Dueck (1792-1847) and Elisabeth Bueckert (b. 1805) who were married in 1827.

Family Lineage.

Genealogist Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B. C., has written that "Peter Dyck (1792-1847) was the son of Jakob Dyck (b. 1763) who married Anna Dyck (b. 1762) in 1786. Jakob and Anna Dyck are listed as the owners of Wirtschaft 38 in the village of Chortitza, Chortitza Colony in the 1793 Verzeichnis (Unruh, page 210), as owners of Wirtschaft 21 in the 1795 Revisions-Liste or census (Unruh, page 237) and the Feuerstellen-Listen of 1802 (Unruh, page 247) which state that Jakob Dyck has died and that the Wirtschaft is now owned by his son Jakob Dyck."

According to the 1795 list Jakob and Anna had two sons Jakob age 5 and Peter age 2.

"Jakob Dyck (b. 1763) was the son of Jakob Dyck (1729-92) listed in the 1776 Konsignation in the village of Neustädterwald, West Prussia, with two sons and two daughters."

Homelife.

In 1965 Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969) wrote his memoirs describing various aspects of the emigration to Mexico, his work as a servant of the Gospel and his life as a school teacher and earlier youth in Manitoba. It is from this booklet that much of the information for this biography is taken.

Isaak's mother Maria Martens was married for the first time to Johann Loeppky (1850-82) who died in 1882.

Years later when writing his memoirs, Isaak M. Dyck recalled and cherished the advice that Aeltester Johann Wiebe had given his mother, then a poor struggling widow: "At no time should we ever exert ourselves to become rich. But rather we should concern ourselves about being Christlike and for the maintenance of our physical being. For if we should need to sustain our life in the older years, and the difficulties of old age and failing

health set in, and our life's course proceeds with rapid steps towards the setting sun, and we are no longer able to work, that in our old age we are able to eat our own bread and repose under our own roof and be able to pay every man his due. To be able to pursue such a wellbeing can be considered as a gift from God, Ecclesiastes 5:18," (page 19).

Having grown up in a home where a mother and grandmother had been widowed and left to raise a family under pioneer conditions, must have left a deep impact on young Isaak. No doubt he

children can reside in the parental home without anxiety the circumstances are generally as follows: if they are hungry they are able to eat, if they are tired, they can lay down and rest--whether it is early or late, if things are hard for us, or we must carry guilt over our sins, we can go to our parents and complain about our burdens. When children are serving among other people they must often forgo these amenities."

In 1907 when Isaak was 18 years old he was encouraged by his parents to take over the teaching position for the school in Eichenfeld. He had 15 students and received a wage of \$15.00 per month. He quickly realized that he needed to alter some things in his life, "for it was not feasible, to instruct the children during the day, to sing and pray together with the children, and then to pass the time in a light-hearted manner in the evening or on Sunday...of which he soon became aware from his parents as well as the parents of his students," (page 6).

In Isaak's third year in Eichenfeld half of his students died of diphtheria. As a result he applied for and obtained the teaching position in Blumenfeld. Here he had 55 students, a much greater responsibility. At the same time his mother lay very sick.

Isaak describes this difficult time as follows: "She [mother] had much suffering physically but even much more so in the spirit. She had much anxiety and sorrow to withstand so that we children often had to stand up in the night and help her pray. All of this, namely, my mother in her sickness, and that I now had a large school with 55 students whom I was not only to instruct with reading, writing and arithmetic, but also to be for them a model in humility and a pious life, that was a difficult burden upon my heart."

As a result of his prayerful anxiety, Isaak departed from the wayward ways of his youth and sought a life of discipleship and reflection. In so doing

he faced harassment and scorn from his former friends and associates. He recalled the words of Jeremiah 3:27-30: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth..." Isaak recalled how difficult it had been as a young teacher, and how different the parents were: "for one, he was far too strict; for the other, much too slack. Up to this time I was still unmarried. As I henceforth wished to refrain from the world, and, in so far as I in my weakness was able, to shun the sinful associations and to forsake the lusts of the world, I soon also had to endure the scorn of the youths...Oh! These godless youths did not give thought to the many prayers and many tears which flowed forth because of their foolishness and spite" (page 7).



Interior of the Old Colony Church, Blumenfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 33.

Teaching.

Since Isaak M. Dyck's parents were poor he had to work out from an early age "in order to earn his own food and clothing, and that for the meagre wages of \$15.00 per month," (page 5).

These experiences shaped Isaak's appreciation for families being able to live and work together as a unit, "O! Here already in my youth I learned the great value of the parental home and how blessed it is to have both father and mother nearby, and daily to have fellowship with them. For so long as

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Isaak M. Dyck soon became a respected teacher in the village of Blumenfeld, Manitoba.

Marriage and Ministry.

In 1911 Isaak M. Dyck married Susanna Peters. The wedding ceremony was performed by Ohm Johann Friesen and took place at the home of Isaak's parents. Isaak and Susanna had eight children of whom four died in childhood. They also adopted five foster children.

In 1912, at the age of 23, Isaak M. Dyck was elected to the ministry of the Reinländer Mennonite Church with 77 votes.

Emigration.

Isaak M. Dyck also wrote about the emigration to Mexico from Manitoba in 1922. As a young

scription, the Reinländer Church was also required to contribute to the Red Cross. Both the census announcement of December 1916 and the Red Cross monies, caused serious concern among the ministerial.

Isaak Dyck lamented the fact that he saw their young people exempted from the military, but on the other hand they were imbibing alcohol and frequenting sinful establishments. He saw the increasing need to emigrate to a "safer" country.

The first public school in the Mennonite West Reserve was in Reinland, the religious and cultural centre of the West Reserve. The second school was just outside the village of Neuenberg, the home of Aeltester Johann Friesen. In their view, flying the Canadian flag and teaching a public school curriculum smacked of militarism which

the Haskett train at the age of 33. He had to leave his farm in Blumenfeld behind, not having been able to sell it.

The train ride was another new experience. With two locomotives, the engineers were attempting to set speed records to El Paso. At Juarez, the Mexican border crossing, two Mexican soldiers boarded the train as protection against bandits. The new settlers also noticed how the landscape was changing as they arrived in Chihuahua some 24 hours later. The next leg of the trip to their destination, San Antonio, was made in two trains, due to the rugged terrain.

Isaak M. Dyck remembered this little dilapidated town, with a few broken-down brick houses and an earthen hut for a post office. There was no help available to unload the train car. Every family



Jakob Elias wears the traditional baptismal attire. The overcoat resembled the long coat of the Ohms ("Prediger Rock"), see Preservings, No. 15, pages 40 and 66. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 34.

minister he believed that as Christian pilgrims, suffering and discrimination were an expected lot in life. From that perspective he became a spiritual leader of the Reinländer Church in the Manitoba Colony in Mexico.

He wrote that as a young man growing up in Southern Manitoba, he heard Aeltester Jacob Wiens from Saskatchewan speak about the necessity to emigrate to another country. The desire of the church leadership to "keep a clean teaching of the Gospel" spurned this drive to find a place where the church members could live as the ministerial thought God meant them to live.

World War I was another impetus. Although the Mennonite community was exempt from con-



Katharina Martens Elias (1846-1928), pioneered with her husband, Peter P. Elias. They spent the winter in Blumenfeld before making Hochfeld their permanent home. Her parents Johann and Maria Martens were Blumenfeld pioneers. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 27.

was against the teachings of the Church. They felt this was an infringement on the promises in the "Privilegium" which had been negotiated with the federal government when they immigrated into Canada.

Mexico, 1922.

After failed delegations to Argentina, Quebec, and Mississippi, another delegation to Mexico proved fruitful. The semiarid region around Cuauhtemoc in northern Mexico was selected and purchased. The government of Mexico guaranteed the freedoms the Reinländer Church asked for during their meetings with the Mexican president.

When the Reinländer Church emigrated to Mexico in the early 1920s, Isaak M. Dyck and his family and parents moved as well. They settled in Blumenfeld, village No. 16, Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Isaak Dyck remembers the first train leaving Plum Coulee on March 1, 1922, and the second one from Haskett the next day. He left Canada on



Train enroute to Mexico loaded with OK exiles from Canada and their goods and possessions, 1922. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 37.

had to manage. Isaak's children were young, so he had to do it himself. Finally two young Mexicans came to help, for a peso a day. One of the two returned the next day to help with the 18 mile trek to their destination, the Rosengart village plan. By 12 o'clock that night they had arrived and pitched their tents.

Ohm Isaak Dyck recalled the words of God to Moses, regarding peace and freedom in a new land. He remembered fondly the warm feelings of support and community as they struggled to make new homes in this tent village. Concerns about equitable land distribution and the surrounding mountains brought reality sharply back into their decision making.

The climate and weather patterns were strange. During the day the tents were uncomfortably hot and at night it dipped to 8 below. Chicken pox and measles swept through the camp, causing a small number of deaths.

Establishing a relationship with the indigenous Mexicans was difficult. They offered wood, horses, corn, pigs and other animals for sale. The Mennonites soon discovered they had stolen them somewhere else. The first Sunday service was disrupted by a severe storm from the southwest filling the air with dust. It was a difficult beginning.

Language was another barrier but some of the

Mexicans showed the Mennonites how to till the semi-arid soil. With lumber hard to find, Isaak's family lived in a tent longer than they had planned. Their son Benjamin became sick. When they finally moved into their plain board shack, they hoped he would get better. But on the 5th of April, when Isaak Dyck returned from a funeral, his wife met him with the news that their son had died.

Ministry.

Both Isaak M. Dyck and his oldest brother, Abraham Dyck, were ministers in Mexico.

On one occasion Ohm Isaak travelled to another village, Kleefeld, to a funeral, and got lost. An elderly Mexican he met pointed him in the right direction. Another minister, Gerhard Friesen, finally arrived, escorted by two Mexican soldiers. Isaak Dyck recounted the climatic difficulties of those early pioneer days. Instead of rain, only dust storms. The meagre grass was not sufficient nourishment for the cattle. For the young children it was also very difficult.

He and his wife had five children. At that time Isaak was 6, Susanna was 4, Peter-12 and Katherina was 15. Other children of theirs had died. He felt the sadness of the children and their parents as he and the other ministers travelled to



Isaak M. Dyck was a teacher in the Blumenfeld Church School from 1918 to 1919. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 108.

the new villages providing comfort and leadership. During the first winter, animals, children and older people suffered and died due to the hardships and lack of food and medical resources. The first rains came on July 12 and the first planting could begin. In August drought set in again.



Trainload of Old Colony exiles leaving for Mexico from the Haskett railway station, 1922. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 37.

The next year was much more fruitful with the first frost late in December. But in 1924 it again returned to drought. With the introduction of corn as a staple crop, food and feed was more available.

1925 was a bountiful year. In the northern part of the Manitoba Colony a river flooded. Upon attempting a crossing Rev. Gerhard Friesen's wagon flipped in the current and his son watched him drown, unable to reach his father. One of the diseases they suffered was typhoid. Some 13 members lost their lives, as well as children.

Difficulties, 1927.

The state of Chihuahua had a law that only Mexican born men could be priests in the Catholic Church. It took a trip to the state capitol, Chihuahua, in 1927 by the Reinländer leadership to explain that they were God fearing and good citizens of Mexico. The state had sent notices to be put up in the Mennonite churches. When they understood the 13 articles given by the Mexican federal government, the tension eased.

The villagers had been warned of roaming bandits. 1931 was a difficult year. Many robberies occurred, often at gunpoint. One evening they came to the home of Peter Letkeman in Schanzenfeld. The son was shot in the lower abdomen and died 19 days later. Some of the bandits were jailed, but he occasional Mennonite male was also involved. On October 27, 1933 the Peter Schellenbergs and their one child were murdered.

Aeltester, 1935.

As Aeltester Johann Friesen's health was failing, he asked the Church to elect a replacement that would be the new Aeltester after his death. On December 10, 1933 Isaak Dyck was elected. On August 2, 1935, Aeltester Friesen passed a way and Ohm Isaak succeeded Johann Friesen as Aeltester of the Reinländer Gemeinde.

In 1935 the school question arose. The state education authorities closed the Mennonite schools because the German language was the language of instruction. Rev. Johan Wall and Rev. Abraham Dyck met with the authorities. After a number of weeks of discussion, permission was given to reopen the schools. In 1936 Aeltester Isaak Dyck quoted correspondence with the President of

Mexico, insuring the Mennonites of control over their education and also providing military protection against the bandits.

The 1950s.

In his writing Aeltester Isaak Dyck described these early years in detail. Less is written about life in the 1950s and 60s.

Aeltester Heinrich Dyck, in the conclusion to Isaak Dyck's autobiography, refers to the emigration to South America. Aeltester Dyck was concerned about the lack of leadership for the remaining Mennonites. When members from the North and Swift colonies left for Bolivia, a number of ministers also emigrated.

Because the whole ministerial had emigrated, the official Reinländer Church no longer existed in Manitoba. Isaak's oldest brother, Johann Loeppky, who was the son of Maria and her first husband, Johann Loeppky, became a minister in the Reinländer Church in the Hague-Osler area in Saskatchewan.

In 1948 Johann Loeppky also moved to Mexico with a group of Mennonites who left this Northern Saskatchewan area and settled on the fringes of Manitoba Colony near the border of the Kleine Gemeinde Quellen Colony. Numerous families were attracted to Rev. Loeppky's area. But the younger brother and Aeltester, Isaak M. Dyck, excommunicated those settlers. The area was abandoned and Johann Loeppky ended up back in Canada.

A letter by Isaak M. Dyck dated in 1952 to Levi D. Christner, Topeka, Indiana, refers to previous correspondence from Levi Christner to Isaak Dyck: "I received a letter from you on the 14th of December of last year and I was greatly moved by it and your goodness and your gift to someone who is often troubled in heart."

In the Manitoba Colony near Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, the Mennonite settlers had experienced two years of failed harvests due to drought, weeds and hail. In this letter he is asking to "be free of [or to be exempted from] our debt to you". Possibly the Amish Mennonites in the United States had provided a loan to the Reinländer Church in Mexico.

Aeltester Dyck wrote this letter from the vil-

lage of Blumenfeld, # 16, Chihuahua, Mexico.

Ministerial Records.

As part of his memoirs, Isaak M. Dyck also compiled a record of the five ministers who had come from Imperial Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s, the nine elections which took place in Manitoba, and the first six ministerial elections on the Manitoba Plan, Mexico. These records were reproduced in the third expanded edition of his memoirs, published at Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, in 1995, Part Two, pages 41-42 (Note One).

Death, 1969.

By 1952, Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck was 63 years old and in failing health.

During the last 10 years of his life Isaak M. Dyck spent much time and effort rebuilding the leadership and this took its toll on his health.

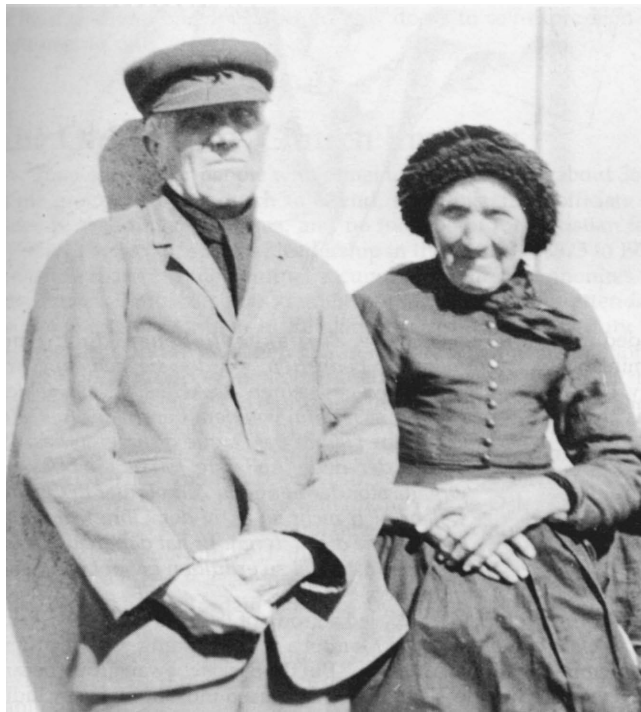
In 1968 he started to complain about various aches and pains. His last sermon was on December 1, 1969. He had difficulty walking up the steps to the pulpit that morning. The next day was spent in bed. He passed away approximately 8:30 Tuesday morning.

Isaak Dyck was Aeltester until his death on December 2, 1969. He had reached the age of 80 years. He was a minister for 21 years and Aeltester for another 36. In total he preached some 3000 sermons and married at least 300 couples. Baptized were 4988 souls. On 18 occasions he called for elections to elect more ministers for the Reinländer Church.

Some other statistic Isaak Dyck recorded included the growth of the membership in his church. By 1946 the church membership had increased to 8301 persons.

Conclusion.

Aeltester Isaak Dyck was a member of a community that emigrated from Canada in 1922. Therefore the perspective of his memoirs is of someone



Maria Dyck with her husband Isaak Dyck in front of their home in Mexico. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 39.

who experienced the exodus first hand. But he was also one of the leaders. It was his understanding and guidance that structured the community development in Mexico. He had a particular world view that stemmed from his personal theology. Although the church ministerial acted as a team, it was the leadership of the Aeltester that determined the direction. This form of theocracy was difficult to continue in a democracy such as Canada.

In northern Mexico the Mennonite leadership exercised more control over its people. Some of these isolationist ideas made life economically challenging for the majority of conscientious villagers. His concerns regarding the spiritual vitality of the people was genuine, but his theological perspective determined that more than any other in-

fluence.

Isaak M. Dyck was a family man, but most of all, he was dedicated to the Reinländer church. He is remembered as the Aeltester that struggled to make this Mexican landscape a spiritual home for this "pilgrim people".

Endnote:

Note One: These ministerial records were reproduced in the *Reinländer Gemeindebuch* (Winnipeg, 1994), page 519, and used by editor John Dyck, to compile a more detailed account and identification of all the ministers, deacons and Aeltesten elected over the years, with charts showing the interrelationships of certain ministerial families, published in *1880 Village Census* (Winnipeg, 1998), page 394-406.

Further Reading:

Isaak M. Dyck, *Hinterlassene Schriften von, Aeltesten Isaak M. Dyck, Blumenfeld, Mexico* (Jakob Klassen Fehr, Campo 5, Apdo 120, Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, 31500, 1994), 123 pages.

Peter A. Petkau, *Blumenfeld Where Land and People Meet* (Blumenfeld Historical Committee, Box 466, Winkler, Manitoba, R0G 2X0, 1981), 264 pages.

About the Author:

Peter A. Petkau is a teacher residing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1981, he co-authored a history of the village of Blumenfeld, West Reserve, close to Winkler, Manitoba.



Aeltester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Drawing by Ruth Wiebe, courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 40/Preservings, No. 16, page 40, based on a photograph of Isaak M. Dyck published in the 1880 Village Census (Winnipeg, 1998), page 395.



Old Colony Church, Blumenfeld, Manitoba, 1981. Photo courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 42.

Abraham A. Wolfe 1876-1945

Abraham Wolfe (1876-1945), Gnadentfeld/Reinfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba, Canada, to Gnadenthal, Waldheim Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, to Reinthal/Chortitz, West Reserve, Manitoba, compiled by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada.

Family Background.

Genealogist Henry Schapansky has written that the patriarch of the Wolfe family was "Jakob Wolfe (b. circa 1759). He came to Russia circa 1788-89 with the first Mennonite pioneers. On July 21, 1776, he married Justina Harder (b. 1758). After his death she remarried first to David Giesbrecht (b. 1750), later of Schönhorst, Chortitz Colony, and again to Johann Epp (n. 1774).

"His son Johann Wolfe (born June 6, 1778) married Anna Peters (b. 1782). He was the father of Johann Wolfe (1804-70)," (Note One).

According to records in B. J. Unruh, *Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen*, pages 215, 242, 248 and 303, the Wolfe family settled in the village of Schönhorst, Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia. They owned Wirtschaft 28 in the village of Schönhorst, Chortitz Colony, Imperial Russia, where they are listed as follows in the Revision (census) of 1795: Johann Wolfe age 17, brothers David 11, Peter 9, Jakob 6, and sister Christina 15.

On the "Feuerstellen Liste" of 1802 the family is listed as follows: "Jakob Wolf has died, currently his son Jakob Wolfe." Another record of individuals prior to 1803 simply notes, "Wolff, Johann, to Schönhorst, married..."

Johann Wolfe is listed as the owner of Wirtschaft Seven in Schönhorst in the Verzeichnes of 1803.

Johann Wolfe 1804-70.

Abraham A. Wolfe (1876-1945) was the son of Abraham Wolfe (1847-1912) and Eva Klassen (1843-1911), R231-1.

Abraham Wolfe was the son of Johann Wolfe (1804-70) and Elisabeth Friesen (1810-74). Abraham had three brothers Peter (b. 1835) R209-1, Johann (b. 1838) R300-3 and Jakob (b. 1853) R401-2 who also came to Canada in 1875.

The brothers had four sisters who married: Anna (1830-74) married to Peter Klassen, Elisabeth (b. 1832) married to Aron Dueck, Maria (1841-75) married to Herman Neufelt, Susanna (1844-1918) married to Jakob Redekopp RGB 371-2, and sister Helena (1851-66) who never married.

Abraham Wolfe 1847-1912.

In 1869 Abraham Wolfe married Eva Klassen (1843-1911). In his family record, Abram has written a blessing following the marriage entry, "May the Lord be gracious unto us, may he direct and lead us upon the narrow path, and that our feet would not depart from the way, and may he grant us the eternal life and a blessed death" (Note Two).

Abraham Wolfe Sr. came to Canada in 1875 crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Canadian together with brothers Jakob and Johann and sisters Elisabeth (Mrs. Aron Dyck) and Susanna (Mrs. Jakob Redekopp) and their families. The vessel arrived in Quebec City on July 19, 1875 four days after another group whose leader Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) later compiled an account of the journey, see *Preservings*, No. 15, pages 18-20.

The Abraham Wolfe family settled in the village of Osterwick, West Reserve, in Manitoba, where they are listed in the 1881 census: "#294 Abram Wolf 34, Elisabet 37, Abram 5, Peter 2," BGB 393.

Four children Johann (1870-70), Elisabet (1872-72) and Anna (1873-73) were born to Abraham and Eva Wolfe in Russia but all had died prior to the time of emigration. Son Peter born January 27, 1875 died the next day.

Abram born in 1876 was the first child to remain alive. Four other children were born after him



Photograph labelled "Abram A. Wolfe". Since Abram A. Wolfe lost his arm in 1895 this photograph must predate the accident, possibly summer of 1895. Photo courtesy of grandson Jakob W. Klassen, Blue Creek, Belize, C.A.

but only brother Johann did not die in childhood. Johann Wolfe (b. 1881) grew up to marry Maria Mueller (b. 1881), daughter of Isaak ("Kaiser") Mueller, Obervorsteher of the Reinland Colony.

Abraham's wife Eva, nee Klassen, died September 19, 1911, and was buried on September 19. The funeral sermon was given by Aeltester Peter Wiebe (Note Three).

Abram Wolfe Sr. died on December 17, 1912, survived only by sons Abram and Johann and their families.

Youth and Marriage.

Son Abram A. Wolfe had a joyous youth. When the young people were dancing in a house, he gladly stood and watched through the window.

As a young man Abram worked a lot with steam

engines. Tragically he lost his left arm on September 14, 1895, while working on a steam engine threshing outfit. He pushed the drive belt from the steam engine with his shoulder to stop the threshing machine. The drive belt flipped off and ripped his arm off.

On July 23, 1898, Abram A. Wolfe and Sara Fehr (born July 14, 1880) celebrated their betrothal. Sara was the daughter of Isaak Fehr (b. 1848) and Sara Neufeld (1851-1910), Wirtschaft 26, Hoffnungsfeld, West Reserve, RGB 381-2. Abram Wolfe and Sara Fehr were married on July 31, 1899. Aeltester Johann Wiebe, Rosengart, officiated at the wedding (Note Four).

April 19, 1899, a daughter Sara was born at 3 a. m. but died two hours later.

Teaching.

As a young man Abram A. Wolfe served as a Vorsänger (Chorister) and teacher. He served in these positions for quite some time.

In 1900 he lived in Gnadenthal, W.R. The various tax and OK Gemeinde records published in John J. Friesen, "Gnadenthal 1880-1824," in J. P. Redekopp, Chair, *Gnadenthal 1880-1980* (Altona, 1982), pages 1-26, do not refer to Abr. A. Wolfe. A Gerhard Enns is listed as the school teacher in 1903.

The birth places of the children provide information regarding the different villages where he may have taught: son Isaak - Blumenort in 1909; daughter Katharina - Osterwick 1912, Elisabeth - Osterwick 1913, Johann - Rosengart 1917 and Abram - died Reinfeld 1919. There was another Abram Wolfe family living in Reinfeld RGB 295-2.

Printery.

Abram A. Wolfe had a printery and on the side while teaching school he printed school materials, books and other printing work.

Historian Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, has gathered three samples of his printing work.

The first item was the "Erster Brief vom Ehrw. Aeltesten Jakob Dyck vom Jahre 1846. Anno 1900 von mir, Jakob Thiessen abgeschrieben in Amerika." The printer is identified as "Buchdruckerei A. A. Wolf, Gnadenthal, Plum Coulee P.D., Man."

The second sample of A. A. Wolfe's printing work is "Der Balzer-Brief, oder eine Geschichte und Gedicht wie und warum Lehr. Heinrich Balzer ist ausgegangen." The publication was dated 1903 and was printed by "Abraham A. Wolfe (Gnadenthal), P.D. Plum Coulee, Man."

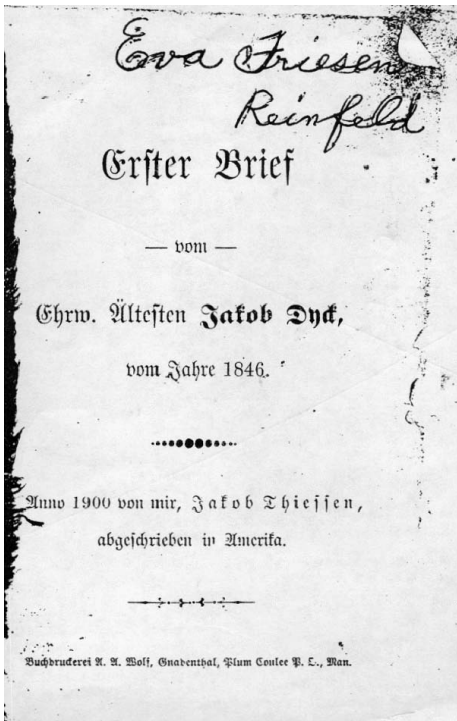
The third sample of Abram A. Wolfe's printing work is "Ein Abschied und Bericht wie es in der Molotschnerkolonie um d. früh. jahre zugegangen ist, und wie die Vorgesetzten den ehr. Aeltesten Heinrich Wiens von Gnadentheim aus dem Lande verwiesen haben. Seine Rückkehr nebst Beschreibung der ganzen Reise."

The booklet was printed on March 10, 1903.

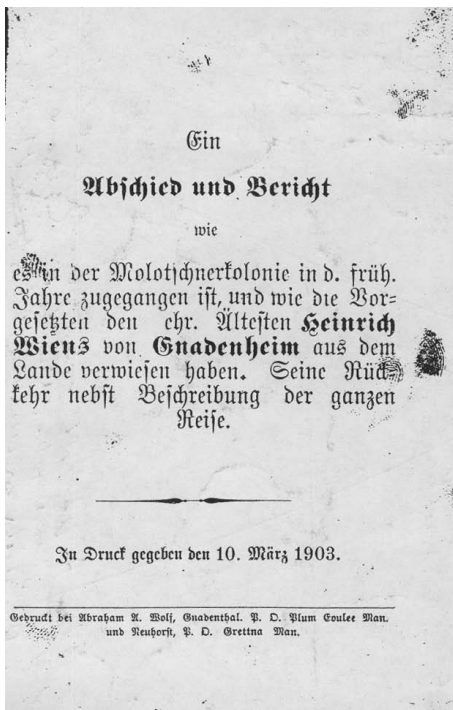
Part Three: Biographies

The printer is identified as "Abraham A. Wolfe, Gnadenthal, P.O. Plum Coulee, Man. und Neuhorst, P.O. Gretna, Man."

All of the booklets were part of the canon of devotional literature among the conservative Mennonites. Presumably other books printed by the



Title page of *Erster Brief* von Ehrw. Aeltester Jakob Dyck, presumably printed by A. A. Wolfe in 1900 or shortly thereafter. Courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R. R. 1., Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.



Title page of *Ein Abschied und Bericht*...Aeltester Heinrich Wiens, printed by Abram A. Wolfe, 1903, Gnadenthal, P.O. Plum Coulee, Manitoba. Courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R. R. 1., Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.

Wolfe printery can be added to the above as more material comes to light.

Charity.

In the generous spirit typical of the Old Kolony people, Abram Wolfe Sr. had adopted an old English bachelor who died in April, 1914. For the last 11 years he had lived at the home of son Abram A. Wolfe. He had achieved the age of 91 years, 10 months and some days. Granddaughter Tina Wolfe Plett recalls that his name was Tabiga and that he was a soldier who had come along with the family from Russia.

The senior Wolfes had also taken in a foster daughter Agatha who also died at the home of son Abram A. Wolfe in August 1919.

Medical School.

Several of the grandchildren recall that Abram A. Wolfe received medical training at the same time as the well-known Dr. Cornelius Wiebe, Winkler, and Hugo McGavin. Grandson Isaak Wolfe, Winkler, recalls that Abram A. Wolfe studied in Minneapolis, New York and Chicago. Dr. Wiebe practised in Winkler, and Dr. McGavin in Plum Coulee.

Emigration, 1922.

When the Mennonites emigrated from Manitoba in 1922, Abram A. Wolfe served as a group leader of one of the trainloads of exiles leaving Canada. He was interviewed and photographed by a newspa-

per reporter in Minneapolis, see *Preservings*, No. 14, page 103.

When they arrived in Mexico, Abram A. Wolfe deposited a large sum of money in a bank in Cuauhtemoc. Shortly thereafter the bank went bankrupt and he lost all his money.

Mexico, 1922-35.

In Mexico the Abram A. Wolfe family settled in Gnadenthal, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc. Later he had a medical clinic on the yard of son Isaak A. Wolfe in Reinland. Mrs. Abram A. Wolfe also practised here but she had never studied as a doctor. Son Isaak moved to Waldheim where Dr. Abram A. Wolfe delivered his grandson Isaak Wolfe. Granddaughter Sara Wolfe Penner remembered that "lots of people came for doctoring and we would hear little snatches of the conversation."

Abram Wolfe also served as a doctor for many Mexican people, travelling through the mountains, as he was concerned that the natives there should have medical care.

For this reason the family moved to a time to Namiquipa. They took the sick people into their home and nursed them until they recovered or died. They always had many people in their home who had to be fed and looked after.

Manitoba, 1935.

In June 1935, Abram A. Wolfes and their three married children returned to Canada, "because of the unrest, murder of the Peter Schellenberg family,



Abram A. Wolfe (1876-1945) and family in Minneapolis in 1922 during exodus to Mexico. L.-r. Daughters Maria, Mrs. Julius Klassen, Eva, Mrs. Isaak Klassen, and Elisabeth, Mrs. Jakob Goertzen, Abram A. Wolfe (note missing arm), and son Isaak A. Wolfe. Although dressed simply and tastefully the faces of the expatriates show the character and determination of those who have chosen to leave a country they had built in order to preserve their faith and culture which was being stolen from them. The Minneapolis newspaper which carried the story referred to the farms of the OKers as the "...richest farming districts of Manitoba," stating that "The Mennonite farmers sold their lands at a sacrifice...which under normal conditions brought from \$90 to \$150 an acre going a-begging for \$10 to \$30." Photo courtesy of Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair Men. Studies, University of Winnipeg, see *Preservings*, No. 14, page 103, for the original newspaper article.

etc.” The immigration party included Abram A. and Sara Wolfe, single daughter Katerina, daughter Elisabeth and husband Jakob Goertzen, daughter Eva and husband Isaak Klassen, son Isaak A. Wolfe, and their families. Mrs. Isaak Wolfe’s brother Abe Unrau also came along. The Jakob Klasses had one son but that became two as Mrs. Klassen gave birth in the U.S.A. during the trip.

The entourage was on the road for a month travelling on an old bus. Julius Klasses drove in an old car which, however, broke down along the way. They traded the car for a trailer which was hitched behind the bus and everybody piled on for the rest of the journey, a total of some 30 people (shades of “East of Eden”, except in this case it was a cynical government which had reduced prosperous God-fearing citizens to poverty and not a dustbowl/Depression).

Abram A. Wolfe again had a printery in Manitoba. Son Isaak took a mechanic’s course and operated his own garage.

Death.

After Mrs. Wolfe had arthritis so bad that she was crippled, Abram shut down his printery and they moved into a house on the yard of son Isaak.

Granddaughter Sara Wolfe Penner remembered “the night being awakened by Aunt Treen knocking at the window and waking Dad to tell him that grandpa had fallen and could not get up. I was very scared. It was the night grandpa had a heart attack or stroke, whatever they called it. He was taken to the Winkler Hospital. I remember when we as children were all taken once to visit him. I was scared I guess to see him, lying in bed so sick. [It was sad]...to hear that the nurses would not listen to his calls at the end.”

Abram A. Wolfe died in the hospital. During the night he had called out repeatedly. Finally, a German man in a different room had come to him. He later reported that Abram A. Wolfe had said, “Jesus is now coming to get me and soon all the others will come also.”

Abram A. Wolfe died March 4, 1945. The funeral sermon was brought by Aeltester Jakob J. Froese.

Abram’s wife Sara Fehr Wolfe died on her birthday, July 14, 1946, at 12 p m. midnight, at the Old Folk’s Home, Bethania, Winnipeg. The funeral was held in Chortitz, West Reserve, with Aeltester Jakob J. Froese officiating.

Recollections.

Abram A. Wolfe is remembered as a man of compassion. He had much concern and generosity for others. “He always remained a loyal Old Kolonier.”

Granddaughter Tina Wolfe Plett, recalls being held in her grandfather’s arms as a two-year-old. Her parents Isaak Wolfes had gone to Winnipeg and grandfather had stood with her at the window that evening looking to see if the lights of her parents’ car were visible already.

Tina also recalls visiting her grandmother in the Old Folks Home in Winnipeg, that she lay in her bed and that another woman was on the other side in the same room.

Granddaughter Sara Wolfe Penner, Abbotsford, B.C., recalls “feeling loved by both him and grand-



Friends relaxing on a Sunday in 1935 before the Wolfes returned to Manitoba. Abram A. Wolfe and Mrs. Sarah Wolfe are the couple in the centre. Who can identify the others? Photo courtesy of granddaughter Helena, Mrs. Cornelius B. Reimer, Jagueyes, Mexico.

mother Wolfe.” She remembered “the trees rustling in the wind which we did not hear at our house.”

“There was a hitching post around the worship house on which we balanced and walked on until sister Helena fell and got badly hurt. After this we were not allowed to do this any more.”

Sara remembered her “grandpa always smiling and singing lots of hymns around the home and discussion of scripture.”

Abram A. Wolfe loved to build things, and granddaughter Sara remembered “being excited at Christmas time when he built some chest of drawers for Helena and me. He made us doll buggies (carriages) with wooden beds. I remember him pushing grandmother in her wheelchair. Earlier when we stayed there during summer holidays, it was special to be allowed to follow him around as he took care of the Chortitz worship house for some years. (This was the same church building which

was later donated to the Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach).”

Granddaughter Helena Wolfe Reimer recalled that “Sarah Wolfe was crippled by arthritis. So she had to be in bed most of the time but she never complained. She liked to watch the kittens play, she even laughed at their antics. We also had to sing for her or open a song book and tuck it between her thumb and forefinger so she could read.

Two of Abram A. Wolfe’s daughters, Mrs. Julius Klassen and Mrs. Jakob Goertzen, who stayed in Mexico, were midwives and also chiropractors (“traichtmokasch”). They helped many people. Sarah Wolfe also served as a midwife in Mexico before she had arthritis.

J.W. Klassen Recollections.

Grandson Jakob W. Klassen, Blue Creek, Belize recalled that as a five-year-old boy he always wanted to be a doctor just like his grandpa for “then he and grandpa would never have to die. But then 10 years later, the 4th of May, exactly on his birthday, grandfather died after all, and consequently I gave up the idea of being a doctor.”

Jakob Klassen reflected, “In the meantime we lived in Canada where it would easily have been possible. We and the grandparents lived together in one house, southeast of Plum Coulee in a village



Abram A. Wolfe, as an older man, presumably taken after his return to Manitoba in 1935. Photo courtesy of Anton and Maria Wolfe Plett, Belize, C.A.



Johann Wolfe, brother of Dr. Abram A. Wolfe and wife Maria. It was said the two brothers resembled each other quite a bit. Daughter Maria, Mrs. Aron Wolfe, now lives at 230 Ave. T North, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

called Reinthal. One time Isaak Wolfes came to our place and then my parents, namely Julius Klassens, and Isaak Wolfen, drove to Eichenfeld visiting at Gerhard Elias', who was my grandmother's sister."

"We four boys, I and my brother Abram, and Wolfe's Isaak and Abram had to remain at home with the grandparents. This was in Fall. But in the meantime it snowed and they were unable to come home for four weeks."

"During this time we boys had much fun with the grandparents. Grandmother got quite angry with us, but we were not able to get grandfather to get mad. To describe everything we did would take too long. But suffice it to say that in the end grandmother gave in and we boys and grandfather also laughed ourselves silly."

"Later we and the grandparents again lived together in one house, this time in Chortitz by the worship house on the yard. I must confess that here I was a terrible brat, teasing the grandparents unmercifully but I never saw them angry..."

"In this wise I could relate many things more of my grandparents. I have never had another friend whom I loved so much as this grandfather. I often regret that he no longer lives for now I would no longer tease him, rather I would show him my love as much as I only could."

"At the time he [Abram A. Wolfe] made washing machines which were much easier to articulate than the so-called "Stuckmaschinen" and they were much sought after. As a 10 year-old boy I have often wondered how he was able to build these with only one hand. I know that another person with two hands could not have done it better nor faster. Often times he related to us about his childhood and years of youth, but, unfortunately, I cannot recount anything about it. I do know that I had often wished at the time that I could also have experienced such things."

Jakob W. Klassen concluded by stating, "I have loved both of them [grandma and grandpa] very much....We lived in Neuenburg, Mexico, when grandpa died, and the grandparents were in Canada. I was very happy that day as it was my birthday....Then the telegram came that grandfather had died. This cut me down as I always had the hope that I would see him again and to ask him for forgiveness....Therefore I would advise everyone who has something to make right with someone, to do it in a timely season, for once it is too late, it is too late forever."

"One thing more. We boys always looked forward to Christmas, for good gifts which made us a joy. But grandfather was much more concerned about something which would be a little fun for him also. We knew this and looked forward the most for the gifts from grandfather.

"...[the gifts we received] the last Christmas which we were still in Canada, therefore the last gifts from him, are a good example. We boys re-



1946. Coffin photograph of Mrs. Sara Fehr Wolfe. Photo courtesy of Anton and Maria Wolfe Plett, Belize, C.A.

ceived a dog made out of hard paper. It was hollow and one could remove the head and look inside. Inside we discovered something which had the appearance of chocolate, only it was white. I did not trust it to taste it, but Wolfe's Isaak, my cousin, immediately took a bite. He made horrible grimaces. Again grandfather had his joy. It was no chocolate, it was dog food."

Son Isaak A. Wolfe.

Son Isaak A. Wolfe married Helena Unruh from Neuenberg.

When the Mennonites moved to Mexico in 1922 Isaak A. Wolfe quickly learned the Spanish language. There was a rich Mexican Luis Laras who got to know the Abram A. Wolfes and their son Isaak. Laras had an automobile but could not drive it himself and so Isaak A. Wolfe often drove it as his chauffeur, far and wide, all over the State of Chi-



Tina Wolfe Plett, Almon Plett, and son Kenneth, Spanish Lookout, Belize, visit the house in which Tina's grandparents Abram A. Wolfes lived in Waldheim, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, from 1925 to 1935. Photo courtesy of Tina Wolfe Plett, Spanish Look out, Belize.

huahua.

Whenever he was needed a message was sent to Wolfe that he was supposed to come to Chihuahua where Senior Laras lived.

When Isaak received the notice he walked to the railway track about a half-a-mile away with one or two roosters. When the train came he held up the roosters and the engineer slowed down so that he could get on while it was still moving--this way it didn't cost him anything. He did not drive along in

a passenger car, but in the locomotive.

On one occasion Senior Laras sent him to a particular place where the automobile was parked in a large coral or compound, presumably to be safe from thieves. There was an office where a young woman was in charge of the keys. Here Isaak was to pick up the car. The owner had phoned the young woman that a Mennonite would come for the car and that she was to give him the keys.

When Isaac A. Wolfe arrived at the compound the woman refused to give him the keys. During the ensuing argument Isaak asked the woman to phone Senior Laras which she did.

She told him, "here is a fellow asking for the keys but he is not a Mennonite like you said."

The owner asked, "Well, what does the man look like?"

"Well so and so," she replied.

"Then give him the keys," Senior Laras ordered.

"But, he is not Mennonite, he speaks better Spanish than I," she remonstrated.

"Yes," said Laras, "He speaks better Spanish than I also. But he is the man. Give him the keys."

Isaak A. Wolfe and family returned to Manitoba with his parents in 1935 and lived in Plum Coulee. He was a gifted man with his hands. He was able to make a fine bus out of an old truck which served to take a large load of people to Manitoba.

In Manitoba Isaak had a garage and filling station and his father worked in the office.

In 1948 they returned to Mexico at which time his father's medical books and certificates were left in Manitoba and lost.

When the Isaak A. Wolfe family settled in Mexico, he provided a lot of help to the entire colony, with emigration papers because he knew the language so well. Often he drove to Mexico City, the capital, and had many dealings with the Federal Government. He was also a photographer and made all the passport photographs for the Quellen Colony.

Sister Maria Wolfe married Julius Klassen in 1928 in Mexico. Daughter Elisabeth Wolfe married Jakob Goertzen from Waldheim in 1931. Daughter Eva Wolfe married Isaak Klassen.

Endnotes:

Note One: Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5, letter to Preservings, Sept. 11, 2000,

Note Two: "Abram Wolfe & Sara Fehr are not listed in the First Mexican Mennonite OK Church Register which was recorded by the village in 1931. They are listed in the Second Volume as Family No. 792 immediately preceding the marriage of their daughter Elisabeth No. 793. Perhaps....indeed, they were outside the Colony in 1931." Courtesy of Bruce Wiebe, R.R.1, Box 79, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.

Note Three: Family records of Abraham Wolfe (1847-1912), unpublished record, courtesy of Tina

Abraham A. Wolfe 1876-1945

Wolfe Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize.

Note Four: Family records of Abraham Wolfe (1876-1945), unpublished record, courtesy of Tina Wolfe



Helena, Mrs. Cornelius B. Reimer, Jagueyes, Mexico, and Tina, Mrs. Almon Plett, Belize, tour the insides of their grandparents house in Waldheim, Mexico. They are looking at a baby carriage similar to the one built by their grandfather Abram A. Wolfe. The door behind them was also built by Abram A. Wolfe. Photo courtesy of Tina Wolfe Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize.

Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize.

Sources:

Tina Wolfe Plett, Spanish Lookout, Belize, Recollections, March 21, 2000, unpublished, 4 pages.
Sara Wolfe Penner, Abbotsford, B.C., "Recol-

lections, unpublished, 2 pages.

Jakob W. Klassen, Blue Creek, Belize, "Recollections," March 5, 2000, unpublished, 3 pages.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 17, pages 48-52.

A Child's Story

by Peter D. Zacharias

It happened some 50 years ago, perhaps in the Fall of 1949. My two sisters, my brother and I were playing upstairs by kerosene lamplight at our farmhouse some 1 1/2 miles northwest of Osterwick near Winkler, Manitoba. We ranged in age from 3 to 13 - I was the 13 year-old. Our parents, David and Laura Zacharias, were hosting special guests downstairs - relatives all the way from Neuanlage, north of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Such a visit was of great family significance. One could feel the importance of the occasion in the very walls of the old house.

But in one sense the visit was not ours - that is, not the children's. Ours was to play upstairs and not too loudly while the sound of lively talk and laughter emanated from the Grootstow downstairs. Soon we were absorbed in a world of our own.

Then it happened.

Footsteps - no mistake! On the stairway! Not our parents' footsteps - those we recognized. Our eyes and ears were glued to the head of the stairway.

And there he was! None other than Rev. Peter Neudorf, Dad's first cousin, Old Colony minister from Saskatchewan. Ah, he had come to visit the children. Our beating hearts were calmed by a kind face and a reassuring voice. And by a man interested in the affairs of children. Yes, he had come to visit us.

Even though now shrouded by the mist of years, an enduring memory was created that evening.

Note: Peter Neudorf was born on April 28, 1904. He married Katharina Loewen. He was chosen as a minister by the Old Colony Church in the Hague-Osler settlement north of Saskatoon. Rev. Peter Neudorf went to his eternal home on November 29, 1955. May his memory remain a blessing to many.

OK-KG Connections

Over the years a number of Kleine Gemeinde/Old Kolony interactions took place reflecting the close theological and historical resonance between the two Gemeinden.

Johann W. Dueck (1865-1932), Rosenort, Manitoba, makes reference to ministerial visits to Rosenort, including preaching at a KG worship service, by Old Kolony leaders:

"August 6, 1911: "There were two couples from the Old Kolony church here, and one of the men Julius Loewen, had a very good sermon on mercy and charity. They stayed also for the brotherhood meeting which concerned.... We visited with the two Old Kolony ministers at David Friesens Sr, who is related to them (one is a Friesen). I had a very blessed discussion with Julius Loewen."

July 7, 1912: "There were also guests in church--Peter P. Friesens and a Mrs. Wall from the Old Kolony. Mr. Friesen and his brother-in-law David K. Friesen from here were my guests in the evening. He also owns a bookstore and wanted to know where I had always ordered my books. The Old Kolony people cling firmly to old traditions and do not accept the newly revised Bibles for use in their schools. Friesen claimed that the meaning has been changed. I tried to convince him otherwise since I believed that God would not permit His Word to be drastically changed. To this he quoted...."

David K. Friesen was a brother to Rev. Johann K. Friesen, Rosenort.

From *Johann W. Dueck: Prairie Pioneer*, page 119 and 135.

Two further incidents are recorded in the ministerial journal of KG Aeltester Peter R. Dueck (1862-1919), Steinbach, Manitoba:

July 20, 1917: "...I and Johann K. Friesen [Rosenort] drove to Winkler to the Old Kolony Aeltester Johann Friesen, Neuenburg, and returned on July 21."

February 23, 1918: "Ohm Johann K. Friesen [Rosenort] came here [Steinbach] in the evening with the Old Kolony Aeltester Johann Friesen and deacon Abraham Friesen, Neuenburg."

February 24, 1918: "...[We] also asked the brethren for advice whether we wished to allow this Aeltester [Johann Friesen, Neuenburg] to teach [preach]. Subsequently worship services were held in the evening and this Aeltester did teach."

As recorded by Johann W. Dueck (1865-1932), Rosenort, Manitoba, an immigration meeting was held in Altona, Manitoba, April 11, 1922, where H. H. Ewert and A. R. Friesen, a delegate from Russia spoke.

"...Next arose a very important question: where to leave the Mennonites [the proposed immigrants from Russia] once they are here? Mr. Ewert suggested that we Mennonites should all mortgage our properties and buy the lands of the Old Kolony Mennonites where 600 quarters are to be sold for three million dollars, implements, and buildings included. This suggestion was rejected, however, indicating that he was on unfamiliar ground. This could turn out so that they and we could go bankrupt?"

April 20, 1922: "In the *Nordwesten* a correspondent by the name of A. Wolfe living in Chihuahua, Mexico, writes something worthwhile and I am going to paste it into my scrap album."

May 20, 1922: "The Old Kolony Mennonites are still persistent in their emigration, next week a large number of them will leave for Mexico. They are now selling their land, seed and everything for \$20 dollars per acre."

From *Johann W. Dueck: Prairie Pioneer*, pages 191-2, 195, and 200.

Aeltester Jacob J. Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld

**Aeltester Jacob J. Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba,
by granddaughter Netha Froese Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba.**

Introduction.

It was on November 13, 1885 in the Village of Reinfeld that a little boy, Jacob, was born to Johann and Katharina Froese. His parents had immigrated to Canada in June 1877 from the Chortitza colony in southern Russia and settled in the West Reserve in the village of Reinfeld. Many years later, he was to have a powerful influence on the Old Colony Church. In fact, the church would flourish under his capable leadership.

Boyhood.

Still at a tender age, his parents left the village of Reinfeld and moved to Schoenfeld, better known today as the Zion School District, located several miles west and one mile north of Winkler. In this country setting Jacob spent his childhood years.

He attended private school since the church required that children should attend school by the time they reached the age of six. Jacob was a good student and advanced rapidly in his program of studies, which consisted of four different courses. These courses included the Fibel, which was used primarily to teach the children to read. There was a study of the catechism of the Old Colony Church, the New Testament and the study of the Old Testament. As well, each day the teacher would devote some time to "rechnen", or mathematics.

It was in this type of school that Jacob received his education. It was an education, which would be an asset to his future endeavours.

As Jacob reached the age of 13, it was the custom for Mennonite children to leave school and graduate to the more important things in life, such as working on the farm. After all, it seemed that Mennonite children were expected to assume their fathers' role and become farmers.

When Jacob was 16 years old his father passed away at the young age of 43. This placed a large responsibility on the three oldest brothers who had to operate the farm. Approximately one-year later Jacob's mother married a farmer from Reinfeld, Peter Friesen.

Teaching.

After having moved to Reinfeld, Jacob received his first opportunity to be of great service to the community. He accepted the challenge of becoming a teacher of the local school. Here his keen young mind was first put to use for the benefit of the community.

In conversations with Mrs. Maria Peters, she had this to say about Jacob as a teacher. "He was my teacher for most of my school years. He was a very good schoolmaster. However, he was strict and always meant what he said. The children whom he taught, received a good schooling." In her reminiscing, she goes



Aeltester Jakob Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld, Manitoba. A great servant of God.

on to say that his instruction was conducted in the "Fibel" and the "Bibel", although "rechnen und schreiben" were important too. She recalls so vividly the physical setting in which all this learning took place, namely the building, which latter became the Old Colony Church.

Puzzles/Opportunity.

It was apparent that Jacob was extremely intelligent. For instance, it is a well known fact that Mr. John Walkof, the principal at the Winkler High School, frequently called on this particular local schoolmaster to solve mathematical problems involving the square root system. A further example of his alert mind was in his ability to figure puzzles put out by various companies such as the Country Guide, Dolly Grey and other periodicals. It was rather intriguing to discover that Jacob won numerous prizes in this fashion, particularly during the depression years. He won sums of money, big radios, which were not as available in those days as they are today, and several cars. One of these cars was a 1927 Chandler, a four-door sedan with a six-cylinder engine.

Ambitious and courageous are words that described Jacob very well. He also was a man of opportunity. He took advantage of opportunities that came along. The money he won as prizes was largely used to buy land during the depression years when land prices were low. This no doubt accounted largely for his prosperity in later years.

Baptism and Marriage.

During his tenure as teacher, Jacob Froese was baptized upon the confession of his faith.



Margaret Enns Froese 1886-1965, the Bishop's wife. Servant of her people.

He was baptized on June 12, 1905 in the Village of Chortitz and received as a member of the Old Colony Congregation. Bishop Peter Wiebe performed the baptismal service. Along with other baptismal candidates, Jacob was required to learn the entire catechism, which consisted of memorizing answers to approximately 150 questions of doctrine.

One year later, on July 15, 1906 Jacob was united in holy matrimony to Margaret Enns from Reinfeld. At first, they resided in the two rooms that were part of the school facility. Following that they took up residence in the house just next to the school, and here they lived all the rest of their married years. Within a year of their marriage, Jacob decided that farming would become his occupation and he relinquished his duties as schoolmaster after four years of dedicated service.

Through good management, wise investments and hard work Jacob Froese multiplied his holdings several times over, owning 3,000 acres of land along with his first John Deere tractor, better known as "Rumbley". All he had accumulated was the fruit of his labour.

The School Issue, 1916-22.

A decade later, life on the farm was prospering. However, a problem of great proportions arose within Manitoba Mennonite community. The Norris government was threatening to remove the right, which the Mennonites had enjoyed, of educating their own children.

Now the government was demanding that teachers must conform to the government's standards. Even more alarming was the fact, that the Union Jack flag was to be flown on the school grounds. This disturbed the Mennonites, since the flag had militaristic implications for them. They also feared that they would lose their exemption from military service. They may have complied with the requirement of instruction in the English language. However, the flag was too much.

The Old Colony Mennonite community sent a delegation to explore the possibility of establishing a colony in Mexico. When the representatives returned with a favourable report, the people did not hesitate to leave. Between 1921 and 1925, almost the entire Old Colony Church left Manitoba. Only 600 members remained behind, with virtually no church to attend. Of the people that remained many joined the Sommerfelder Church.

Meanwhile, Jacob Froese along with Abram Friesen, decided to go to Mexico and get their own unbiased view of the situation. Jacob Froese decided to stay in Manitoba.

For Jacob Froese this was a period when he was exposed to numerous teachings, not necessarily exclusively those of the Old Colony Church. He frequently attended in-depth bible studies conducted by Rev. Reimer from Steinbach, H. B. Toews, Henry Janzen and A. H. Unruh, to name a few. As well, he attended services, "Bibel und Gebeststunde" at other churches in the community.

In addition, Jakob Froese was largely self taught through intense bible study and reading of reference books. This proved to be a time when he gained much biblical knowledge, which would be very valuable to him in later years.

Reestablishing the Church.

When it became obvious that Mexico was not the Promised Land and people started to return to Canada, there was a need to reestablish the Old Colony Church. It was under the capable leadership of Jacob Froese that the Old Colony Church was reestablished and under his influence, it flourished. He was no longer a young man. The day he was elected as congregational minister, June 25, 1936, he was 53 years of age. On June 28, 1936, Rev. Froese was ordained as a minister. Several brethren from the Osler, Saskatchewan branch of the church came to Manitoba for the ordination. Among them was Johann Loepky, who was in charge of the ceremony.

One-and-a-half years after his ordination to the ministry, Rev. Froese was elected as Bishop of the church. Elder Johann Loepky of Osler again presided at his ordination as Bishop on November 14, 1937.

Jacob Froese delivered his first sermon as Bishop on the day of his ordination. His message dealt with the importance of rebuilding the church, with great emphasis on the responsibility of each of the hearers to assist in this task. Bishop Froese possessed a tremendous burden for his people, which probably

prompted him to accept such a monumental task.

WWII.

Within two years, the attention was to shift from the rebuilding of the church to the tension that was developing on the European continent. The Mennonites of Manitoba became very concerned about the effects that an outbreak of war might have. Questions loomed large on what position the Mennonite Church would take.

The war came and the fears of the Mennonites were justified. The Government passed conscription. It was not clear what would happen to the young men who had attained the age of eligibility for military service.

The Mennonite churches selected three men out of the council of elders from the 10 local Mennonite denominations. This committee was to represent the Mennonite views in meeting with government officials. The committee, accompanied by Bishop Froese, went to Ottawa in February 1941 to determine if it would be possible to have Mennonite young men excused from military service, or to find out what possible alternatives could be worked out. The committee met with Member of Parliament, Howard Winkler, Judge Adamson, Deputy Defense Minister Davis and Major General La Fleche.

The Mennonite delegation was told, it would be impossible to be exempted from all service. However, it would be possible to arrange some form of alternate service including labour in the parks or on roadwork under civilian supervision. Most of the young men selected this option as their alternative service.

The committee reported that Bishop Jacob Froese had been of great assistance. Bishop Froese also assisted many young men in their attempts to obtain non-combatant status.

Building the Kingdom.

Bishop Froese was frequently called upon to ordain ministers and elders, serve communion, conduct baptism services and accept new members into congregations. He did this in communities such as Rainy River, Ontario; Pinscher Creek, Brochet and Peace River Alberta; many locations in Manitoba; and as far away as Mexico. In his total ministry, he ordained 19 ministers, six deacons and two bishops.

Bishop Froese preached on a regular basis from 1936 until several weeks before his death in 1968. His sermons were always carefully written and were read in his Sunday services. Sermons were preached in the High German language. However, when additional emphasis was desired the idea was repeated and summarized in the Low German language.

Bishop Froese's messages revealed deep insight and understanding of scriptures. He emphasized that a person needed to experience a rebirth, as well as the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross from the sins of the world. He preached 1,727 Sunday morning messages, conducted 200 funeral services and officiated



Jakob M. Froese (b. 1917), Winkler, MLA for Reinland Constituency for 14 years. All photographs for this article are courtesy of daughter Netha and Henry C. Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

at 94 weddings.

In addition, he presided at special services, such as the dedication of the new church at Chortitz. Other aspects of his work included crisis counselling involving situations of grief caused by illness, marital discord, or death. There was a good deal of casual exchange and discussion in which mutual encouragement, inspiration, assistance and exhortation occurred. He was involved in teaching at bible studies held in the village.

As well, many visits were made to senior citizens and in some cases visits were made to give communion to bedridden members of the church. His visitation program included hospital patients. In fact, Dr. C. W. Wiebe, long-time practising doctor in Winkler, recalled that Bishop Froese was one of the favourite ministers requested by hospital patients for visits and counselling.

Since government relief and welfare services did not exist in those days, programs were established within the church to support various causes. Paying doctor bills and hospitalization expenses were not unusual, since Medicare was not in existence. Many letters of need arrived from various locations. Sometimes these needs were met with the support of the church. However, Bishop Froese covered many times expenses incurred in assisting needy situations. At the same time, in his entire ministry Bishop Froese was never paid for any of his services.

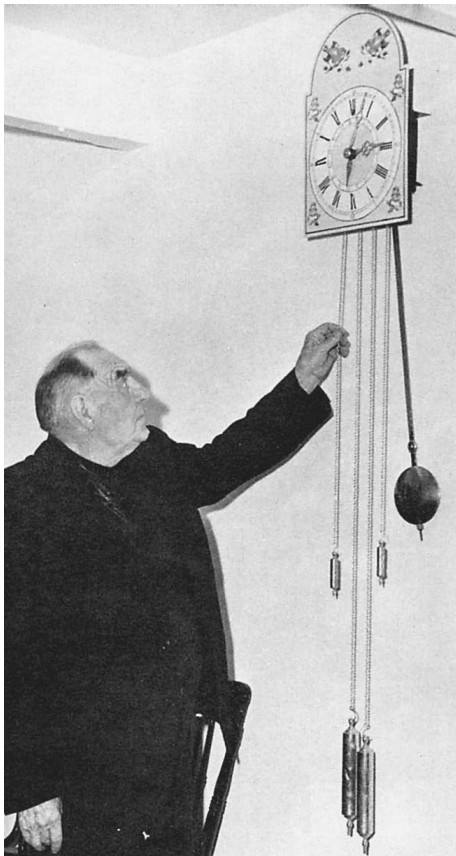
Margaret Enns Froese 1886-1965.

Bishops Froese's life companion complemented him in every way. According to all that knew her, Mrs. Froese, had a great love for people. Her generosity knew no limits. It was

almost impossible to leave her place without taking home a small token. It could be a syrup pail filled with "heenasupp", or sometimes "schmauntsupp", at other times "plumi moos", or a bag of "tweback", perhaps some "schnetki" or some fruit from the garden.

Mrs. Froese was always giving of herself. She was the ideal woman in her setting. They frequently had company, especially as meal time. Company came at a moment's notice. Many times these turned out to be overnight guests. She possessed a genuine concern for others as was so evident in caring for a foster child, who was left motherless at the age of eight. As well, preparing three or four meals a day, for weeks at a time for thresher gangs of 25 men, could not have been an easy chore.

The fact that she was quiet in no way affected the beauty of her character. In the Old Colony families, the role of the woman was a passive one. Women did not participate in the decision making in the church, nor did they have any decision-making role in the home other than in household duties and the proper rearing of the children. For such a setting as this, Mrs. Froese was indeed a gem. It was a great loss to her husband, when she died in May 1965.



Aeltster J. J. Froese winds up the pendulum clock, a family heirloom. Photo courtesy of Walter Quiring, *Mennonites in Canada: A Pictorial Record* (Winnipeg, 1961), page 117.

Death, 1968.

Bishop Froese was a voracious reader and consumed large amounts of material, including newspapers, especially the Steinbach Post, books, reference books and the Bible. He loved to get up early and watch the sunrise. He loved to see the beauty of the golden fields of ripening grain and he loved to travel and see the world.

His interests extended to include politics. He loved to discuss happenings on the political scene with his son Jacob M. Froese, who was the Social Credit Member of the Manitoba Legislature representing Reinland Constituency for 14 years. On one occasion, Bishop and Mrs. Froese were able to visit the legislature when the house was in session.

In early January 1968, Bishop Froese suffered a heart attack with complications of pneumonia.

On January 15, 1968, he went home to be with the Lord. Some 2,000 people attended his funeral and many mourned that the church had lost a very capable leader.

Legacy.

Bishop Froese left us with a heritage that continues. He contributed a great deal to the church and other people as a whole. He was responsible for helping many destitute people from Saskatchewan become re-established after the depression. He helped numerous families who emigrated from Russia to Canada, both financially and in terms of establishing themselves in their new country.

He left an indelible mark on the church and contributed a great deal to this cause. He was a faithful shepherd to the flock entrusted to his care and he served them well.

He served as a member of the first Board of Directors of the Bethel Hospital, in Winkler. Although he did not participate in politics, he had two sons who served the community in positions of public office.

Reflecting upon the man and the church he served, some may tend to be somewhat critical. They look at their simple form of worship and conservatism with scepticism. However, let us remember, as written by Frank H. Epp in his book *The Glory and the Shame*, "It is one thing to recognize the weakness of the past and another to give strength to the present. No genius is required to excel in the former....The test of education, it would seem, is whether the educated have the patience to teach those from whom they have sprung. To damn what has stayed behind is the easiest response in the world. To improve on what has been left to us is the nobler choice."

May God grant that in our look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and that we may build on the foundation that others have laid.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 41-43.

Family Background, by H. Schapansky.

As already mentioned Jakob J. Froese was the son of Johann Froese (1859-1902) and Catharina Unruh (b. 1860). RGB 263-1.

Catharina was the daughter of Cornelius Unruh (1829-1907) and Maria Bankrath (Pankratz) (b. 1832), RGB 260-1. The Unruhs had come from the village of Gerhardtsthal, Fürstenlandt, Imperial Russia, in 1875 and had settled on Wirtschaft No. 19 in the village of Schönfeld, West Reserve, situated between modern-day Winkler and Morden and a mile north of Highway 14.

Maria Pankratz was the daughter of Andreas Pankratz who was from the Alt-Flemish Gemeinde at Przechowka, Prussia. Her mother Barbara Knelsen "appears to be the one born 1801 in the Hutterian Bruderhof to Abram Knels (1772 at Przechowka, Prussia) and Judith Wallman born at Sabatisch, Slovakia," John Dyck, editor, *1880 Village Census* (Winnipeg, 1998), page 338.

Johann Froese and Catharina Unruh were married in 1879 and by 1881 owned Wirtschaft No. 2 in Schönfeld. In 1903 Catharina married for the second time to the widower Peter Friesen (1860-1931).

Johann's parents were Johann Froese (1818-1913) and Katharina Thiessen (1822-92), RGB 255-1. They immigrated from Neuhorst, Chortitza Colony, Russia in 1877 and also settled in Schönfeld, Wirtschaft No. 22, BGB 401-463. Genealogist Henry Schapansky has advised that Katherina was Johann's step-sister by marriage, being the daughter of Heinrich Thiessen, whose widow was the second wife of Jakob Froese (1779-1845).

Katharina's sister Maria married Johann's brother Jakob Froese (b. 1823) and their daughters Helena (1847-96) and Aganetha (1854-1925) married Joseph and Isaak Mueller, sons of Obervorsteher Isaak Mueller, Neuhorst, West Reserve, Manitoba, BGB 281-2.

According to historian John Dyck, Johann Froese Sr. was the son of Jakob Froese (1779-1845) and Anna Doerksen (1771-1841) who came from Neustadterwald, Prussia. They lived in Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony (*1880 Village Census*, pages 201-202) where they are listed in 1808 (B.G.Unruh, page 256) and 1814 (Unruh, page 273).

Genealogist Henry Schapansky has concluded that Jakob Froese was the son of Peter Froese (1755-1806) listed as being from Neuteicherwald, West Prussia, son of widow Froese listed in the 1776 Konsignation as resident in Neuteicherwald, West Prussia, with one son. Courtesy Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B.C., V3L4V5.

Sources:

Jake Peters, "A Biography of Rev. J.J. Froese," Essay, Winkler Bible Institute, Winkler, Manitoba, 1976.

Aeltester Herman J. Bueckert

“Aeltester Herman J. Bueckert, Prespatou, B.C.,”

by Jacob G. Guenther, Box 1281, 102 Fifth Ave. N., Warman, Saskatchewan, Canada, S0K 4S0.

Introduction.

Elder Herman Bueckert was born in 1911 in the village of Schönwiese, southwest of Hague, Saskatchewan. He and Helen Harms of Steele district, southeast of Hepburn exchanged vows on June 13, 1937.

They settled on a newly established farmstead south of Hague. Their next place of settlement occurred in the early 1940s when they moved south of the village of Chortitz, also in the Hague area. Being a good carpenter it did not take much time before buildings were set up and ready to move in.

Prespatou, B.C.

They and their family of six lived at this location until 1961 when scarcity of land for acquisition prompted another move to Prespatou, north of Fort St. John, B.C.

In the early decades of the 1900s it was a custom that when a death occurred the body was looked after within the community. It was a tradition amongst the Mennonites, as brought over from Europe, that each settlement had a few women who acted as morticians to prepare the bodies of the dead. There were two ladies who acted as morticians of this work in the village of Grünfeld, west of Schönwiese, namely, Mrs. Justina Goertzen and Mrs. Gertrude Wiebe.

In case of a death they combined their pro-

feSSION with a carpenter and often Rev. Bueckert was contacted to build a coffin. He was known for his neatness in the items that he manufactured. Rev. Bueckert as well as the ladies never charged a fee for their work from the underprivileged.

Ministerial Work.

The Old Colony Church of Saskatchewan called Herman Bueckert to the ministry in 1955. He was elected as Aeltester at Prespatou, British Columbia, on July 8, 1969 and was ordained July 13, 1969. He relieved Aeltester Abraham Loewen whose health had failed.

An interesting anecdote about Aeltester Bueckert is found in the *Hague Osler* book by Leonard Doell: “For the Province of British Columbia the adjustment to the Old Colony neighbours also took time. Shortly after their arrival in British Columbia, a Federal election was held. The Returning Officer for Cariboo could not drive to the Mennonite settlement because the roads were impossible and there were no telephones or post offices. The Returning Officer arrived at the home of Rev. Herman Bueckert by helicopter only to find that they had religious scruples against taking part in elections.

“Rev. Bueckert informed him that ‘It is not our teachings, and we don’t believe in it.

Therefore we will not do it.’”

“The Returning Officer jumped in his helicopter and left. Rev. Bueckert then responded to the beauty of the country and the reason for coming to the north. ‘This is good land, easy to clear. We’ll have it broken soon. There will be pigs, chickens, ducks, and geese. We are a long way from Town, it is true, but we need very little. We will grow and raise what we need. We live the way we believe is right,’ he said.”

“‘We do what the Bible tells us to do. Other people have their religion that they believe in, we don’t bother them. We have our religion and we ask that other people do not bother us.’”

Retirement.

Mrs. Herman Bueckert, nee Helen Harms, passed away on December 16, 1984. She was interred at the Grünfeld cemetery in Prespatou.

After many years of service Herman Bueckert retired in 1990 and lives in the Prespatou Lodge near his place of worship. He was replaced as Aeltester by Johann Fehr in 1992 and in 1995 by his son John Bueckert.

Herman Bueckert had served his beloved Gemeinde as Aeltester for 21 years and 14 years as minister. He provided sound and stable leadership during difficult times and left a legacy of spiritual faithfulness.



Aeltester Herman Bueckert and wife Helena (nee Harms) Bueckert, photograph taken in Ontario shortly before her brother Peter Harms died in 1980. They went to visit him together with her half-sister Susie Knelsen, nee Guenther, and brother-in-law Jake Knelsen. Photo courtesy of Jakob G. Guenther, Box 1281, Warman, Sask., S0K 4S0.

Bishop William Fehr (1935-89)

Bishop William Fehr (1935-89), Aylmer, Ontario, by son John Fehr, Aylmer, Ontario.

William Fehr was born to his parents, Wilhelm and Aganetha (nee Epp) Fehr, in Eichenfeld, Mexico, on February 18, 1935. He attended the local school and spent the first 22 years of his life in Mexico, before arriving in Manitoba, Canada, in 1958. He became a Christian and was baptized by Reverend Cornelius Nickel in 1958 in Manitoba.

After being employed there on a local farm for a few months, he travelled to Ontario and settled near Aylmer, Ontario. It was at this time that he got to know a young girl, Katharine Fehr, the daughter of Johan and Aganetha Neufeld Fehr. Katherine was born in Blumenfeld, Mexico, on October 3, 1938. On May 3, 1959, about 50 friends attended the wedding of William and Katherine Fehr, which was held near Aylmer and officiated by Reverend Schmidt.

During Mom and Dad's first years they lived just west of Mount Salem, where they were blessed with the birth of the first of 11 sons. Dad was employed in the construction industry at this time and remained there for approximately 12 years. During this time he and Mom built their own house just east of Mount Salem and lived there until the spring of 1973.

Dad was elected as a minister on November 19, 1969, and on November 23, 1969, he was ordained by Bishop Jacob Penner from the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Manitoba. He served as a minister for 15 years in congregations in Aylmer, Wheatley, Kingsville, Walsingham and Kitchener, all in Ontario. He was ordained as Bishop of the Old Colony Mennonite Church congregation in Ontario on December 12, 1984, in Wheatley.

Dad and Mom always had an interest in farming and it was with this interest that they purchased a farm just east of Aylmer in the spring of 1973. A lot of work went into the farm by them and their sons for there was always something

that needed to be done and everyone was quick to help in anyway they could. We grew tomatoes, cucumbers and strawberries and during harvest time we would have to hire additional help. For seven years Mom and Dad continued to farm this property at which time they purchased a farm near Corinth, Ontario. Tomatoes and cucumbers continued to be the main crops grown.

During this time more and more of Dad's time was devoted to the church, as the congregation was expanding rapidly and two new churches were opened. Mom and we boys were kept busy with the farm work, for when it was time to plant or harvest the crops one could not afford to delay it.

There were times when Dad was called away on church business during the busy times of planting and harvesting and it was at these times that Mom and we were left to do the planting and harvesting on our own. As some of the boys were getting older and finding work off the farm, Mom supported Dad greatly by doing the things on the farm that she was able to do, because there just was not time for Dad to do everything.

It was in 1981 that Dad was first diagnosed with an illness that was to affect him for the rest of his life. He first underwent surgery in 1981 and the second time in 1986 and hereafter he was fairly healthy until November 1988. He agreed to have major surgery in February 1989 and had high hopes of becoming healthy once more.

The year of 1989 was a difficult one for the whole family, as Dad was experiencing many ups and downs with his illness. There were times when it looked as if he was going to get well once more, but then suddenly his illness would get quite severe again.

On September 18, 1989, Dad was called home to be with his Saviour. It was a difficult time for the family, for we knew that we would now be left with an empty feeling. We took comfort in

knowing that Dad had gone to be with the Lord and would have to suffer no more.

Mom and Dad were married for 35 years and blessed with 11 sons. To this day we still have many fond memories of the happy times that we were able to share with Dad.

During Dad's last years on earth, two sons were married and they were blessed with two grandsons and one granddaughter. Since his death, four more sons have married and two more grandsons born. The remaining five sons are still at home.

Dad's services for the church and for God were as follows (these figures are approximate, as accurate records are not available). He preached 459 sermons, married 48 couples, conducted 17 funerals, and held The Last Supper 35 times. He served at 16 baptisms and brought 243 people to Christ through baptism.

Bishop William Fehr also had the pleasure of giving the opening sermon at two new churches and he held elections for two teachers, one in Ontario and one in Seminole, Texas.

Source:

Biographies of Our Late Leaders in Histories of the Mennonite Churches in Essex and Kent Counties (Essex and Kent Mennonite Historical Association, Leamington, Ont., 1995), pages 139-140.

The Matriarch



Katharina Unger was born in 1876 in Grünfeld, West Reserve, Manitoba, to Peter A. Elias and Katharina Martens, RGB 248-1. Her first husband was Herman Neufeld who died in 1903. In 1905 she married Heinrich Unger of Neuenburg, where she lived until she died in 1966.

The matriarch Katharina Unger represents the courageous and noble women of the Old Colony people whose story has yet to be told.

Katharina was the grandmother of Henry Unger; Crystal City, Man., former MCC worker. Photo by George Sawatzky, Winkler, Manitoba. Courtesy of Pres., No. 14, page 35/ Pres., No. 16, page 58.



Bishop William Fehr (1935-89) served the Old Colony Mennonite Church of Ontario.



Mrs. Katherine Fehr.

Part Four: Congregations

Old Colony Mennonite Church in Manitoba

“Old Colony Mennonite Church in Manitoba,” by Rev. Abraham E. Rempel,
R.R.1, Box 551, Group 40, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1, Minister of the Old Colony Church.

Introduction

I was born in 1942 and therefore have not witnessed any of the events in the 1920s and 30s. The information contained in this report has been derived from written sources and from individuals, some of whom witnessed some of the events. I therefore cannot guarantee that all the information is accurate, and take no responsibility for errors.

Today there are seven Old Colony Congregations or Gemeinden in various parts of Canada. At the time of the migration to Mexico in the 1920s there were three--one in Manitoba and two in Saskatchewan.

I will refer to these as “Old Colony” even though the name of these communities prior to the move to Mexico was officially registered as “Reinländer”. Nonetheless, they were referred to as the “Old Colony Gemeinde” in common parlance because they came from the Chortitz Colony, the first and oldest Mennonite settlement in Imperial Russia. The reorganized Gemeinde in 1936 was officially registered as “The Old Colony Church”.

The Early Years.

When the move took place from Russia in the 1870s, the Gemeinde in Manitoba was the first to be established in 1875 under the leadership of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. The Gemeinde in the Saskatoon area (Hague-Osler) was established in 1895 and the one at Swift Current in 1905, so that dream did not last very long, especially for the Saskatchewan churches.

About two-thirds of the members from the Manitoba Gemeinde moved to Mexico, also all of the clergy, so that nobody remained to keep the church in operation. The general feeling of those moving was that the ones who stayed behind were “black sheep”. So the “Reinländer Gemeinde” ceased to exist in Manitoba, at least officially. The same thing happened in the Swift Current area, that church ceased to function. However in the Saskatoon area, the church managed to stay in operation, even though the Aeltester also moved. Some of the ministers, however, remained behind to continue.

Saskatchewan.

A few comments about the Saskatchewan situation, as it ties in with our Manitoba history. The Hague-Osler Gemeinde was the only Old Colony congregation in Canada to stay in operation. It, however, struggled in its ef-



A host of two-bottom plows and tractors were brought along to Mexico from Canada in 1922. This wagon, plow and tractor belonged to delegate David Rempel, Schönendorf. Photo and caption courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 63.

forts, since it was difficult to provide the necessary services to its members in the field of communion and baptism. Jacob Enns, who went to “Jugend Unterricht” had to wait two years before he could be baptized.

It was told that Aeltester Wiens occasionally came from Mexico to provide these ordinances. Since there was no Old Colony Aeltester in Canada, it did not give the Manitoba group much possibility to reorganize.

Two Old Colony members of Saskatchewan, Abram Wall and Johann Loeppky started to work on full re-establishment of the Old Colony Church in Saskatchewan. They met with Aeltester C. Hamm of the Bergthaler Church to ask for assistance. It was agreed to have a meeting with some of the remaining members of the church to explore this possibility. Several brethren from Manitoba also attended this meeting. The meeting was held on March 20, 1930 with Bishop Hamm of the Bergthaler Church officiating.

An election was held for Aeltester and Rev. Johann Loeppky of the Osler area was elected as Aeltester for the church. This Gemeinde then officially took on the name “Old-Colony Mennonite Church”. Their M.L.A. had sug-

gested to them that they should use this name since they came from the “old” Colony in Russia. So once again, there was an Old Colony Aeltester in Canada, who was also accessible to Manitoba. This also gave Manitoba an avenue for possible reestablishment.

Manitoba.

Now getting back to the Manitoba situation: first of all, the church facilities. The one in Reinland, the oldest one (being the first Mennonite worship house built in western Canada), was sold to the Rüssländer Gemeinde (later the Blumenortler Gemeinde). The one in Blumengart eventually was owned by the Hutterites. Others were sold for various purposes.

The worship house in the village of Chortitz, W.R., was the only one that remained in the hands of the Old Colony people, or was available to them to use for worship services. Apparently the Sirlucks who were Jewish purchased most or maybe all of the land surrounding Chortitz. Mr. Jacob Heide then purchased the church and the property from the Sirlucks, for the purpose that the church could be used for worship services, if so desired. He owned the building and the property until



Circa, 1918. This is how most of the Old Koloniers in Manitoba did their fall plowing, with a four-horse team and a two-bottom plow. In this photograph we see the sons of Peter Friesens in Reinland, Manitoba Johann Friesen, Abraham Froese and Heinrich Froese, the latter later resident in Blumenort, Campo 22, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc. This is the quality of Mennonite model farmers which the Mexican government gained in the 1920s. Photo and caption courtesy of Peter Rempel, editor, 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 63.

the church reorganized and then donated it to the Old Colony Church.

Apparently he purchased the building and a three acre property for \$400.00. During the 1930s the church building was locked and Mr. Sirluck was surprised that it was locked. He had said a church should always be open so the people could come there to pray, especially to pray for rain in the 1930s. Some people believed that even the weather patterns had changed on account of the move to Mexico. There were three years when there was not enough snow on the ground to make a sleigh track or "Schlaeden Bone" and many believed this was because of the move.

Interim Pastoral Care.

As already mentioned, about one-third of the membership remained in Manitoba. Some probably moved later and some moved back from Mexico. It was difficult for the remaining members to reorganize since many were still considering a move to Mexico, or at least had the idea high in their mind. Some were somewhat concerned that the Old Colony Gemeinden in Mexico would react



A stallion. Prime example of one of the large powerful horses which the Old Koloniers brought with them, which were unknown in Mexico. Photo by A. Redekop. Photo courtesy of Schmiedehaus, Die Altkolonie-Mennoniten im Mexiko, page 62.

unfavourably if they formed a new church. Also there was no Old Colony Aeltester in Canada.

So many, or most of them, attended the Sommerfelder worship services which were similar to what theirs had been. My mother told me that two ministers had come back from Mexico for a visit, and held some services here for the people. They had also tried to convince more to move to Mexico. They were Rev. Jacob Loewen and Rev. Jacob Giesbrecht. My mother also related that Aeltester Johann Friesen had come back at least once and held communion services here.

I have also been told that some of the Sommerfelder ministers, Rev. Isaac Hoepfner, William Falk, Isaac Fehr, George Froese and Peter Dyck held services in the Old Colony worship house in Chortitz. Funeral services were usually conducted by the Sommerfelder ministers. Most of the young people joined the Sommerfelder Church or went there to Jugend Unterricht (young peoples, Catechism and baptism).

My mother said that one year there had been two benches full of boys and two benches full of girls that had gone to Jugend Unterricht in the Sommerfeld Church in Reinland, where most or all of the parents had been from the Old Colony Church.

In 1930 Rev. Johann Loepky was elected and ordained for Aeltester in Saskatchewan for the Old Colony Church. He then came to Manitoba, once or twice a year to serve with communion. He also held baptismal and wedding services here.

During this time, services were also held in private homes, including in my wife's grandparent's home in Hochfeld. My wife remembers there was a pulpit which could be used by placing it on a table. It was in the attic of the grandparent's home. This pulpit was probably used at the time when services were held in private homes.

Reorganization.

"Bruderschaften" were held to see whether

the Manitoba Church could again reorganize. The key people behind this drive were Jacob Froese of Reinfeld, Jacob Rempel of Blumenort, A.A. Hiebert of Hochfeld, J. Kauenhofen of Friedensruh, Peter Klassen of Blumenfeld, George Elias of Blumenfeld, John Thiessen of Chortitz, and others.

A. N. Hiebert, son of A. A. Hiebert, remembers attending such a "Bruderschaft", led by Jacob Froese. Many people envisioned Jacob Froese as a capable person to re-organize and lead the church. On June 25, 1936 the first clergy elections were held for the new church, by Bishop Loepky who was also here to serve with communion. At the first election Jacob Rempel, Jacob Froese and Peter Harms were elected. Only Jacob Froese was ordained on June 28 according to my records. Peter Friesen was elected deacon.

November 10, 1936, another ministerial election was held where Abram Janzen, Peter Zacharias and Jacob Penner were elected. Peter Zacharias and Jacob Penner were ordained on November 12, 1936. On June 10, 1937 another election was held where Johann Friesen and Peter Thiessen were elected. Johann Friesen was ordained on November 4, 1937. On January 24, 1939 Jacob Goertzen of Reinfeld, Jacob Goertzen of Chortitz, and David Driedger were elected. David Driedger was ordained as deacon on March 9, 1939. These were the elections and ordinations in the 1930s.

The denomination was now registered as the "Old Colony Mennonite Church of Manitoba", to coincide with the name of the Saskatchewan church.

In singing it was decided to use the

A slightly revised version of the article by Rev. Abram E. Rempel, Winkler, on the Old Colony Church of Manitoba, was published in the *Mennonitische Post*, February 4, 2000, pages 14 and 15, under the title, "Die Altkoloniegemeinde in the 1920er und 1930er Jahren."

“Solenzeze” (melody by numbers), the same melodies as used by the Sommerfelder Church. Thus the “Oleveze” was discontinued in Manitoba.

After the church had reorganized some more members moved back from Mexico, and they were accepted in the church, even though Aeltester Isaac Dyck of Mexico had felt that this church had no right to just accept them back into this new church. The first funeral of the new church was that of Abram Bueckert of Chortitz.

Worship Houses.

Now getting back to the worship houses. The Chortitz church was available for immediate use and was donated to the Old Colony Church by Jacob Heide. It was originally dedicated October 21, 1881. It was replaced in 1967 with a new church with the inauguration on November 12, 1967. The old church building was later moved to the Steinbach museum. Bishop Froese passed away in the winter of 1968 and both buildings were used for his funeral.

The Rosetown church was inaugurated on November 7, 1937. It was replaced with a new building on July 28, 1963. The old church building was used for Sunday School classes. Later the new sanctuary was moved onto a basement, and the old church sold and moved to Neuenberg where it was converted to a home.

The Blumenfeld church was built in the summer of 1938 at a cost of \$800.00. The lot was donated by George Elias. It was dedicated October 20, 1938.

The Reinfeld church was the former school and remodelled into a church. It was rebuilt in 1957 and inaugurated on September 29, 1957. These are still the four locations where church services are held today in the Old Colony Gemeinde.

Relations with Mexico.

How did this new Old Colony Church relate to the one in Mexico?

Not always very well at first. The Gemeinde in Manitoba was willing and open to work with the church in Mexico. However, the Gemeinde in Mexico was not always interested in having a good relationship with the church in Manitoba. When some of the members from Mexico moved back to Canada they were unable to get releases or transfers from the church in Mexico.

The Gemeinde in Manitoba did accept these people into the church without a transfer and without a certificate of good standing. Their acceptance was approved on a faith basis. They would ask the person to affirm that they were in good standing in the church, and if so, were accepted on that basis.

If they were “im Utschluss” and the reason was because of rubber tires, the “Utschluss” was not recognized as valid, and they were still accepted. A number of times a letter was written to the Gemeinde in Mexico on the matter and that he or she was

sorry that they had disobeyed the Gemeinde. Usually no response was received.

Since there are a number of colonies in Mexico that are allowing the use of rubber tires, pickups and tractors, our relationship with these colonies has improved over the years.

To date no Old Colony minister from Manitoba has preached in an Old Colony Church in Mexico. I have ministered in the Reinländer Churches in the Swift Colony; these used to be the Old Colony worship houses. But no Old Colony minister from Manitoba has presented a sermon in a worship house actively used by the Old Colony Church in Mexico.

However, I have been sitting with the ministers of the Old Colony church at a funeral in a machine shed. I have been sitting with the ministers at a funeral in the Grünthal Church in Manitoba Plan. I have had good visits with many of the Old Colony ministers in Mexico on an individual basis. I might add that I have also had several services in the Altenheim by Cuahtemoc and this has been much appreciated.

Ministerial Associations.

The ministers from the six Canadian and the Seminole Churches are welcome to serve and preach in the Manitoba worship services.

The ministerials of the Canadian and Seminole churches have met twice for a time of discussion of mutual problems, Bible exposition and spiritual development, where all were invited. The first such assembly was held in Chortitz in the Winkler area, Manitoba, March 2-3, 1994, and the second was held in Ontario, March 21-22, 1997, hosted by the Wheatley and Aylmer congregations.

Leadership.

Jakob Penner from the Morden area was elected as Aeltester on November 22, 1959, to replace Jakob Froese as Aeltester of the Manitoba Old Colony Church.

Jakob Penner died in 1974 and was replaced as Aeltester by John P. Wiebe from Hochfeld, south of Winkler, Manitoba. Bishop Wiebe has provided the spiritual leadership of the Church to the present day. He was ordained by Aeltester Julius Enns, from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Sunday School.

The Old Colony Church in Manitoba has operated Sunday Schools since the 1940s. The classes are held during the regular worship services. The main languages for worship and for Sunday School are High and Low German.

Teaching materials include the Bible, Bible Stories (Biblische Geschichten), catechism and other materials.

A young peoples' evening (Jugend Abend) is held at the Chortitz church every Wednesday with Bible study, singing and teaching.

Schools.

Many of the Old Colony children in Manitoba attend public schools. Many also do home school-

ing using the Christian Light Education (CLE) curriculum. Others attend three private schools operated by church affiliated committees consisting of Old Colony, Reinländer and Sommerfelder people.

The Valley Mennonite Academy is located in Chortitz and has about 100 students. The Grace Valley Academy is located in Gnadenfeld, and has an enrolment of 40 students. These two schools work together on many mutual concerns. They use the Christian Light Education curriculum materials from Harrisonburg, Virginia. The third school, the Prairie Mennonite Academy is situated four miles south of Plum Coulee, Manitoba, and has around 60 students. Some of the teachers have Provincial teaching qualifications and others have taken the CLE program. Parents volunteers are also substantially involved.

The Church Today.

The ministerial of the church in Manitoba consists of seven ministers, one deacon and the Bishop. The baptised membership as of the turn of the century was 1070 with a total of 2125 souls.

The Old Colony Church has four worship houses at Chortitz, Rosetown, Blumenfeld and Reinland, all in the Winkler-Altona area.

Each church has from four to seven Vorsänger. The “sole Wiese” is mainly used.

Conclusion.

May God grant that as we look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and build on these foundations that others have laid.

Reprinted from Preservings, No. 16, pages 38-40, with some additions.

About the Author:

Abe Rempel grew up in Neuenberg and was a grain and dairy farmer in the Neuenberg area. He was elected as a minister of the Old Colony Church in Manitoba in 1975. Abe Rempel and his wife presently reside in Winkler, Manitoba.



The author Abe E. Rempel, Winkler.

Hague Osler Old Colony Mennonite Church

“Hague Osler Old Colony Mennonite Church in the Old West Saskatchewan,”

by Leonard Doell, Box 364, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, S0K 0A0.

Introduction.

At the turn of the century Mennonites came to the Saskatchewan Valley full of hopes and dreams for their future and the future of their children. They saw tremendous potential in the Hague-Osler area where they would acquire land, set up villages as they liked, conduct their own schools and live in simple obedience to God.

The Saskatchewan Valley was known to these settlers as the “Old West”. The following is the story of the Old Colony Church, a story of a people who tried their best to live out their faith and some of the struggles they had in doing so.

Beginnings.

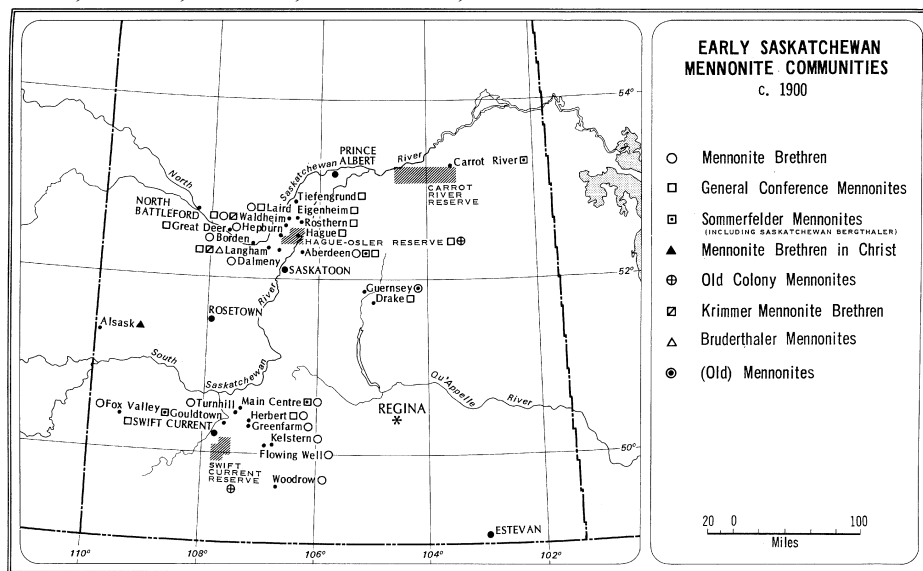
In the spring of 1891, a group of Old Colony settlers headed for Gleichen, Alberta, under the leadership of Rev. Gerhard Petkau. Part of this group, together with Rev. Petkau returned to Manitoba due to the dry farming conditions in Alberta, while the rest of the group headed for Rosthern. The group that moved to Rosthern consisted of 11 families, who moved without the blessing of Rev. Petkau which put their church membership in jeopardy.

In the spring of 1892, a group of recent immigrants from Russia and some from the Manitoba West Reserve settled at Rosthern. Among them were Deacon Heinrich Bergen of the Bergthaler Church and Cornelius Epp who had come from Russia in 1891. During this group's first year in Saskatchewan they discussed which bishop should be asked to serve them communion and baptism. Deacon Bergen suggested asking Aeltester Johann Funk who had just formed the new Bergthaler Mennonite Church on the West Reserve in early 1892. Cornelius Epp favoured Aeltester David Stoesz who was serving the Sommerfelder church on the West Reserve at this time.

Part of this decision depended on the 11 families within this group who were excommunicated members of the Manitoba Reinlander Church. They probably made up the majority of this Rosthern group and had come there instead of following their minister Rev. Gerhard Petkau who had settled at Gleichen, Alberta. Being without a minister they decided to write Aeltester Heinrich Epp of the Chortitza Colony in Russia for advice to start a church and to help elect leaders. Epp replied that he was ill and could not come. He advised, however, to steer clear of Aeltester Johann Wiebe of the Reinlander Mennonite Church and rather to write Aeltester David Stoesz for assistance.

Two letters were written to Manitoba, the first to the Bergthaler on the West Reserve to request ministers. The second was an anonymous letter written to Aeltester Stoesz by another portion of the Rosthern group who did not approve of the first action (Note One).

For the years 1893 to 1895, Aeltester David



Early Saskatchewan Mennonite communities, and particularly the Old Colony Reserves at Rosthern and Swift Current, circa 1900. Map courtesy of Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786 to 1920*, page 319.

Stoesz served the Rosthern Community with communion and baptism. During this time he also led the ordination service for Rev. Cornelius Epp in 1893.

It seems likely that it was in the July of 1895 visit when Deacon Heinrich Bergen told Stoesz that he would no longer be needed. The group could instead be served by the local Aeltester Peter Regier (General Conference at Tiefengrund). This church community had arrived from Prussia in 1893. Aeltester Stoesz then went home and wrote Rev. Cornelius Epp that he would not be going to Rosthern anymore. They could contact another Aeltester to serve them.

By this time, the influx of a large group of Old Colony members and leadership had also brought new influences to bear upon the situation. After deciding not to return to Rosthern again, Aeltester Stoesz wrote Aeltester Johann Wiebe of the Reinländer (Old Colony) Church asking if he would take the Rosthern group under his wing since they were without an Aeltester. Stoesz probably felt that the Bergthaler group at Rosthern could join the Old Colony group there. Johann Wiebe however did not respond to the situation before 1897 and many of the excommunicated Old Colony members at Rosthern joined the Rosenorter Church (Note Two).

Organization, 1897.

In the spring of 1895, the first Old Colony settlers arrived at Hague, and settled in the village of Neuanlage. Rev. Peter Klassen who had been elected as an Old Colony Minister in Manitoba in 1880, joined this group. He not only served as minister but also as a Vorsänger and as the first German school teacher for the years 1895 to 1897. The first church services in

Neuanlage were held in the home of Rev. Peter Klassen and later in the log school house with the sod roof that was built in the centre of the village (Note Three).

The Old Colony people began having church services at the Rosthern area approximately 1897, in the home of Jacob Friesens. Mr. Friesen's first wife had died and in November 1897 he married Helena Klassen, the daughter of Rev. Peter Klassen of Neuanlage. Her father then began having services for the Old Colony settlers there. Those attending services were: Jacob Neudorfs, Johan Bartschs, Heinrich Bartschs, Johan Neufelds, Jacob Friesens, Abraham Dycks, Isbrand Friesens, Herman Ungers, Peter Siemens, Johan Wiens and Isaac Fehrs (Note Four).

Aeltester Johann Wiebe also began to make regular trips to the Old West. As the official representative, he came to the Hague-Osler area particularly to conduct baptismal and communion services. It became too troublesome for the aged Aeltester to travel west continually so he decided to have another Aeltester elected.

In July 1900, Rev. Jacob Wiens was ordained as Aeltester of the Old Colony Mennonite Church at Neuanlage by Aeltester Johann Wiebe of Manitoba. Wiens, who had been elected as a minister of the church in Manitoba on October 23, 1888 came to Saskatchewan on May 7, 1899 and homesteaded near Gruenfeld. He actually resided in the village of Neuanlage, some distance from his homestead. He led the Saskatchewan group both during its greatest period of material development and through its most agonizing years. Wiens bore the distinction of having been the first preacher to lead a church service in the Town of Hague. He served there several weeks in a tent erected for the settlers arriving in Hague in 1900 (Note Five).

Hague Osler Old Colony Mennonite Church

Aeltester Jacob and Helena (W all) Wiens had no children of their own but adopted two children in Manitoba. One was Franz Harder who later became an Old Colony Minister in Saskatchewan and the other was Maria Janzen who later married Wilhelm Friesen. Mrs. Wiens had a stroke in about 1910 and could not care for herself. Their home always had a Kjaeksche (maid) to help Aeltester Wiens care for his wife.

Aeltester Wiens not only served the community as the leader of the church but also as a self-taught veterinarian. He loved animals and knew many home remedies that were applied at a minimal cost.

In the fall of 1899, Rev. Peter Klassen, of Neuanlage wrote a letter to Aeltester Johann Wiebe in Manitoba requesting financial help in order to build a church. At the church's brotherhood meeting held on September 4, 1899, Aeltester Wiebe pleaded with the church to help their brethren in the West. "I have received a letter from brother Peter Klassen who is asking the whole church to help build a meeting house in order to teach and to instruct everyone according to God's word. They do not have money and this has to be paid for. The harvest was poor and they write, damaged by frost and disease. Therefore we ask all of you, be charitable and compassionate and open your hands and give gladly for much has been given to us again by our merciful God and Father. Therefore God likes to have a cheerful giver and God loves cheerful givers. And if God loves cheerful givers who give to those who are needy, will He then not love cheerful givers who give for a house of prayer where His name is honoured, His kingdom is proclaimed and a house is built for His honour? I am asking all village leaders to make this known to everyone and to bring the donations to our Vorsteher Franz Froese as soon as possible. They are planning a building 30 ft wide by 60 ft long." (Note Six).

A church building was constructed in the northwest corner of the village of Neuanlage in 1900. The church was built by volunteer labourers like Rev. Heinrich D. Martens with leadership provided by carpenters Abram Giesbrecht Sr. of Neuanlage and his brother David who lived north of the village. These carpenters also built the German School in the village.

The village of Edenberg, across the river, was established in 1902. Church services for Old Colony people were held in the granary of Jacob Unrau Sr., where logs that had been cut were used as benches. The Old Colony Church was built here in approximately 1904 (Note Seven).

In the village of Neuhorst, church services

were first held in the home of David Braun Sr. A church building was built here in 1907 by volunteer labour under the direction of Isaac Loepky Sr. It was dedicated on November 17, 1907.

Church services were held in the German schools in villages where no church building existed. In order to meet the needs of their growing church more ministers were elected. In 1908, the leadership of the Old Colony Church consisted of Aeltester Jacob Wiens, Rev.

allowed ministers certain days off and in event of sickness or other interruptions, provided for a standby.

House of Worship.

The church buildings were unpainted with shutters over the windows. These were opened Sunday mornings by the church caretaker and closed after the morning service. The caretakers in the Neuanlage church were Abram Zacharias Sr. and Isaac Wall Sr. In Neuhorst one of the earliest caretakers was Peter Wiebe Sr. and in Edenberg Jacob E. Wolfe served as caretaker for many years.

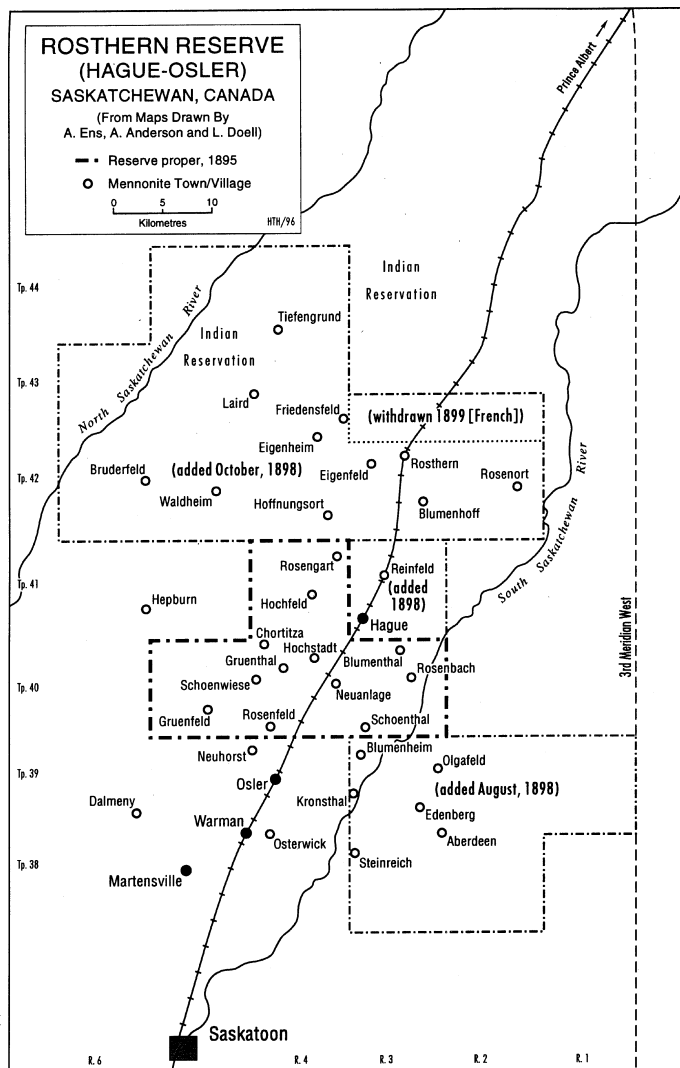
In his history of the village of Neuanlage, Jacob G. Janzen describes the interior of the Old Colony Church: "The church had a front and a side entrance. The main entrance was at the front, used by the preachers, Vorsänger and women who never entered the church through the side door. We boys on the other hand never entered the church through the front entrance. Inside by the main entrance was a short hallway leading to the sanctuary. To the right of the hallway was a nursery. To the left was the preachers and Vorsängers' gathering room before the service. It was also this room in which the preachers gathered on Thursdays for planning and discussing church related events in Neuanlage and other villages."

"This little room had a second door leading into the auditorium. The preachers always entered the auditorium through this door. This meant the preachers and only the preachers used this door. No one else ever entered or left through that door, except maybe the caretaker after or before the morning service. When it was time for the service to begin, the Vorsänger left the preacher's room through the hallway door and entered the auditorium through the main auditorium entrance."

"On the preacher's door was a small window with a curtain over it. The curtain served as a signal to the Vorsänger. If someone had

something to discuss with the preachers it was done during the singing and the curtain remained over the window until the preachers were ready to enter the auditorium. The Vorsänger kept singing as long as the curtain fully covered the window. When they saw the curtain slide back, uncovering most of the window, they finished the verse of the song they had begun, ended the singing and waited for the preachers to enter through the door."

"A hush came over the congregation as the preachers entered. If the bishop was present he led the procession, halted near the pulpit and



Village map of the Hague Osler Reserve. Courtesy of Wm Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas, page 75. For a more complete village map, see Leonard Doell, editor, Hague Osler, page 25.

Johan Wall, Rev. Peter Klassen of Neuanlage, Rev. Peter H. Klassen of Neuhorst, Rev. Abram Wall of Edenberg, Rev. Peter Wiens who farmed near Gruenthal and Deacon Wilhelm Wiebe of Gruenthal. The church consisted then of 970 members.

None of the Old Colony Churches had its own ministers, all of them served the church on a rotation basis. These ministers were elected by the members of the church and any male in the church could be nominated. They served the church without payment or compensation. There were usually more ministers than churches which

Part Four: Congregations

said, 'The peace of the Lord be with us all, Amen.' and continued to the pulpit or if one of the other preachers was to bring the message, he sat down on the bench near the pulpit with the other preachers."

"The church had no platform. Instead the pulpit was raised to two-three step stairways, one on the right side of the pulpit for the preachers and one on the left side for the Vorsänger, each leading to a long bench. These benches were made out of planed boards with no leans or cushions, the same as all the other benches in the church. In front of the preachers and Vorsänger benches on the other side of the pulpit was a waist high dividing wall with a sloping top on the inside to serve as a book stand" (Note Eight).

There were generally four to five Vorsänger in one congregation. One of these men would call out the first line and number of the song. He would also start the song, without musical accompaniment, whereupon the other Vorsänger and the entire congregation would join in.

Royal Commission, 1908.

In 1908, several former members of the Old Colony Church agitated until their cries led to a Royal Commission of Inquiry to look into private school education. The inquiry was held in December 1908 at the Warman Schoolhouse. The Old Colony Church had to defend its case for private school education to the government, while several disgruntled petitioners, all of whom had been banned from the church felt their rights had been violated. They had sent their children to public schools and operated businesses in towns and purchased vehicles; which were all against the wishes of the church.

Economic sanctions which were part of the banning were causing a loss of business for some businessmen in the group namely: Jacob J. Friesen and Isaac P. Friesen of Rosthern and Isaac P. Miller. Aeltester Jacob Wiens justified

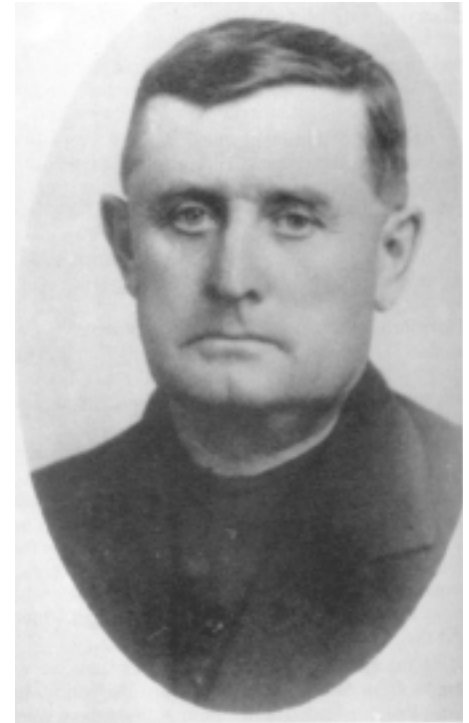


Aeltester Jakob Wiens (1855-1932), Neuanlage, Hague, Sask., son of Rev. Jakob Wiens Sr. (1807-89), Reinland, W.R., Manitoba. Jakob Wiens Jr. moved to Mexico in the fall of 1926 settling in Durango where he served as the first Aeltester of the Old Colony Gemeinde. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 580.

the churches actions for excommunicating him. Wiens chastised Friesen for being disobedient to the wishes of the church, when Friesen upon his baptism promised to be faithful to the teachings of the Old Colony community (Note Nine).

Earthquake, 1909.

An earthquake hit the Hague-Osler area on Saturday, May 15, 1909 at 9:15 in the evening. The *Saskatoon Phoenix* reported that western Canada had been given a shake for the space of



Rev. Johann P. Wall, Hochfeld, Hague, Sask. One of the delegates to inspect land in South America in 1919 and Mexico in 1920. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 580.

a minute. The tremor was felt chiefly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan but no injuries were reported. Hundreds of people in Saskatoon noticed nothing unusual, scores of others recalled experiencing a wobbly sensation when they learned that an actual earth tremor had actually occurred, while hundreds more distinctly felt the shock and those who recognized its meaning stood in suspense at the awesomeness of the moment. The town of Rosthern was affected fairly seriously and particularly in the higher buildings.



House barn of Franz Letkeman in Hochfeld, later owned by sons Dave and John built in 1906. The Letkeman housebarn is one of only several still in existence in Saskatchewan. Courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 191. According to L. Doell, Mennonite Homesteaders on the Hague Osler (Saskatoon, 1999), page 526, the housebarn was built by Rev. Johann P. Wall and sold to Franz Letkeman when the Walls moved to Mexico. The housebarn is now part of the Hague Museum.

Mr. & Mrs. A.W. Hutchinson who had quarters in the Dawson Block, a two-story brick building, thought it was going to pieces and rushed into the street. People in the Queen's and Occidental Hotel felt it badly, persons in the second and third stories say the building heaved up several inches, (Note Ten).

Dick Braun recalls his grandmother Mrs. David Braun (nee Aganetha Loeppky) of Neuhorst talking about the earthquake. She was sitting in her home in Neuhorst when the dishes began to rattle in her cupboard and her canary cage began to sway back and forth. A baby cradle began to rock and the sewing machine moved back and forth across the floor. Her experience was typical of many prairie people who experienced this unusual occurrence. In scores of homes, windows rattled, doors shook, pictures swayed on the walls and dishes and glassware clinked and clattered restlessly, as though houses were being shaken by some giant unseen hand.

A German school teacher at Grünthal thought that there was a lesson to be learned from this earthquake. He quoted Luke 13:3-5 which calls its readers to repentance before they perish eternally. He also quoted Psalms 18:8 where the earth quaked and rocked and the mountains' foundations shuddered at the presence of God. Through this earthquake he saw God earnestly speaking to humankind, asking them to look seriously at the state of their spiritual lives (Note Eleven).

Strife, 1910.

In the winter of 1910, Johan Driedger had a store at Clark's Crossing but business was very slow. He announced one day in the Osler area that he was going to bring a load of goods to Osler to sell for a good price. Driedger was lucky, for the weather was favourable and people came from everywhere to buy. Before long Driedger had sold his load. Then he told the people he would again bring a load to Osler and would advertise beforehand. Many were waiting for the day. The day came and Driedger came with two loads instead of one, he drove the 18 miles in a snowstorm but the customers did not come. He had made the trip in time. He owned a vacant hardware store in Osler and he stored the goods there in order to sell them at a better time. Mr. Jacob J. Heinrichs owned a store next to Driedgers which burned down during the same night and Driedger's store burned down with all of the merchandise (Note Twelve).

Johan Driedger and Jacob Heinrichs were both excommunicated from the Old Colony Church when they applied for fire insurance under the Mennonite Brandordnung (fire insurance organization). The fire insurance did not

cover Mennonites who operated businesses in local towns but could only do so in the villages. Contact with non-Mennonites with different values was discouraged. The ban from the church was very serious, for no church member

Meighen granted assurances that he would simply appoint a counsel for defense in the event of further lawsuits (Note Fourteen).

Johan Driedger was at odds with the Old Colony Church for many years. Since he was excommunicated he was not allowed to enter the sanctuary of the church, during the service. He was allowed to sit in the lobby of the church where he could still take part. If he did appear, the congregation would all leave the church and he was left there alone. Shortly before his death in 1920, he resolved this conflict with the church and was able to die in peace (Note Fifteen).

Reorganization, 1930.

The migration to Mexico took with it the majority of the leaders in the Old Colony church. Two ministers Rev. Johann Loeppky and Rev. Abram Wall and Deacon Wilhelm Wiebe remained in Canada.

Aeltester Jacob Wiens had moved to Mexico in the fall of 1926 but returned in the spring of 1927 and 1928, in order to conduct baptisms as well as communion. There were no baptisms or communion in 1929. In the spring of 1929, Aeltester Wiens left for Canada with the intention of serving communion and conducting baptisms to his members there. Soon after he left for Canada his wife had become very ill and some men from the village caught up with Aeltester Wiens and he went back to Mexico.

Aeltester Wiens never returned to Canada. He did not want to elect an elder in Saskatchewan, because as far as he was concerned the Old Colony Church had moved to Mexico. Two girls from Neuhorst had gone through catechism in 1929 with the intention of being baptized that spring but were not

baptized because the elder was not able to come (Note Sixteen).

The Old Colony group that remained in Saskatchewan decided to elect their own elder in the spring of 1930. The two ministers that remained were the candidates for elder. A vote was taken which included the Old Colony people in Manitoba, Swift Current and Hague areas. On March 16, 1930, Rev. Johan Loeppky was elected as Aeltester in a service conducted by the Bergthaler Aeltester Cornelius Hamm.

The election results were as follows: Johann Loeppky - 151 votes from Hague, 67 votes from Manitoba and 8 votes from Swift Current, total 226 votes; Abram Wall - 25 votes from Hague, 13 votes from Manitoba and 3 votes from Swift Current, total 41.

On March 20, 1930, Aeltester Cornelius



The Wall/Letkeman house, Saskatchewan, at Hochfeld, southwest of Hague, "is unusual as it survives almost unchanged since it was built, even retaining the original furnishings. In this internal view can be seen the kitchen door opening directly into the stock barn." Photo courtesy of Bird and Kobayshe, A Splendid Harvest Germanic Folk and Decorative Arts in Canada (Toronto, 1981), page 198.

could deal with Driedger or Heinrichs, nor could their families have any dealings with them.

Jacob Heinrichs became bitter and took Aeltester Jacob Wiens to court in 1914, asking for compensation for his losses. He claimed \$34,200.00 in damages and loss of orders and stock caused by his ex-communication (Note Thirteen). After two years of legal battles the court case ended on September 21, 1916. Mr. Heinrichs was awarded \$1,000.00 for conspiracy resulting in economic loss. Aeltester Jacob Wiens the defendant did not appear in court, stating that it was wrong for a Christian to take another to court in order to resolve their differences. The Old Colony leaders appealed to the Federal Department of Justice for protection, for they felt that they could not defend themselves in court. Solicitor General Arthur



Rev. Johann P. Wall in later years. He settled in Durango, Mexico, where he was an outstanding leader. He served as a negotiator with the Mexican government in 1935 after the closure of schools. Photo courtesy of A. Warkentin, editor, *Gäste und Fremdlinge* (Steinbach, 1987), page 9.

Hamm ordained Rev. Johann Loeppky as Aeltester. The re-organized church took on as the official name of the church "The Old Colony Mennonite Church". Following this service, Aeltester Loeppky came to Manitoba once or twice a year to serve with baptismal and communion services.

A Sommerfelder minister from Herbert wrote a letter to Aeltester Cornelius Hamm on April 28, 1930 expressing his joy that the Old Colony people now had an Aeltester again, "May God's blessing be with him (Loeppky), that is my wish and prayer to God. I sensed it keenly two years ago when we were at your place and saw the nice big flock which was without elder, not completely alone for they still had the loving teachers who nourished them spiritually and sought to continue everything to the best of their abilities. But when we, I and our dear elder, returned home from your place for the first time I appealed to the Lord many a time from the bottom of my heart, Lord if it is your will grant that the flock will get a leader soon..." (Note Seventeen).

Aeltester Johan Loeppky was born in Manitoba on January 21, 1882, to Johan and Maria (Martens) Loeppky. Aeltester Loeppky's father was killed in 1882, the same year that he was born. His father had tied the reins of two horses around his hand. The horses took off in two different directions and tore him apart. Aeltester Loeppky's mother then married Isaac M. Dyck in 1883. Through this marriage, Aeltester Johann Loeppky had a half-brother, Isaak M. Dyck, who became the Aeltester of the Old Colony Church in Mexico.

Johann Loeppky was elected as a minister in 1909. In July 1909, his first wife Anna Neudorf



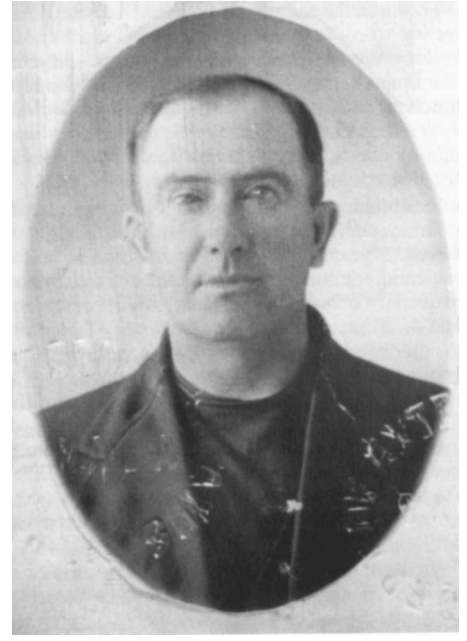
Rev. Peter H. Klassen, Neuanlage, Neuhorst, Hague, Sask. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 581.

died and in September he was married to Helena Janzen. It was a big adjustment for Helena, since she had never been married before and now she was married, the mother of four children and her husband just elected as a minister

In 1921, Aeltester Loeppky was delegate for the church to Mexico but did not make the move there at that time. His ministry was greatly appreciated by the Mennonite settlements that were created in the 1930s. He traveled to many outlying districts to conduct services, marriages, funerals, baptisms and communions. Many of these settlements were in the northern part of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba.

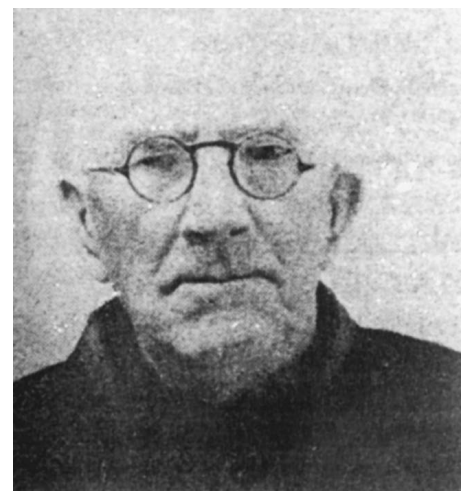
The people who remained in the Hague-Osler area and did not move to Mexico, kept in contact with their relatives by letter, through the *Steinbach Post* and through visits. In the spring of 1931, it was reported that Aeltester Jacob Wiens was very sick and had not been able to preach but as of yet was unable to give up his position as Aeltester. On April 14, 1932, Aeltester Jacob Wiens died in Mexico at the age of 76 years. During the 43 years that he served the church as minister and Aeltester, he preached 1577 sermons, conducted 370 funerals, baptized 1396 souls, and officiated at 184 weddings. A funeral service was held for him in Saskatchewan, giving opportunity for Hague-Osler people the chance to pay last respects to their loving Aeltester. For the people of the Aberdeen area, they had to return home disappointed. Der Fischer wrote in the *Steinbach Post* on May 5, 1932, that due to low water the ferry could not operate and people were unable to cross.

In 1936, Aeltester Loeppky went to Manitoba and helped to reorganize the Old Colony church there. It was now obvious that many Old Colonists would not move to Mexico and there was



Rev. Johann Wall, Neuanlage, Hague, Sask. He was one of the delegates to South America for the Hague Osler Gemeinde in 1919. He died in Brazil, see Klaas Heide biography cf. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 581.

a distinct need to re-establish a church in Manitoba. The first clergy election took place on June 25, 1936, when three ministers and deacons were elected. Aeltester Loeppky returned to Manitoba where he presided over the



Rev. Franz F. Harder who moved from Neuanlage, to Mexico. He was raised by Aeltester Jakob Wiens. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 583.

ordination of the Aeltester Jacob Froese on November 14, 1937.

New Churches.

Aeltester Jacob Froese in turn also visited Mennonite settlements and helped to organize churches where he could. A large number of people from the Hague-Osler area had moved to Swan Plain, Saskatchewan (near Yorkton) in the 1930s. Rev. Abram Neufeld and Rev. Johan

Wall, both from Hochfeld, Saskatchewan, were ordained as ministers at Swan Plain by Aeltester Jacob Froese on October 30, 1939. A short time later Heinrich Friesen and Abram Klassen were also ordained as preachers at this settlement.

Aeltester Johan Loepky also made numerous trips to Swan Plain. He also served the churches in northern Alberta. He traveled to LaCrete in June of 1939 to conduct a baptismal service there. Aeltester Wilhelm P. Wiebe was ordained as Aeltester at LaCrete, Alberta on October 5, 1941. Aeltester Wiebe had moved to LaCrete from Blumenthal, Saskatchewan in 1937.

Aeltester Johann Loepky.

During the Second World War, Aeltester Loepky assisted many young men in their attempt to obtain exemption from military service. In some cases, this meant dealing with government agencies who were not very sympathetic to Mennonite beliefs on pacifism.

In the late 1940s, there was discussion in the Reserve about another move to Mexico. The shortage of land in the colony was one prime factor. The other concern was the Second World War which was still fresh in their minds, which saw many Mennonite boys enlist as soldiers. In 1946, Aeltester Loepky made a trip to Mexico to look at the land possibilities there. In 1947, delegates Jacob Wiebe and Johan B. Peters of Blumenheim traveled to Mexico to look at land. Aeltester Johann Loepky had an auction sale on September 10, 1948 and prepared to move. Included in the group were people from Burns Lake, BC, Sonningdale and Hague,

Saskatchewan. There were 2787 souls left in the church who remained in Saskatchewan, a total of 996 members.

On June 6, 1949, Aeltester Loepky returned to Saskatchewan to conduct baptisms in the Old Colony Church but returned in July. On February 23, 1950, he returned to Saskatchewan for good. He and his wife came back to the Manitoba border with Aaron Unruhs and then took the train to Osler. They settled in the village of Neuhorst. On August 20, 1950, Aeltester Johann Loepky died in a Saskatoon Hospital. He served the church for 40 years, 8 months and 15 days as a minister and Aeltester. During this time he preached 2103 sermons, he baptized 797, he conducted 198 weddings and 549 funerals.

Aeltester Abraham Loewen.

Aeltester Jacob Froese and Rev. Jacob Penner came from Manitoba in 1951 to hold an election for Aeltester to replace Johann Loepky. On February 21, 1951, Rev. Abram Loewen was elected and then ordained on February 22

by Aeltester Jacob Froese. Aeltester Loewen was born on Christmas Day in 1898 to Jacob and Katharina Loewen. He came to Saskatchewan as a child and grew up in the village of Neuanlage. He was married to Helena



The Ohms at Hague, Sask. Rev. Abram Wall, Rev. Johann Wall, and Johann P. Klassen. Photo courtesy of Wm. Braun in Hague Osler, page 582.

Goertzen in 1919 but she passed away in March 1925, leaving Abram a widower with four children. He married for the second time in December 1925, to Maria Epp and were blessed with another 13 children. His second wife passed away on May 2, 1941. In 1943, he married Helena Wiebe and this marriage was blessed with another four children two of which died young.

In order to accommodate the Old Colony people who lived in the Kronsthal-Osterwick area, a church building was moved from Neuanlage. This building has once been the home of Rev. Johan Wall, the Old Colony minister who died in 1919, while looking for land for the Old Colony Church. Aeltester Abram Loewen dedicated this church at Kronsthal to the Lord's service on April 2, 1952, using as his Biblical text Psalms 116:12. This church was used by the community up until the late 1960s. In 1970 or 1971, it was moved to the town of Martensville where it has been used as an Old Colony Church.

Sunday School, 1942.

Sunday School in the Old Colony Church began in the village of Neuanlage. The General Conference Mennonite Church already had a Sunday School and their minister Rev. Johan Janzen Sr. began Sunday School services in the Neuanlage German School in about 1930. Old Colony leaders feared that their members would join the General Conference so it was stopped. Then he went to the homes of Peter Janzens and others and held Sunday School there. This only went on for a short time until Old Colony leaders brought it to an end. The real boost came when Rev. Peter Neudorf and Rev. Abram Wall Jr., saw a need for the Sunday School and began to organize it in the summer of 1942.

The first organized Sunday School was started on Sunday afternoons in the Neuanlage church. In the fall of 1942, the Sunday School was changed to Sunday mornings and held before the church service. With time it was moved into the ministers' room. When the ministers went into the church, their room was divided by curtains into Sunday School classes. After the children were finished in Sunday School they joined their parents in church. Some of the teachers who taught in Neuanlage were Peter B. Guenther, Mrs. Maria Klassen, Mrs. Maria Guenther, Peter Harder, George B. Guenther, Mrs. Mary Rempel, and Isaac Wiebe (Note Eighteen).

In about 1948, Jacob Froese who lived in the Steele school district began to teach Sunday School together with a Bergthaler, Aaron Reddekopp. The Mennonite Brethren from Hepburn had been working toward setting up a Sunday School in Neuhorst but Jacob Froese felt it was better if the Old Colony people had their own. A Sunday School was held in the Neuhorst village school for the first years.

One day, a few years later Jacob Froese went to the village store in Neuhorst and took a collection raising \$500.00 to build a Sunday School building. They got bricks for a footing and the lumber and started to build. This building was built on the northeast corner of the church yard, separate from the church. It was used for Sunday School and as an eating place for funerals for a number of years. Before going to the store, Jacob Froese had gone to see Aeltester Abram Loewen, who said he had waited many years for a Sunday School to be started and was thankful to see it going. Many children took part in the one at Steele school and later at Neuhorst. Mrs. Abram Wolfe (nee Helena Ens) and Jacob Froese started teaching the Sunday School in Neuhorst. Jacob Froese taught eight years before moving to LaCrete, Alberta (Note Nineteen).



Rev. Peter Wiens moved from Grünfeld, Sask., to Mexico. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 584.

Other teachers who taught in Neuhorst were Jacob W. Loeppky, Jacob Braun, Cornie Guenther, Johan Dyck, and Johan Froese. The Sunday School was conducted in German. The purpose of the Sunday School was to teach the children Bible stories and the German language, so that eventually they could make an easier transition from their Sunday School training to becoming members of the church. This Sunday School replaced the German private schools which had helped the children in the past to prepare for membership in the church.

In Blumenheim, the Sunday School began in the Old German School in 1949. The Old Colony people held services here every third Sunday. In 1949, the Bergthaler and Old Colony began to have services in the same building, trading off every Sunday. Rev. Abram Buhler spoke his first sermon in Blumenheim after his ordination as Aeltester in 1949. The Sunday School was held before the church service for the first half year and then moved to a connected building. Rev. Peter Neudorf from Neuanlage came to organize the Sunday School in Blumenheim. Abram G. Janzen began teaching Sunday School in 1949 and taught for many years afterwards (Note Twenty).

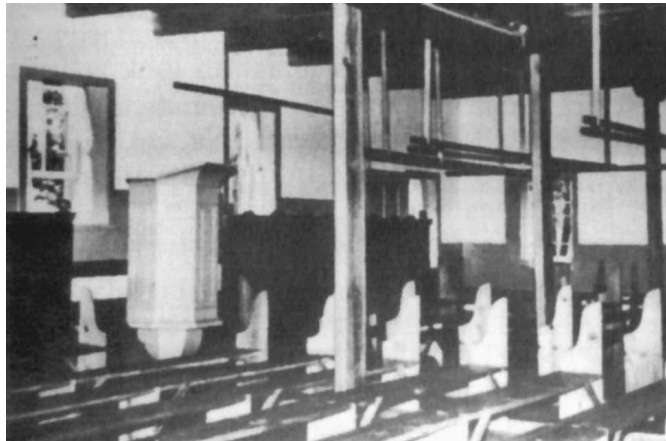
Another Sunday School took place in the Osler airport located 12 miles east of the Town of Osler. After the airport closed in 1945, a group of local farmers decided to buy the land and set up a Co-op Farm. Many of these farmers were Old Colony people, including the manager, David Janzen. From 1947 to 1949, there were many Sunday School services held at the airport, with leadership coming from Rev. Abram Wall Jr., Rev. Peter Neudorf, and John E.S. Driedger. The teacher was Johan Dyck, who also taught later in Neuhorst.



The Neuanlage worship house built in 1900, the first build by the Old Colony Church in Saskatchewan. Courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 192.

“Sole Wiese”.

When the Old Colony Mennonites arrived in Saskatchewan at the turn of the century, they sang their hymns from the *Gesangbuch* containing many songs written by the martyrs of the faith. It was a German hymnal without notes, which relied on the *Vorsänger* (or song leaders) to start the melody and to lead the singing. The singing was done in the “Alte Wiese” (old style), a beautiful and embellished, but very slow way of singing these songs. By the 1950s, the Neuanlage church had begun to use the “Solen Wiese”, a faster form of singing the same songs.



Interior of the Neuanlage Old Colony Church. The style of the worship house was based on traditions going back centuries. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 585.

This was met by opposition by some members of the church who wanted to retain the “Alte Wiese”. At a brotherhood meeting held in Neuhorst, there was lively discussion about the issue. It was decided there that a vote by the members would be taken by the ministers. A majority favoured the “Solen Wiese”. The first couple in the Old Colony Church to be married with “Solen Wiese” music were Jacob W. Goertzen and Helena Loepky.

Fort St. John, 1961.

In the summer of 1961, a number of families from the Hague-Osler area moved to Fort St.

John, in northern British Columbia. Included in this group was Aeltester Abram Loewen. Aeltester Loewen continued to serve the Old Colony Church at Fort St. John until his death on August 1, 1977. During his service to God and to the community, he preached a total of 1251 sermons, baptized 337 people, performed 80 marriages and conducted 134 funerals.

Herman Friesen, a farmer from the Kronsthal area was ordained as the Old Colony minister on April 15, 1962. A little over a year later on June 23, 1963, he was ordained as Aeltester by Aeltester Abram Loewen.

Warman Home, 1967.

The Old Colony Mennonite Bishop Herman D. W. Friesen had a vision of a “Home” where the older members of his congregation might retire and enjoy their sunset years in an atmosphere and lifestyle they were accustomed to. He felt this undertaking was too large for his congregation to handle alone so he shared his vision with the Bishop of the Bergthaler church, Abram J. Buhler. In time, Rev. Buhler got caught up in the enthusiasm for this project and together the two men, seeking God’s blessing and guidance, set things into motion. Together the two Bishops presented the need of a Home to their members and gained their interest and support. This was in the winter of 1967 (Note Twenty-One).

The first joint meeting of the Old Colony and Bergthaler Mennonite Churches in connection with erecting a home for the aged took place on February 4, 1967. The R.M. of Warman gave their approval to the project on March 6, 1967, allowing six acres on SE1-39-5-W of 3 to be used for the building of an old age home. The land for the home was donated by a bachelor John D. Peters who lived on the same quarter of land.

It was estimated that the building would cost \$210,000.00 dollars to build which would include 34 single rooms and serving facilities. This would also allow enough room for an addition. A government loan to be repaid in 40

years was offered to the group but refused. According to frugal Old Mennonite customs, the elders felt that they could not burden the next generation with a large debt and decided to build only if and when enough funds could be raised.

A committee of nine was elected to investigate plans and possibilities and to collect money for the cause. Among them were two deacons, Peter K. Fehr of the Bergthaler church and Klaas B. Dyck of the Old Colony Church. Also Peter Unger of Hague, farmer and Reeve of the R.M. of Warman; Jacob W. Loeppky, owner-operator of a grocery store in Osler, was the secretary; John D. Reddekopp, manager of Weldons Concrete; Jacob Reddekopp, auctioneer; and three farmers Isbrand Friesen, John G. Wiebe, and John I. Fehr (Twenty-Two).

The correspondent for the *Valley News* added "that a lot of money has already been donated to the cause and it is expected that a lot more will come in so that a loan will not be needed, which all goes to prove that there is strength in unity" (Note Twenty-Three).

A ground-breaking ceremony took place on August 25, 1967, with construction to be done in two phases. The pouring of the grade rails and pillars was to be done in the summer and the construction of the building to be done the following spring (Note Twenty-Four). Myers Construction was awarded the contract for the second phase of the project which was finished in the fall of 1968.

The official opening of the "Warman Men-



Aeltester Johann Loeppky and Mrs. Loeppky, nee Helena Janzen. Photo courtesy of Jakob G. Guenther and Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 585/Preservings, No. 16, page 40. Johann Loeppky later composed an account of his delegate's journey to Mexico, "Ein Reisebericht von Kanada nach Mexiko im Jahre 1921," serialized in the Steinbach Post, May 7, 1941 and after, and later translated into English.



Rev. Johann and Maria (Hildebrand) Janzen, an Old Colony minister from Hochfeld. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 586.

nonite Altenheim" took place on October 30, 1968. It was a long awaited event which in-



The Warman Special Care Home, formerly the Warman Mennonite Altenheim. Photo by Jakob G. Guenther in 1994. Courtesy of Len Doell, Hague Osler, page 589.

involved a great deal of planning, energy and hard work. Favorable weather conditions permitted ceremonies to be conducted outside of the home. Speakers taking part were: Reeve Peter Unger, Chairman; Bishop Abram Buhler of the Bergthaler Church; Bishop Herman Friesen of the Old Colony Church; Jake Dyck for the Warman Town Council; Dave Chalmers representing the Department of Welfare; and MLA Dave Boldt who highlighted the event when he cut the ribbon. In between speeches, two numbers in song were rendered by the Peters sisters of Osler. Dedication services were held by Bishop Buhler and Friesen on November 10, 1968 in the dining room of the Home. Both Bishops presented messages of thanksgiving and gratitude. Bishop Friesen related different highlights pertaining to the home and asked the congregation to seriously consider those seniors that were invalids, that could not be accepted into the home (Note Twenty-Five).

The "Altenheim" (Old Folks' Home) started out as a Level One Care Home but it soon became evident that nursing care was needed. As

the residents' health deteriorated and could not be cared for they had to be transferred to a nursing home. At various times efforts were made to get government approval to build an addition and provide nursing care but these were always turned down.

Finally in 1988, an addition was approved and constructed at a cost of \$290,000.00. The first nurse was hired prior to this in December of 1986 and slowly the transition to a full fledged nursing home was made. For this reason the name was changed to "Warman Mennonite Special Care Home." (Note Twenty-Six).

In 1993, the home celebrated its 25th anniversary. George K. Fehr and Rev. David Buhler reflected on the history of the home. "Looking back on 25 years of operation, we praise God for his faithfulness and guidance. Although there have been trying times, there has been much to be thankful for. Hundreds of senior citizens have passed through these doors and temporarily made this their home. With changing Health

Care legislation, there is a concern how it will affect the Warman Mennonite Special Care Home. With God's guidance we are confident that each challenge can be met and that good care can continue to be provided for our residents," (Note Twenty-Seven).

Leadership Changes.

Aeltester Herman Friesen met with a tragic death on September 26, 1969. The tractor which he was operating near his farm at Kronsthal overturned on a municipal road, pinning him beneath it. He was brought to Saskatoon City Hospital where he died later that afternoon. He was 61 years of age. He served the church as a minister for a little more than a year preaching 46 sermons, conducting two funerals and one wedding. As an Aeltester he preached 389 sermons, conducted 73 funerals and performed 23 marriages and baptized 83. He served 5,049 communion and led three brotherhood meetings. He also conducted two minister elections and two ordinations.

Aeltester Friesen's experience as a council-



The Aeltester Herman Friesen (1908-69) and Margaretha (Banman) Friesen family. Front (l.-r) Justina on Mom's lap, Bill, Eva in front of Dad, Helena. Back row Elisabeth, Margaret, Annie, Mary, David, Jakob, Tina. Photo courtesy of Anna Klassen and originally published in Len Doell, editor, Hague Osler, page 591.

lor for the R.M. of Warman and as a secretary for the local school board made him more open to change than those Aeltesten who came before him. He supported the efforts by local school teachers in starting some evening programs for the young people in the area. He was also instrumental in initiating a popular "Oventstund" in the church which included a combination of singing and short lectures. After his death in 1969, he was replaced by Rev. Julius Ens who had returned from Fort St. John.

Rev. Julius Ens was elected as Aeltester on February 21, 1970 and ordained the following day by Aeltester Jacob Penner of Manitoba. Rev. Ens had been ordained as a minister on August 24, 1950 and had already served the church for nearly 20 years. He was a farmer from Grünfeld who also delivered milk/cream cans by truck to Saskatoon for a number of years.

In 1972, the Bergthaler Mennonite Church was moved from near Schonwiese to the village of Blumenheim. The church had been built in 1911 and had not been used regularly at Schönwiese for a few years due to low attendance. The Bergthaler gave the church building and the Old Colony paid for the moving. The church is now used by both the Old Colony and

Bergthaler churches on alternate Sundays.

The Church Today.

Due to failing health, Aeltester Julius Ens,



The dairy farm of Aeltester Herman Friesen in the Kronsthal area, east of Osler. Photo courtesy of Anna Klassen and published in Hague Osler, page 272.

stepped down from his position as elder. He was replaced by Aeltester Peter J. Wolfe of Neuanlage. Aeltester Wolfe was ordained as a minister in the Old Colony Church in 1975 and ordained as an Aeltester on January 10, 1982 Neuhorst by Aeltester John P. Wiebe of Manitoba.

The Hague Osler congregation currently has



Bishop Julius Ens, and Katharina (Wiebe) Ens, Grünfeld, Hague, Saskatchewan. Aeltester Ens was elected as a minister in 1950. Photo courtesy of L. Doell, Hague Osler, page 594.

303 members. The church is served by four ministers, one deacon and the Aeltester. The Old Colony children in the area attend public schools.

Conclusion.

Over 100 years have passed since the Old Colony Church began here in Saskatchewan. A good percentage of the Hague-Osler residents are descendants of these Old Colony settlers. It is important to be mindful, that we are stewards of a great heritage and that in spite of conflict, trouble and sins committed in human frailty, we need to build upon the good foundation of vision and sacrificial effort which they have left to us.

May God grant that in our look at the past we may see the good that has been done, that we may treasure the heritage left to us and that we may build on the foundation that others have laid.

Sources:

Author unnamed, "Homesteading at Rosthern," in Klippenstein and Toews, editors, *Mennonite Memories Settling in Western Canada* (Altona, 1977), pages 163-186.

Richard Friesen, "The Old Colony Mennonite Settlements in Saskatchewan," M.A. Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1975.

Endnotes:

Note One: Dennis Stoesz, MA Thesis, University of Manitoba, Sept. 8, 1987, p.74.

Note Two: *Ibid*, p.74.

Note Three: Mary Klassen, "The Village of Neuanlage," unpublished paper, CMBC, Feb. 25, 1967, p.5.

Note Four: Mrs. Gerhard Kroeker, interview

with Leonard Doell, Dec. 1983.

Note Five: Jack Reddekopp, "The Hague-Osler Colony Mennonites," unpublished paper, CMBC, Mennonite Studies, April 12, 1976, p.12.

Note Six: Reinland Village Records, CMC Archives, vol. #1091, file #10.

Note Seven: Abram Wall, Warman, Sask., interview with Leonard Doell 1980.

Note Eight: Jacob G. Janzen, "Early Neuanlage," unpublished memoirs written in 1991

Note Nine: Aeltester Jacob Wiens to Isaac P. Friesen, letter dated Feb. 24, 1902, CMC Archives, Saskatchewan Mennonites vol. #.

Note Ten: *Saskatoon Phoenix*, May 17, 1909, p.1.

Note Eleven: Pamphlet in possession of Leonard Doell.

Note Twelve: Peter Elias, Memoirs, CMC Ar-

chives, vol. #1078, translated by Ingrid Lamp, p.74.

Note Thirteen: *Saskatoon Daily Phoenix*, Nov. 13, 1914, p.3.

Note Fourteen: Jack Reddekopp, *op. cit.*, p.14.

Note Fifteen: George Friesen, Warman, Sask., interview with Leonard Doell, Nov. 1994.

Note Sixteen: Mrs. Herman Friesen and Mr. Peter Braun, Warman, Sask., interviews with Leonard Doell, May 1983.

Note Seventeen: Rev. Abram Goertzen to Rev. Cornelius Hamm, copies of Rev. Hamm's letters in possession of Leonard Doell.

Note Eighteen: Interview Peter B. Guenter, Mrs. Maria Klassen, and Mrs. Mary Rempel by Leonard Doell, Feb. 1995.

Note Nineteen: Rev. Jacob Froese, LaCrete, Alta., interview with Leonard Doell, Aug., 1985.

Note Twenty: Abram G. Janzen, Blumenheim, Sask., interview with Leonard Doell, Feb., 1995.

Note Twenty-One: Rev. David Buhler and George K. Fehr, "A brief History of the Warman Mennonite Special Care Home," prepared for 25th Anniversary, 1993, p.1.

Note Twenty-Two: Margaret Heinrichs, "\$210,000 dollar Home," for *Warman Sask Valley News*, July 6, 1967.

Note Twenty-Three: Heinrichs, *ibid.*

Note Twenty-Four: "Ground Breaking Ceremony Slated for Friday," *Sask. Valley News*, August 24, 1967.

Note Twenty-Five: "Warman Home Officially opened," *Sask. Valley News*, November 14, 1968.

Note Twenty-Six: Buhler and Fehr, *op.cit.*, p.4.

Note Twenty-Seven: Buhler and Fehr, *ibid.*, p.5.

Blue Ribbon Faith



The blue ribbons around the neck and wrists of departed saints signified that the commandments of Christ were inscribed in their hearts, Numbers 15: 37-40. The funeral of Gerhard Hoepfner (1846-1916), who settled in Waldheim, W.R., Manitoba, in 1876, a charter member of the Old Colony Mennonite Church (#533/1875). The Gerhard Hoepfner family moved to Waldheim, Sask. in 1895, where he died in 1916. According to ancient custom he was buried with blue ribbons around his neck and wrists. The white shroud represented the adornment of the saints, symbolizing purity, the bride prepared to meet her bride groom in eternity, Matthew 22 1-14. The blue ribbons are explained in J. C. Wenger's Separated Unto God, page 16. In a discussion of Old Testament teaching on the topic, Wenger referred to Numbers 15, 37-40 "...put upon the fringe of each border a chord of blue; ...that ye may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God." This allegory prefigured the New Testament teaching that the words of Jesus would be inscribed in the hearts of His followers. It is amazing how closely much of conservative Mennonite religious culture was based upon and articulated by the teachings of the Gospels. Gerhard Hoepfner was a grandson of Delegate Jakob Hoepfner (1748-1826), Insel Choritza, who led the Mennonites to Imperial Russia in 1788 and Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort, Molotschna, Imperial Russia, making him a distant relative of American folk singer John Denver (1943-97), see *Dynasties*, page 690. Photo courtesy of Pauline Heppner, Heppners' in Prussia, Russia and America (4535 Haig Dr., Sardis, B.C., V2R 1K3, 1997), page 204, reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 17, page 60. Famous singer Ben Heppner, originally from Dawson Creek, B.C., is a descendant of Anton Hoepfner, the deputy's brother. The Editor

Swift Current Old Colony Mennonite Church

“Swift Current Old Colony Mennonite Church,” by Leonard Doell, Box 364, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, S0K 0A0.

Introduction.

The Old Colony Mennonite Church negotiated a second Reserve in Saskatchewan in 1904, obtaining vacant land south of Swift Current. The Dominion Government granted them six townships of land, both the even numbered and the available odd numbered sections which became the “Swift Current Reserve”. The odd ones could be purchased at \$3.00 per acre in ten annual instalments with interest at five per cent (Note One).

The Old Colony settlers in the area, created the same village structure as they were accustomed to in Manitoba and earlier in Russia. Three church buildings were constructed on the Reserve, so as to be convenient for travel.

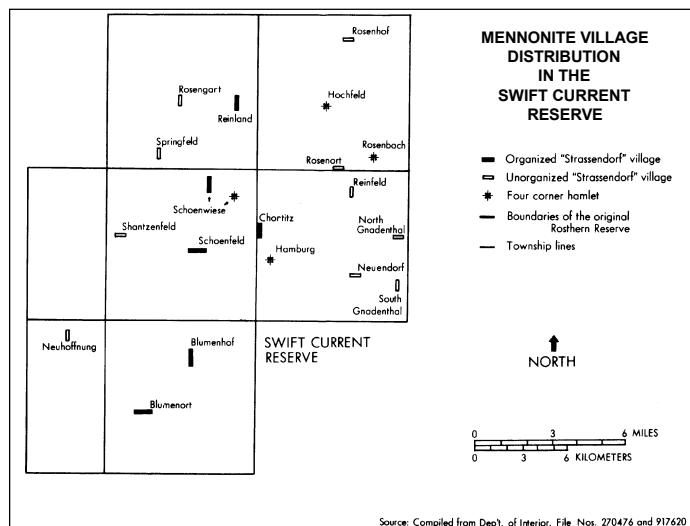
Church Buildings.

One church building was built in the village of Schönfeld in approximately 1906 or 1907. It was 30' by 60' in size, the largest Old Colony church on the Reserve, constructed by carpenter Mr. Harms. In 1937, the Old Colony church officially sold this building to the Sommerfelder and it is still in use by them (Note Two).

The second church was located at the south end of the village of Reinfeldt. After the migration to Mexico in the 1920s, the church was no longer used. It was later bought by Mr. Pomerence and moved

to Mr. Mahon, where he converted it into a general store. Some years later it burned down (Note Three).

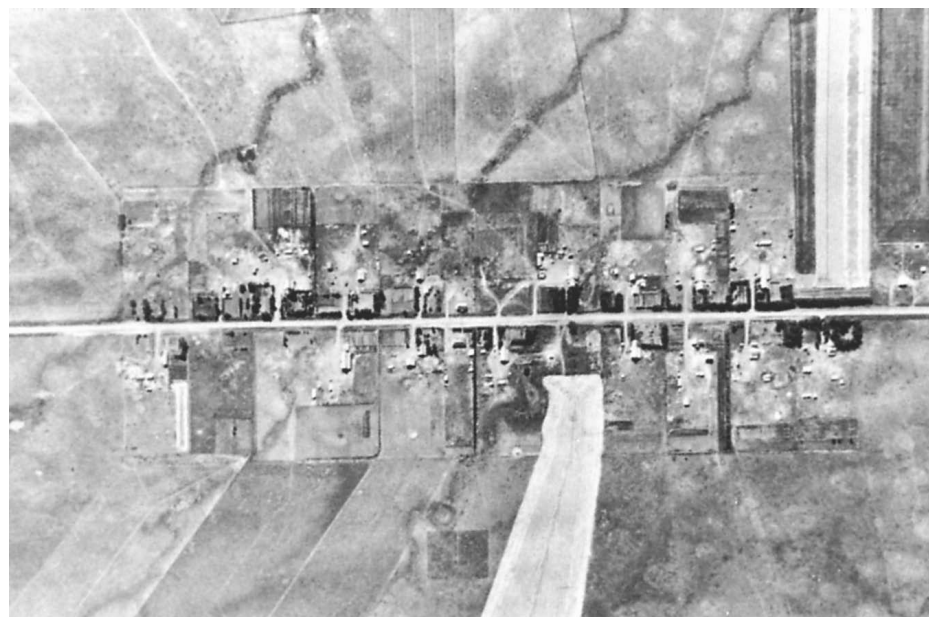
The third church building was built in approximately 1912 in the village of Rhineland. The church served the community up until about 1926, when the migration to Mexico took place. The church stood vacant until 1937, when it was purchased by the General Conference Mennonite Church (Zion) at Swift Current and moved there. The Bible that was left by the Old Colony



Village map of the Swift Current Reserve. Courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 190.



Wedding picture of Abram A. Fehr (b. 1889) and Helena Froese. Abram Fehr was the son of Abraham Fehr (1856-1922), Neuenberg, W.R., Manitoba. RGB 316-2. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 163.



Blumenort in the Swift Current Reserve was considered to be the best preserved Mennonite village in Saskatchewan in 1977. Courtesy of Mennonite Memories, page 193.

Church is being retained presently in the Zion Church library (Note Four).

Church Leadership.

There were three Old Colony Aeltesten who served the Church at Swift Current. Aeltester Johann Wiebe of Manitoba, helped to get the church organized and served his members up until his death in 1905. His son and successor, Aeltester Peter Wiebe, also travelled back and forth from Manitoba to Swift Current from 1905 up until 1910.

In 1910, Rev. Abram Wiebe was elected as Aeltester of the Swift Current Old Colony Church. He was also a son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe and had been elected as a minister in Manitoba in October 1895. He lived in the village of Springfield with his family up until his emigration to Mexico in the summer of 1924. He died in Mexico on November 10, 1925 (Note Five).

Some of the other church leaders included Rev. Julius Wiebe. He had been elected as a deacon and later minister in the Hague-Osler Old

Colony church and then moved to the Swift Current village of Rhineland in 1911. Rev. Wiebe was a delegate to Mexico in 1921 and later he and his family also moved there (Note Six).

Rev. Jacob Peters lived in the village of Blumenhof. He did not move to Mexico but later joined the Sommerfelder and served them as a minister. Rev. Heinrich Peters of Schönfeld also moved to Mexico. A Rev. Schmidt also served the church but little is known about him. Pete Klassen served as a deacon in the church (Note Seven).

Conclusion.

During the years 1922 to 1926, approximately 1,200 Old Colony Mennonites from the Swift Current area moved to Mexico. This migration made up about 37% of the total population of their community (Note Eight). Of those who remained, many eventually became part of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church. Many descendants of the first Old Colony settlers to the area can still be found living in Swift Current and the surrounding area.

Endnotes:

Note One: Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920* (Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Toronto, 1974), p. 313.

Note Two: *Patchwork of Memories, History of Swift Current* (Wymark Dist. History Book Comm., 1985), p. 659.

Note Three: *Ibid*, p. 578.

Note Four: *Ibid*, p. 474.

Note Five: *1880 Village Census of Mennonite West Reserve* (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1998), p. 398.

Note Six: *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995* (Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve Book Comm. 1995), p. 593.

Note Seven: *Mitarbeiter*, 1909.

Note Eight: Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens, The Mennonite Experience in Canada 1870 – 1925* (University of Ottawa Press, 1994), p. 214.

Sources:

Richard Friesen, "Villages in Saskatchewan," in Klippenstein and Toews, editors, *Mennonite Memories Settling in Western Canada* (Altona, 1977), pages 187-194.



Jakob Wiebe (1857-1921), son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), and his wife Katharina Wiebe. They moved to Saskatchewan in 1906 settling in the village of Springfield, Swift Current Reserve, in 1906. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories (Wymark, 1985), page 141. RGB 66-1.



Heinrich Wall and son John breaking prairie sod on S1/2 31-13-14 with a 1923 15-30 McCormick Deering tractor and a four-bottom plow, 1924. This photo explains why the innovative Old Colony farmers liked farming in Saskatchewan. Heinrich Wall was the brother of Johann Wall who died in Brazil as a delegate to South America. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 133. RGB 20-1.



The village of Neuhoftnung, Swift Current Reserve. The Main Street running east and west. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 154.



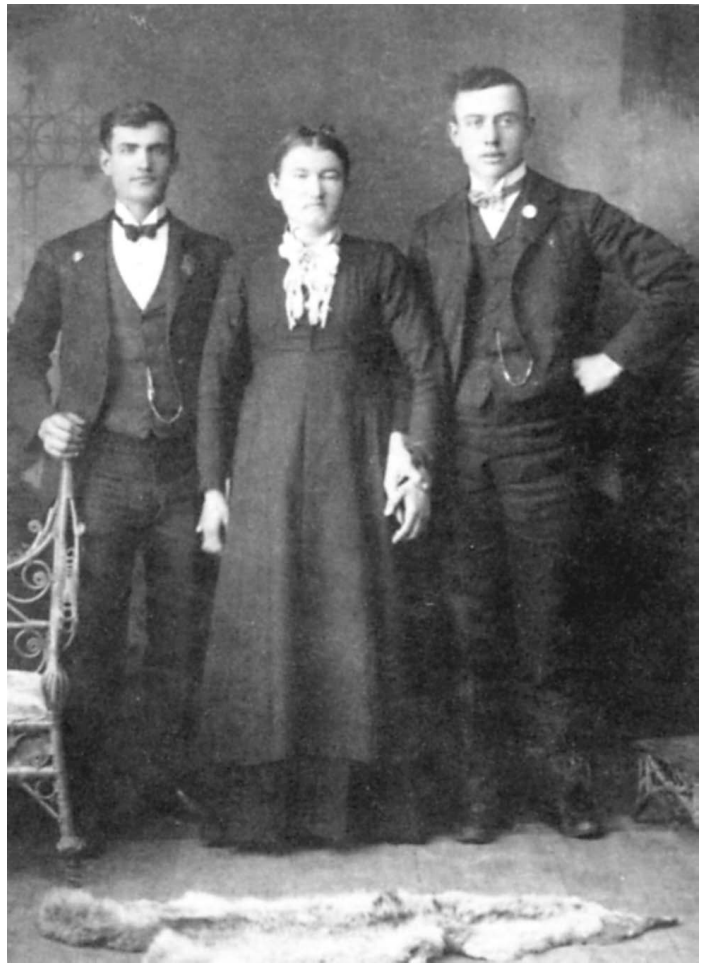
Abram A. Fehr became a successful farmer in Blumenhof, Swift Reserve. A. A. Fehr's threshing crew. Sitting on cab, l-r John N. Wall, Abe Froese, B. F. Ens. Standing on wheel a transient worker of Greek origin, Jake Heide. Standing on the hitch, Cornelius Peters. Standing beside the tractor A. A. Fehr, A. P. Klassen, H. J. Froese, J. Neufeld, Herman Neufeld. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 162.



Farming in style. By 1922 horses were already giving way to tractors. Abe Fehr and Isaak Hildebrand are riding their new tractors. Henry Froese is leading the first team of horses. Leading the second team and standing on the seed drill, is Mr. Derksen, an elevator agent. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 270.



Johann Froese and Maria Friesen, wedding picture in 1906. They moved to Blumenhof on the Swift Reserve in 1907 where he later managed the lumber yard. The family immigrated to Mexico in 1926. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 287.



Brother David Martens, Maria and David Martens, wedding picture 1902. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 488. Marie and David were both born in Manitoba. They moved to Saskatchewan in 1910, and eventually settled in the village of Reinland, Swift Reserve. Mrs. Martens died in the 1918 flu epidemic. The family moved to Mexico in 1926. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 488.



Peter Wiens (1836-1920) and Anna (Reimer) Wiens (1840-1920), settled in Schantzenfeld, W.R., Manitoba. In 1905 they moved to Saskatchewan and settled in the village of Schantzenfeld, Swift Reserve. Both Peter and son Isaak were renowned bonesetters. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 1052. RGB 107-2.



Peter N. Wolfe (1850-1934) and Sahra Fehr (1851-1902), settled in Blumenhof, W.R., Manitoba, in 1875. Around 1906, they moved to Saskatchewan, taking out a homestead southwest of Springfeldt. In March 1922 Peter and his second wife moved to Mexico, Swift Plan. RGB 216-1. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 1063.



Equipment and holdings of Peter Wiens and family when they came from Manitoba to Swift Current in 1905. A typical scene for Mennonite farmers as they establish a new territory. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 1053.



Gertruda Wiebe Wolfe and Johann V. Wolfe, son of Peter N. Wolfe (1854-1934), Springfeldt, Swift Reserve, Sask. Photo courtesy of Patchwork of Memories, page 1063. Gertruda was the daughter of Jakob Wiebe, son of Aeltester Johann Wiebe, see Elaine Wiebe, "The Clock Keeps on Ticking," Part Two, cf., and Preservings, No. 17, pa ge 122.



Migration to Mexico, people waiting to go, 1922. Photo courtesy of Patchwork, page 34.



Isaac Thiessen family - Katherina, Mrs. Margaret (Banman) Thiessen, Annie, Johann, Isaac, Mr. Isaac Thiessen and Margaret. Homesteaded SE 1-13-13. The family moved to Mexico in 1922. Photo courtesy of Patchwork, page 547.

La Crete Old Colony Mennonite Church

La Crete Old Colony Mennoniten Gemeinde, compiled by Robert Loewen, Box 839, Grunthal, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 0R0.

Settlement, 1936.

The first Mennonites to migrate to the Peace River area were the Old Colony Mennonites who came from the Hague-Osler areas in Saskatchewan.

The Town of Peace River is located some 300 miles north of Edmonton, Alberta. The Peace River area encompasses the catch basin of the Peace River which flows north into Lake Athabasca. It contains many communities well known to Mennonites such as Grande Prairie, Worsely, Fairview, Fort Vermilion and La Crete. La Crete is located some 250 miles north of the Town of Peace River.

During the 1930s no decent roads existed north of the town of Peace River. From here, travel to the present La Crete area was done on the so-called "Russian Navy", a paddle-wheel freighter. The first settlers made an initial settlement at Carcajou. This settlement was abandoned in lieu of the present La Crete area in 1936.

First Ministerial, 1939.

The first minister to settle here was the late Isaac Wieler who arrived in 1938. Rev. Wieler had been a minister in the Old Colony Mennonite Church at Hague, Saskatchewan.

During 1936 or 1937, Aeltester Johann Loeppky, Deacon Jacob Giesbrecht, Aron Guenther and Jac. S. Friesen from the Hague Osler Gemeinde motored to Alberta, travelling by way of Peace River to La Crete by rowboat,

in order to conduct baptismal and communion services.

At first, services were conducted in the

homes. The families would assemble to sing hymns and the minister present would bring the message.



Rev. Jakob Froese (1906-93) and wife Anna (b. 1906). They moved to La Crete from the Hague Osler area in 1955 where he continued his ministry. He was confined to a wheelchair for many years and as a helpful friend still gave good counselling to many. Anna used to knit away many pounds of wool, and people came from far and wide to purchase her creations. Photo courtesy Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler Book, page 421.



1934. Abram and Eliza Beth Fehr on their way back to Saskatchewan from Edmonton after spending a winter a hundred miles north of Peace River at a site called Battle River. They were not long in deciding that Carcajou was not the right place for them. They sold what they had not lost through a scow mishap and returned to their former home. Photo courtesy Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler Book 1895-1995, page 415/F. Epp, Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940 (Toronto, 1982), book plates/Hague Osler Homesteads, rear flyleaf.

Organization, 1939.

The first ministerial in La Crete were ordained on June 29, 1939, namely: Abram Bergen, deacon, and Isaac Hiebert and Cornelius Krahn, ministers

Cornelius Krahn (deceased Feb. 15, 2000) was 26 years-old when he was ordained. He served in this capacity as much as his health allowed.

His obituary in the *Mennonitische Post* mentioned how difficult he found being elected and ordained to this office at such an early age. During his ministerial sojourn of some 60 years, he preached 1535 times, conducted 24 funerals and conducted 67 marriage ceremonies. Together with his parents he had migrated to Mexico in 1922 as a 9 year-old-lad. He was baptized on June 5, 1933 by the late Aeltester Johann Friesen. Cornelius Krahn returned to Canada in 1937.

Co-minister Isaac Hiebert later joined a move to Bolivia and was residing there in 1988. Deacon Abram Bergen passed away in January, 1961.

Aelt. Wilhelm P. Wiebe, 1941.

In 1940, the then Aeltester of the Manitoba Gemeinde, Jacob Froese and three other ministers came to La Crete to conduct communion services. During this June visit, Wilhelm P. Wiebe was ordained as minister.

October 9, 1941, Wilhelm P. Wiebe was ordained as Aeltester of the Gemeinde at La Crete, giving him the distinction of being the first ordained Aeltester of the Alberta Old Colonists. Wilhelm P. Wiebe and his family had relocated to the La Crete area from Saskatchewan.

He was regarded as born leader of the church and somewhat of a church statesman. He often lamented the depreciative attitude that he felt toward the Old Colonists from the members of the other Mennonite denominations that moved



Isaak (b. 1914) and Susanna (b. 1912) Goertzen. He was the son of Benjamin Goertzen, delegate to Mexico. Children, l-r. John and Mary, and George on Susanna's lap. Photograph taken in the village of Grünfeld, Hague, Saskatchewan. Later they moved to La Crete, Alberta, where he was elected as a minister in 1955. The family made a further move to Bolivia where Isaak was elected as the Aeltester. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler Book, page 420.

into the area. He knew his Scriptures and felt a calling to keep the church separated from the world and often reminded the congregation of Romans 12:12 "Be not conformed to this world..."

Mrs. Sara Harder, a former school teacher in the area, writes, "Always have I cherished

the warmth of Aeltester Wiebe's family and home."

The Wiebe family lost their father and the church lost its leader when he passed away on October 4, 1977. He had faithfully served the Gemeinde for 36 years as Aeltester.

Worship Centres.

The earliest worship centers were held in log buildings with a sod roof and a dirt floor.

The first church building was the Reinland church, dedicated on July 5, 1951. A 20 foot addition was added in 1963. In 1982 a new church building was constructed at the site and dedicated on September 26.

Church services were begun in in Blumenort in 1952. A new worship house was constructed in 1984 and dedicated on August 26, 1984.

The Buffalo Head Prairie church building was dedicated on November 3, 1957; an addition was added in 1974.

On June 29, 1986, a new church was constructed at Tompkins Landing.

Ministerial 1955-78.

Ohm Cornelius Giesbrecht moved into the area from British Columbia; he later transferred to Worsely, Alberta, passing away September 2, 1976.

Isaak T. Goertzen and John K. Peters were ordained as ministers on June 5, 1955. Both later moved on to Bolivia where Isaak was ordained as Aeltester.

Ohm Jac. J. Froese came to La Crete from Saskatchewan and assisted with the ministry. He and his wife evidently were readers of the German periodical "Familienfreund" published by the Kleine Gemeinde.

His clear spiritual views are evidenced in a letter to the publication, where he writes,



Photo of the original German School at Buffalo Head Prairie. It was built in 1941 and also used for church services the first years. Photo courtesy of Hague-Osler Book, p. 417.



Old Colony Church at Buffalo Hills settlement at La Crete. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler Book, page 419.



Aeltester Isaak Goertzen and brother Johann. Isaak was called as an Old Colony Aeltester in Bolivia. Isaak returned to Canada in 1996 and is now retired and living in the Heimstead Lodge, La Crete. Photo courtesy of Len Doell, Warman, Sask.

“...durch den Glauben an Sein vergossenness Blut bietet er uns die Gerechtigkeit die vor Gott gilt dar, in dem das er Sunden Vergibt...”

Ohm Jakob J. Froese passed away in 1993. Due to severe rheumatoid arthritis, he was forced to retire from farming at the age of 56 years in 1962. He was unable to walk after 1977.

On August 1, 1961, John J. Wolfe, Jac. W. Wiebe and Abram Wieler were ordained to the ministry and Franz Banman as deacon. On April 25, 1971, Jacob T. Wiebe and Herman Giesbrecht were ordained as minis-

ters. Mr. Wiebe later migrated to Bolivia. In 1976 Deacon Peter Unruh moved to La Crete from B.C.

Aeltester Johann Klassen, 1978.

The present Aeltester, John Klassen, was ordained to his office on June 18, 1978, after the death of Aeltester Wiebe. Jacob Schapansky was ordained to the ministry at the same time.

The present (2000) Old Colony Mennonite Aeltester is 61 year-old John Klassen. He was elected as a minister in November 1975. His

wife Helen is the daughter of Jacob and Helena Driedger.

The Old Colony Church at La Crete has close ties with the Old Colony Mennonite Church at Vauxhall, Alberta, which is presently being served by Aeltester Johann Klassen. (This congregation was organized by those Old Colonists having returned primarily from Mexico during the last decade.) The La Crete church also maintains close ties with Old Colony Mennonites in other provinces.

In the La Crete area, its relations are perhaps the warmest or closest with the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church. (The Sommerfelder Church here is not affiliated with the church of the same name in Manitoba, but it is most like the Friedensfelder Mennonite Church which broke off from the Reinland Mennonite Church).

Schools.

Most of the Old Colony children in the La Crete area attend public schools. There are two private schools run by Old Colony members. One school is located in Thomkins' Landing, 30 miles northwest of La Crete. The second is located in the Buffalo Head area, 10 miles southeast of La Crete. Together the schools have an enrolment of around 100.

Most children attending the public schools also attend German schools operated by church members on Friday and Saturday nights.

“Lange Weise.”

The Old Colony Mennonite church at La Crete, unlike their fellow Old Colony brethren in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, have retained the “Lange Weise” or slow tunes. The Old Colony churches in these three other provinces have replaced these slow tunes with the faster tunes from the Heinrich Franz “Choralbuch” in conjunction with congregational singing from the “Gesangbuch”.

Conclusion.

The La Crete Old Colony Mennonite Church has a current membership of 1,031, a total of some 2300 souls including children. The ministerial consists of seven ministers and two deacons and Aeltester Johann Klassen. Ministers John Wassen, Herman Friesen, John T. Wolfe and deacon Isaac Banman were elected in 1976. Ministers John Harms, Peter Giesbrecht and Peter Fehr were elected in 1995.

The Church has four houses of worship at Reinland (La Crete), Blumenort, Rosenfeld and Neuanlage. In addition, worship services are held in the La Crete Long Term Care Home and in the Seniors' Lodge in La Crete.

Sources:

Leonard Doell, Jakob Guenther, et. al, *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995* published in 1995 by the Hague-Osler Reserve Book Committee.

A Heritage of Homesteads, and Hope published in 1989 by the La Crete and Area, Then and Now Society.



John J. Peters of Hague, Sask. moved many families from the Hague Osler Reserve to the Peace River country. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler Book, page 420.

Prespatou Old Colony Mennonite Church

Prespatou Old Colony Mennoniten Gemeinde, British Columbia, Canada, compiled by Robert Loewen, Box 839, Grunthal, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 0R0.

Introduction.

There have been three migrations of Old Colony Mennonites from Hague-Osler area: to Vanderhoof, Burns Lake, and Prespatou. The Prespatou settlement has become successful, whereas the other two have since become extinct.

In 1955, a group of Old Colony families made an attempt to settle at Vanderhoof, B.C. A delegation returned from Vanderhoof with favourable reports, but when the three families, (Rev. Jacob Froese, Rev. Julius Ens and Deacon Jacob Giesbrecht) arrived in the area, they discovered--to their obvious disappointment--that the desired land was already taken. Some of the group returned to Saskatchewan whereas some (e.g., Jacob Froeses) moved to the La Crete area.

Burns Lake.

The Hague-Osler settlement in Saskatchewan during the 1930s was a misery-

poverty stricken and drought ridden area. The governments of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, cooperated in transferring Old Colony

Mennonites from Hague-Osler to the Burns Lake area.

The area between Francois Lake and Ootsa



Church and school house at Cheslatta, B.C. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler, page 440.



Johan and Anna (Derksen) Martens, moved from Blumenthal, Sask., to Burns Lake, B. C. He was elected as Aeltester of the Old Colony Church at Burns Lake in 1945. He was a German school teacher in the Hague Osler area. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler, page 440.



Rev. Henry Bueckert and his wife Katharina (nee Derksen). Shortly after his ordination they moved to Burns Lake. He was the first Old Colony minister to accompany the group to Burns Lake. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler, page 440.

Part Four: Congregations

Lake was opened for settlement. Two church houses were built soon after the arrival of the settlers in 1940. The settlers were led by Rev. Heinrich Bueckert soon after his ordination. In 1945 he was joined by Johann Martens who was ordained to the ministry and to the office of Aeltester the following year.

Eventually the church (Old Colony) here ceased to function. Some settlers moved to La Crete, some returned to Saskatchewan and others migrated to Bolivia.

Fort St. John.

From 1953 to 1961, the Saskatchewan Old Colony Mennonite Church negotiated the acquisition of lease land some 40 miles from the Alaska Highway, 60 miles north of Fort St. John and 400 miles southwest of La Crete.

The development of this area was fuelled by the desire to settle young families on farms, including those unable to establish farms in the Hague-Osler area due to high costs and the threat of unemployment of other young men needing to obtain employment in urban centres.

Some 86 families migrated to the Fort St. John area with the option of farming up to 480 acres of virgin farmland in the Prespatou area. The Old Colony Church had started to negotiate for this land in 1953 and only now was able to complete the deal.

In the fall of 1962 and the spring of 1963 more Mennonites moved to Fort St. John. The first group to move were Old Colony Mennonites and were soon joined by Mennonites from other church backgrounds.

Aeltester Abram J. Loewen joined this mi-

gration to Prespatou and was the spiritual leader who moved with his people to northern B.C. When he was unable to function as Aeltester due to failing health, he was replaced by

Herman Bueckert as Aeltester in 1969. He had been ordained as minister in 1950.

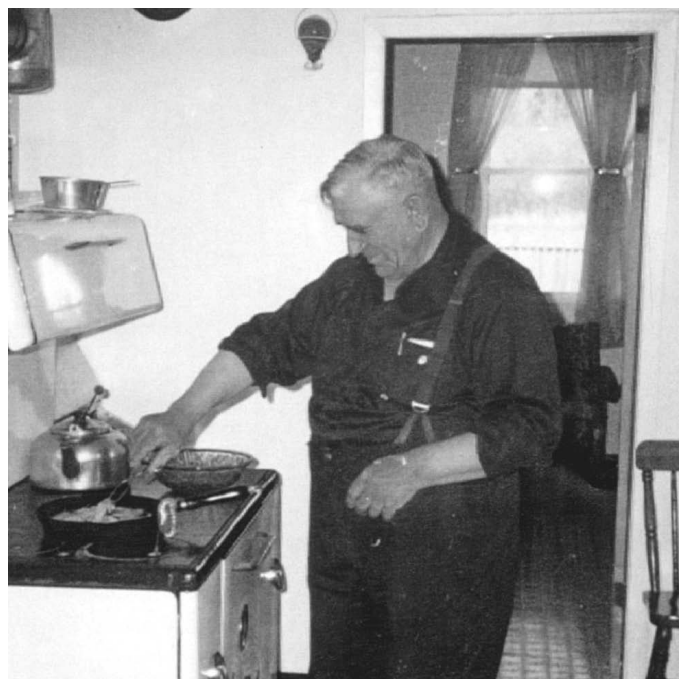
In the *Hague Osler* book, Leonard Doell provides the following account of the immi-



Jakob and Katharina (Banman) Giesbrecht and family. They moved to Fort St. John where Jakob is presently serving as an Old Colony minister. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler, page 145.



Johan and Sarah (Hiebert) Giesbrecht. He was a minister of the Old Colony Church. Photo courtesy of Jakob G. Guenther, Warman, Sask. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell, Hague-Osler, page 590.



Aeltester Herman Bueckert frying Roll-Kuchen for his wife Helen in their home at Prespatou, B.C. Photo courtesy of Jakob G. Guenther, Box 1281, Warman, Sask., S0K 4S0. Herman Bueckert was called to the ministry in 1950 in the Neuhorst Old Colony Church, Osler, Sask. He became the Aeltester at Prespatou, B.C., relieving Aeltester Abram Loewen whose health had failed.

gration of Old Colony people to Prespatou: "The editor of the Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* gave some history of this move to Fort St. John in an editorial on July 26, 1961. He mourns the loss of these Saskatchewan farmers and felt that British Columbia's gain was Saskatchewan's loss, if for no other reason than that the trend has been for a continuing dissolution of families on farms....The orthodox Mennonite settlers through their years had their roots in the soil. Land and what it produced, to them had the same fascination and urge as more millions to a millionaire. From father to son was the traditional concept of farm life..."

"For the Mennonites of Fort St. John, this land has certainly become their home and has provided a good living for their people."

In the early 1970s a small group left the Old Colony Gemeinde at Prespatou to join the Chortitzer Conference from Steinbach, Manitoba.

The Church Today.

Aeltester Herman Bueckert retired in 1990. For the next period the Prespatou Gemeinde was served by Aeltesten from elsewhere. In 1993 Rev. Johann Fehr was elected as Aeltester. But in 1993 he together with a small group started a second Old Colony Gemeinde which has about 25 members currently.

In 1995, John Bueckert, son of Aeltester Herman Bueckert, was elected as Aeltester. The Gemeinde currently has four ministers and one



Aeltester Abram Loewen (1898-1977) was the spiritual leader who moved with his people to Fort St. John. Abram Loewen was the son-in-law of delegate Benjamin Goertzen. Photo courtesy of Doell, Hague-Osler (Saskatoon, 1995), page 588.

deacon. It has two houses of worship, in Reinland and Grünfeld with 300 members and a total of some 700 souls. The children attend public school. Sunday Schools are a part of the Church program with its own curriculum.



Jakob and Helena (Guenther) Giesbrecht of the Reinland village near Osler, Sask. They moved to Prespatou. He served as a deacon in both Hague and Prespatou. Photo by Pete Giesbrecht and published in Doell and Guenther, editors, Hague-Osler, page 444.

Source:

Leonard Doell, *Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995* (Saskatoon, 1995), pages 444-445.

Worsley Old Colony Mennonite Church

"Worsley Old Colony Mennonite Church, Worsley, Alberta," compiled from information provided by David Janzen, Box 634, Hines Creek, Alberta, Canada, T0H 2A0.

Origins, 1959.

Worsley is located 100 miles north of Grande Prairie, Alberta. The Old Colony settlement is located approximately 20 to 25 miles southwest of the City of Worsley and covers the Cleardale and Worsley area.

The first settlers moved here from La Crete in 1959. Rev. Isaak Hiebert and Rev. Cornelius Giesbrecht from the La Crete Old Colony Church were among the first settlers and took up the leadership of the new congregation with Isaak Hiebert serving as leader.

In 1962 Jakob K. Peters and his brother Johann K. Peters were elected as ministers, and Johann K. Peters' son, Jakob was elected as deacon.

Bolivia, 1968.

By 1968 about 100 families had homesteaded in the Worsley area. But then all the ministers and also 85 percent of the congregation moved away to Bolivia, founding the Santa Rosa Colony. Only nine families remained. At this time the David Janzen family returned from

Richmond Hill, Belize, and settled in the Worsley area, making a total of 10 families.

Rev. Cornelius Giesbrecht returned from Bolivia and assumed leadership of the Gemeinde at Worsley.

In 1976 Ohm Cornelius Giesbrecht died. For the next number of years the Worsley Gemeinde was served by ministers from La Crete and Prespatou, B.C. In 1978, Benjamin Wolfe was elected as minister and served as leader. At the same ministerial election Cornelius Klassen was also elected as minister and Peter D. Janzen (brother of David) was elected as deacon.

In 1986 Benjamin Wolfe was elected as Aeltester but in 1989 he and the other ministers led a group of some 20 families to Bolivia where they founded the Alberta Colony.

Schools.

Almost from the beginning the Worsley Congregation had its own elementary school where German was used as the instructional language. In the meantime new school build-

ings were built in Worsley where English is used for instruction except for Friday and Saturday, when a traditional German school is held using the Bible, Catechism, and Gesangbuch as text material. Some children also attend the Menno Simons public school in Cleardale.

In 1998 a new election was held and Rev. Peter D. Janzen was elected as leading minister and Johann Peters and Jakob Isaac as ministers and Abram Giesbrecht was elected as deacon.

Conclusion.

Some of the Old Colony families in Worsley are farmers but the majority are employed in the logging industry. Many current members are children of former members who had belonged to the Gemeinde and then migrated to Bolivia. The current membership of the Worsley Gemeinde is around 241 with a total of 665 souls.

Vauxhall Old Colony Mennonite Church

Vauxhall Old Colony Mennoniten Church, Alberta, Canada, compiled from information provided by Deacon Herman Wiebe, Box 567, Vauxhall, Alberta, Canada, T0K 2K0.

Beginnings.

Since the mid-1980s until the present time, Old Colony Mennonites have been settling in Tabor and Vauxhall area in southern Alberta, seeking a better livelihood than was available in their home colonies in Mexico. Some families have come from Belize and others via Manitoba and Ontario. Most of the Old Colony people in southern Alberta are farm labourers and some work in construction.

The Old Colony Mennonite congregation in Southern Alberta now has two worship houses located at Vauxhall and Grassy Lake.

Vauxhall.

Vauxhall, the older of the two settlements, is located some 140 miles southeast of Calgary, 50 miles northeast of Lethbridge and 50 miles west of Medicine Hat. The Vauxhall worship house, located 10 kilometres north and six kilometres east of town, is the larger of the two. A General Conference Mennonite Church was purchased and renovated to resemble Old Colony worship houses in Latin America but at the same time served with electricity to provide lighting. This worship house was dedicated by Aeltester Cornelius Enns from Ontario on November 12, 1994.

Grassy Lake.

The second house of worship is situated four kilometres west of Grassy Lake, about 32 kilometres east of Tabor, Alberta, approximately 25 miles south of Vauxhall. A church building was purchased in Tabor and moved to the site where it was renovated according to Old Colony customs. The church at Grassy Lake was first

used in 1999.

A visitor to an Old Colony worship service in Southern Alberta might readily notice that dress styles have remained very traditional as in Mexico. Old customs include backless benches and the pulpit and Ministerial-Vorsänger platform on the traditional "long" side of the Church.

Two Hills.

A new congregation is currently being started at Two Hills, located on Highway 45, 90 kilometres east of Edmonton. A community hall has been rented where worship services are held once a month, served by ministers from Vauxhall. Aeltester Peter Wolfe and Rev. John Quiring from Hague, Saskatchewan, are also helping with this work.

In the Two Hills area a number of Old Colony families have purchased their own farms. It seems that some older farmers here wish to retire and are anxious to sell their farms, which are of moderate size. Some Old Colony people have also come direct from Mexico and purchased farms.

The Jacob Wiebes were the first family to move to the Two Hills area arriving in late 1999. They came from Vauxhall where they had moved 15 years earlier from Mexico. The Wiebes have been helpful to others interested in relocating to the area by hosting people and taking them around to look at property.

Some 20-30 families had relocated to Two Hills by the end of 2000 and more are expected to follow. The settlement is encouraged by local hospitality and stimulated by a positive response from local officials.

Schools.

The majority of Old Colony children in the Vauxhall and Grassy Lake area attend public schools and some parents also home school. Interested parents in both districts rent facilities where they operate Saturday German schools. In these schools the children learn the catechism and other church curriculum.

At Two Hills the local school division has designated two classrooms for teaching Old Colony children with some instruction in German and some in English.

The Church Today.

The present ministerial consists of three ministers: Franz Guenther, Henry Wiebe and Jakob Giesbrecht and one deacon Herman Wiebe.

The church maintains close ties with the Old Colony Church at La Crete and Worsely. They are currently being served by Aeltester Johann Klassen from La Crete as well as by ministers from Hague Osler, Saskatchewan.

The membership of the Vauxhall Old Colony Church is around 600. Rev. Jacob Giebrecht was elected as the Aeltester of the Vauxhall Gemeinde on January 18, 2001, and ordained by Aeltester John Klassen, of La Crete on January 21. There are now seven Old Colony Bishops serving in Canada. Praise God for His great goodness and mercy over His people.

As the newest Old Colony Church in Canada the Gemeinde with meeting places at Vauxhall, Grassy Lake, and Two Hills, Alberta, still has many challenges to face. May the blessing of God be upon them.



Vauxhall Old Colony Mennonite Church, Vauxhall, Alberta. Photo courtesy of Abe Fehr, Box 24005, Lethbridge, Alberta, T1H 6H1.

Old Colony Mennonite Church of Ontario

“Old Colony Mennonite Church of Ontario,” by Rev. Peter Dyck, R.R.#1, 1023 Talbot Trail, Wheatley, Ontario, Canada, N0P 2P0, and Deacon Henry Friesen, Box 53, Wheatley, Ontario, N0P 2P0.

Beginnings, 1957.

The Ontario Old Colony Mennonite church was founded by families returning to Canada from Mexico.

In 1957 some families settled in the Matheson area, located some 200 miles north of Toronto. About a dozen Old Colony families settled in the area. They were able to purchase pasture land relatively cheaply and went into beef farming.

No formal church organization was ever organized at Matheson. Some worship services were held for the settlers by a minister from Manitoba.

Over the years individual families moved away to join those around Alymer in southwestern Ontario and at Rainy River, Ontario, near the Manitoba border. Others moved to Manitoba. Eventually the settlement at Matheson dissolved.

Alymer, 1954.

In 1954 Old Colony families from Mexico were settling in the Alymer area, near Waterloo, taking up factory and farm work.

The first Old Colony Church worship services were held in Alymer in 1957 by Aeltester Jakob J. Froese from Winkler who also organized the Gemeinde. Various other ministers came during the first years to conduct worship services. The Old Colony Mennonite Church was established in Ontario in order to preserve the teachings and values brought along from Mexico.

The first ministerial election was held in 1960 with Henry Peters and Jakob Wiebe elected as ministers and Peter Giesbrecht as deacon.

In 1966 Peter Driedger and Jakob Wiebe was elected as ministers.

In 1969 another ministerial election was held with six ministers elected. Three ministers were elected for the western part of the Gemeinde including Heinrich Reimer, Johann Neufeld and Cornelius Quiring. Three ministers were elected for the eastern part of the Gemeinde including Jakob Reimer, Wilhelm Fehr and Jakob Giesbrecht.

Aeltesten/Bishops.

The first Aeltester election was held November 19, 1972 with Rev. Heinrich Reimer, Leamington, elected. He was ordained by Aeltester Jakob Penner from Manitoba. Later Heinrich Reimer moved to Seminole, Texas, with a number of members and eventually gave up the ministry.

On November 18, 1978, an Aeltester election was held to replace Aeltester Reimer with Cornelius Quiring, Leamington, elected and ordained by Aeltester Johann Wiebe from Winkler,

Manitoba. Aeltester Quiring served until 1983 when he left the Gemeinde to found the “New Reinland Gemeinde”.

On November 8, 1984, Rev. William Fehr was elected as Aeltester and ordained by Bishop John Wiebe, Manitoba, on November 9, 1984. Bishop Fehr died of cancer in 1989.



The home of Peter Dycks in Wheatley, Ontario, where the first worship services in held in 1965. Photo courtesy of Rev. Peter Dyck, Wheatley, Ontario.

The current Aeltester Cornelius R. Enns, Alymer, was elected as Aeltester on November 11, 1989. He was ordained by Aeltester Wiebe from Manitoba the following day.

Wheatley Congregation.

In the early years in the Wheatley area there were only a few families. The Church in the west end was started in 1962 with services and prayer meetings at night in the home of Jacob Enns.

In 1966 one of our members bought an old school building in Coatsworth, Ontario, and we had church services in there.

In 1967 we purchased the property about five kilometres north of Wheatley where the current church stands today, situated on the Wheatley Tilbury Townline in Romney Township. It was a garage when we bought it and we converted it to a church building. The building was very small but it served the purpose.

In 1970 we started to make plans to build a bigger church 40' x 80' and in 1972 the building was completed. It was a big project at that time for us with the total cost being approximately \$25,000.00. We did all the work ourselves. The building accommodated an average of 300 people for regular services and occasionally as many as 500 for special events such as funerals, Good Friday and Thanksgiving services.

The original church building was renovated and became the Sunday School classrooms. Inside washrooms were added later to replace the outside plumbing, making the facilities more convenient.

Even though two congregations in Dresden and Kingsville were started in 1988 and 1989, the Wheatley congregation continued to grow. Only four years after Dresden was started, the Wheatley

group was dealing with serious space shortages. A decision was made to add to the existing building.

In 1995 and 1996 a 3200 square foot addition was added on the north side of the existing 3200 square foot sanctuary, making this the largest of the Old Colony worship houses in Ontario. Even though the building was not completed, the first worship service in the new part was held Sunday morning February 19, 1995. The main sanctuary seats 700 people and is usually filled to capacity.



The first church building of the Wheatley Old Colony congregation, purchased in 1967. The building is located on the same yard where the large church is today and serves as a Sunday School building. Photo courtesy of Rev. Peter Dyck, Wheatley, Ontario.



Baptismal candidates (52) in the Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church. Not all are visible in the photograph. Photo courtesy of Rev. Peter Dyck, Wheatley,

Walsingham.

The third congregation was started in Walsingham in 1974 situated 40 kilometres from Aylmer. An old building was purchased in 1973 for \$16,000.00 and renovated. The dedication service was held on January 19, 1974.

In 1995 further renovations were made to the building and an addition added to the sanctuary and washrooms modernized. The seating of the expanded sanctuary is 300. The Vorsteher (Chairman) is Cornelius Unger of Walsingham.

Kingsville.

The Wheatley congregation was growing at a tremendous rate and it was necessary to find additional space to accommodate everybody. Since many were coming from far away, the church decided to buy another building. In 1988 a building was bought from the Seventh Day Adventist congregation near Kingsville, on Essex County Road #18, between the Arner Townline and Division Road. This is where the Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church was founded.

The building consists of a sanctuary, three Sunday school rooms, a small kitchen and a study. Jakob N. Dyck was the first chairman elected on July 9, 1988, and Jakob K. Ketler was the first vice-chair/secretary for this congregation. This building accommodated an average of about 150 people the first year.

By 1994 the congregation was looking at expanding and purchased a parcel of property adjacent to the existing site because the space was not sufficient anymore. In 1997 the Kingsville congregation built a new church facility at a cost of \$200,000.00. The sanctuary seats 600 people. The chairman (Vorsteher) is Henry Kroeker.

Dresden.

While the Kingsville congregation consisted mainly of Old Colony Ontario members, the

history of the congregation in the Dresden-Wallaceburg area was somewhat different. The congregation we helped to establish there in 1989 was composed mostly of newcomers from Mexico. Fourteen of these families were accepted as church members on January 20, 1990, and others joined later.

Because this congregation was smaller and the people newer to Ontario, they rented a building for worship services for the first year. In 1990 they purchased an old church building just east of Kent County Road 15, north of Highway 21, in the Wallaceburg area.

The Dresden church is currently adding an addition to the existing sanctuary at a cost of \$190,000.00. When completed it will seat 500. The Vorsteher (Chair) of the Dresden congregation is Jakob Peters.

Drayton.

In 1974 a small group started meeting in a building made available by the Old Order Men-

nonites 10 kilometres west of Kitchener. In 1983 a church building was purchased in the Town of Heidelberg.

Shortly thereafter, Aeltester Cornelius Quiring left the church and founded his own "New-Reinland" congregation, taking the church building and a few members with him. The Heidelberg congregation then rented a high school in Elmira for a time.

In 1991 a church building was purchased from a Mennonite congregation in Drayton. The Drayton worship house is located 40 kilometers north of Kitchener/Waterloo.

The church building has a balcony and seats 350. This property also included a cemetery. The Vorsteher (Chair) is Jakob Dyck.

Tillsonburg.

The seventh congregation of the Gemeinde was founded in Tillsonburg in 1993. This congregation resulted from an overflow from Aylmer and Walsingham. Tillsonburg is located



Nine baptismal candidates at the Dresden Old Colony church together with four ministers, the deacon and Aeltester. At the left hand side is Rev. Henry Teichroeb; next to him is Rev. Peter G. Dyck. Right to left, starting at the right side of photo is deacon Henry Friesen, Bishop Peter W. Friesen, Rev. John Neufeld, and Rev. David Hiebert. Photo courtesy of Rev. Peter Dyck, Wheatley, Ontario.



Dresden Old Colony Mennonite Church. Photo courtesy of Biographies of our late Leaders, page 135.

20 kilometres east of Aylmer.

The congregation started in a hall purchased from the Knights of Columbus. The building seated 300 but an addition was added in 1998 bringing seating capacity to 600. The Vorsteher (Chair) is John Banman.

Virgil.

The newest congregation of the Old Colony

Church in Ontario was founded at Virgil in 1991. A building was purchased in 1994 from a Mennonite Brethren congregation. The seating is about 300 people. Vorsteher is Jakob Doerksen.

Cemeteries.

A concern was finding a graveyard for our deceased. For many years members in the

Wheatley area (west group) did not have a dependable place to bury the dead. Because of this loved ones are buried in four different cemeteries in Essex and Kent Counties. This includes two at the cemetery on Cemetery Road just east of Wheatley, and one at the Ruthven Cemetery at the corner of Highway #3 and County Road #31 west of Leamington, and two at Evergreen Cemetery on Talbot Road.

For the last years the dead have been buried at Fairview Cemetery on Erie Street South, Wheatley. From 1986 until the present, we have buried 115 people, at the Fairview Cemetery in Wheatley, Ontario.

Circumstances in the Aylmer area (east group) were different as a cemetery was part of the church property acquired in Aylmer in 1964. The cemetery was situated across the road from the church and very convenient.

Another cemetery was acquired in 1991 as part of the Drayton church property. This became the second cemetery owned by the Ontario Old Colony Church.

In the year 2000, Norfolk Township handed an old cemetery over to the Old Colony Church, the Tillsonburg Congregation, for the price of the legal fees involved in the transfer of the property. This cemetery is located about four kilometres from the Tillsonburg church and has room for 1400 graves.

Christian Service.

The Ontario Old Colony Mennonite Church has many members who are involved with various local service projects. The congregations

Rev. Peter Dyck

My name is Peter Dyck and I was born in Mexico on September 28, 1938, in the village of Waldheim. My parents Jacob and Helena Dyck were poor and had to move often because they were cattle watchers in the villages. I was one of 12 children, 8 boys and 4 girls. Two of my brothers and two of my sisters died in their childhood. I started school when I was six years old. I had many teachers and when I turned 13 it was time to go to work to help support the family to help make ends meet. I worked in many places. At 15 I was a Milchfuerer (Milkman) to the cheese factories. My favourite job at 16 years old was as a clerk in a store.

On my 20th birthday I married a girl from the village of Springfield. Her name was Anna Neufeld. I worked a year or so on the farm of my in-laws, but then I went back to the store where I worked until 1964. At that time we decided that we were going to go to Ontario to work and get "rich" and that of course never happened!

We left Mexico on April 20th, 1965 and arrived in Aylmer, Ontario, on the 23rd. There was not much going on at that time, so I bought myself a 1952 Chevy for \$425.00 and we started on our journey toward Wheatley. There was a farmer who needed a worker and he had a house where we could live in for free. He paid me \$50.00 a week and that was a pretty good income. He also helped me farm. Soon

we found out that it wasn't enough to make ends meet, so I went to look for other work. It was a job at Nelson's Wood Products at Wheatley. Later on I got a job in a canning factory which was also situated in Wheatley where I worked until the end of 1965. I also worked as a clerk at an IGA grocery store.

The language was a problem so we decided to head back to Mexico. We found out that we didn't like Mexico anymore and we came back to Ontario.

There was not much going on in this part of the country. There was no church but we had prayer meetings in the white house we had rented for ourselves (see photograph). Then someone bought the public school in Coatsworth and we renovated part of the place into a church. We called that place our church for almost a year. Before all this happened we didn't find it interesting because there were only five Mennonite families living in Wheatley then.

We returned to Mexico in December, 1966. Before we returned to Wheatley again, they had bought the public school and had already renovated the place into a church. We found this fairly interesting. We stayed in Wheatley until 1969 and then we once again returned to Mexico. We stayed there for a year; I still had property down there but then I sold it and came back to Ontario.

I found a job at Fords and lived again in the Wheatley area. But I didn't like the long drive every day into Windsor so I quit and found a job at a plastics factory in Tilbury, Ontario (I worked

there for 30 years)....

By this time, 1970, the number of Mennonite people living in Wheatley had increased sharply. So, many people agreed on buying the land where we have our church now. There was only a garage on this piece of land. We changed the whole thing and made it into a church. We now use that building for our Sunday School classes. The church we have now we started to build in 1971. It was on the same piece of land...

We have stayed in Wheatley since 1970 and enjoy living out here now. Though we have visited Mexico from time to time during these 15 years, we have never lived out there again or stayed for over a month.

I was elected treasurer (Vorsteher) and served in that position for 14 years. At the same time I was also a Vorsänger in the church. I was elected as a minister in 1988.

My Dad passed away in 1967 at the age of 67 years old. In 1972 another brother died at the age of 31 here in Ontario. He had a car accident in the Kitchener area and lived about 1 ½ years after the accident. In 1976 another sister died at the age of 46.

My wife and I had 10 children, 4 boys and 6 girls. The first baby girl we had only lived for 3 days and another boy died at 8 months old. We ended up with 3 boys and 5 girls, and they are all married and grown up today.

Revised and adapted from *Memories*, pages 49-50.

have supported MCC by working with the Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Assistance Committee (OMIAC) and at the "Et Cetera Shop". The Old Colony Church also supports the "Visitation Ministry" within the Low German community under the auspices of MCC, which reaches out to immigrants who are not connected with any religious denomination.

Another project supported in past years was the "Mission Council", now defunct. Other cooperative ventures include the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, South Essex Community Council, and Leamington Mennonite Home.

Great Commission.

The vision of the Ontario Old Colony Mennonite church is to live out the teachings of Jesus Christ. In the tradition of the early Christian church and that of the Anabaptists in Reformation times, the Gospel is to be preached wherever there are needy souls. Ministers and others travel from place to place and congregation to congregation teaching God's word.

Until the year 2000 the Old Colony Mennonite Church of Ontario had never sent or delegated ministers to serve abroad or in areas other than where they were ordained to a specific congregation.

The exception was perhaps Rev. Jakob Giesbrecht, Aylmer, who, in 1975, moved to Paraguay, South America, in the hope of finding greener pastures. When he returned 6 1/2 years later he went to Seminole, Texas, where he served as a minister for two years, and then came back to Ontario and was accepted to serve again as a minister in the OCMC Ontario.

This changed when in 1998 a couple of individuals purchased two parcels of land in the State Campeche, Mexico, and then invited others to participate. In 1999 several families moved from Ontario to Campeche and made this their new home. Since they were members of the OCMC Ontario, they proposed to the church to provide leadership for these new settlements.

On June 17, 2000, this proposal was presented to the brethren of the church at a "Brodaschoft" and thus an approval of 80 per cent was achieved for this project. Accordingly Rev. Heinrich Reddekopp with family volunteered to move to Campeche to serve as minister for a period of two years. The Reddekopps left Ontario in December of 2000.

Ministerial.

In 1985 all four of the Old Colony congregations in Ontario, including the one near Wheatley, were served by one Bishop, Wilhelm Fehr, one deacon, and five ministers. Since deacon, Peter Giesbrecht was getting old and needed help with the increasing work load, the ministerial decided to elect and ordain a new deacon and two new ministers, Heinrich R. Friesen of Leamington, Peter Dyck of Wheatley, and Cornelius Enns of Aylmer. The election took place on January 23, 1988, and the ordination on January 31, 1988.

A number of ministerial elections and ordinations have been held since. On March 24, 1990, David Hiebert of Leamington, and



Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church. Photo courtesy of Biographies of our late Leaders, page 135.



Wheatley Old Colony Mennonite Church, 1997. Photo by George Schartner and courtesy of Biographies of our late Leaders, page 30.

Herman Bergen of Aylmer, Ontario, were elected as ministers. On November 16, 1991, Peter W. Dyck of Aylmer, Ontario, and Peter W. Friesen of Leamington, were elected as ministers. Another election was held on September 24, 1994, for deacon Cornelius Reimer of Aylmer and minister Cornelius U. Enns of Kingsville, Ontario.

Since the workload in the church grew ever heavier as the church grew bigger, we finally decided to elect another Bishop. Peter W. Friesen, Leamington, was elected as the Aeltester of the western part of the Gemeinde on July 30, 1994, serving the congregations at Wheatley, Kingsville and Dresden. He was ordained on

July 31 by Aeltester Cornelius Enns.

The current ministerial consists of two deacons, 12 ministers and two Aeltesten (Bishops).

Ministerial Exchanges.

In the beginning the ministers travelled to all the churches but later after the Gemeinde was divided into two parts, we stopped travelling to the east. We only visit the other part once a year now, travelling to Virgil or Drayton. It is a four hour drive one way. That means getting up at 4:00 am to make it there for the 10:00 am service.

Our members are scattered all over Ontario from Windsor in the west to Niagara Falls in

Old Kolony Church in Ontario

Gemeinde statistics for the Old Kolony (OK) Church, Ontario, Canada,
as compiled by deacons Heinrich Friesen and Cornelius Reimer.

Births. 84 males, 81 females, total of 165 souls born in our Gemeinde in the preceeding year.

Deaths. 15 members of the Gemeinde, 10 males and 5 females and 8 children. A total of 23 persons died in our Gemeinde in the past year. In addition there were 5 children who were not entered as members so that a total of 23 were buried. Therefore there were 123 more births than deaths.

New Members. 87 males and 81 females were entered as members [by transfer], and 238 children. Accordingly, a total of 406 souls were entered.

Released. 36 males and 41 females, and 110 children. Therefore a total of 187 souls have been released from the Gemeinde.

Baptised. 84 males and 97 females. Therefore a total of 181 souls were baptised by Aeltester Cornelius Enns and Peter Friesen.

Marriages. 81 couples.

Totals. Baptised members in our Gemeinde - 1801 males and 1940 female. Therefore, we presently count 3741 members of the Gemeinde and 4438 children, for a total of 8179 souls as of the end of this year in our Gemeinde.

We wish everyone a blessed new year in 2000.

Reprinted from the *Mennonitische Post*, March 17, 2000, page 9.

the east, and Toronto to the north.

Christian Education.

The Ontario Old Colony Mennonite Church provides Christian adult education in the following areas:

- 1) Evening classes in winter for the youth, one night per week in three locations with some 130 young people attending;
- 2) Youth baptismal classes (“Jugend-Tauf Unterricht”) held in three locations from New Year to Pentecost on Wednesday evenings;
- 3) Pre-marriage classes (“Ehe Unterricht”) held in three locations for four weeks held on Wednesday evenings, starting at Pentecost.

Sunday School.

Sunday Schools were new to our people from the south. Back home they were not needed since our regular schools were all Bible based, and Sunday Schools were looked upon as something the modern churches would use. But things are different in Ontario. In the Aylmer (Port Rowan) area our Sunday schools started in the late 1950s. They were initiated by, and the first Sunday School teachers were from, the M.B.; I don't know the names of these teachers.

After one or two years we started our own program with our own teachers and books. The books used were the “old” *Gesangbuch*, the Catechism and the “Fibel” (a traditional German reader) with an emphasis on the German language and calligraphy (Recht Schrieben). In the Wheatley area the Sunday Schools were started in the late 60s as a Friday night or afternoon class and later were held on Saturdays.

In the early 70s we started a steady Sunday morning program with the same program as Aylmer. In 1989 we started to revise the program by changing the books that were used. The expensive *Gesangbuch* was replaced with a small book with selected songs from the *Gesangbuch*. In 1995 a Sunday School book was composed from the *Biblische Geschichten* (Bible Stories), Catechism, the *Fibel* and the



Construction of the new Kingsville Old Colony Mennonite Church, 1997. Photo by George Schartner and courtesy of Biographies of our late Leaders, page 31.

Gesangbuch). We printed our first book for a new Sunday school program and since then we have produced an additional five booklets, one for each of the six classes.

Our classes, in general, are well attended. In some schools we have as many as 250 to 300 children attending, even though this attendance is irregular, as children will normally only attend when the parents come to church.

We have eight churches and each church has a Sunday school. The largest two are the Aylmer and Wheatley churches, followed by Kingsville, Tillsonburg, Walsingham, Drayton, Dresden, and Virgil. Wheatley presently has 18 volunteer teachers.

We also have three Sunday School Teachers' Seminars per year conducted by the ministerial (Lehrdienst) and one Sunday School Teachers' Training Course per year also conducted by the Lehrdienst. By Deacon Henry Friesen.

The Church Today.

A statistic from our last Communion from all the eight churches was 3258 baptized members. The east has a Bishop (Aeltester) and seven ministers (Predigers) and a Deacon (Diakon). The West churches have a Bishop, five Predigers

(Ministers) and a Deacon.

We have had seven ministerial elections in the time that we have been in Ontario. Considering the rate of growth, more leadership is needed.

A church that consists mostly of newcomers from foreign countries has many different kinds of problems. One of our big problems was, and still is, helping to educate our people. To improve this, in 1989 we started to operate two private schools, one in Wheatley and one in Aylmer (see article following by Henry Friesen, Leamington, Ontario).

These two schools started their classes on the same day that Aeltester Wilhelm Fehr, a very dedicated supporter of private schools passed away into eternity, on September 18, 1989.

Besides these two schools, four others have emerged. Kingsville, Dresden, King Lake, and Walsingham, all in Ontario, now have Old Colony Mennonite Schools with a combined attendances of over 846 students.

Conclusion.

May the Lord grant His blessing to the work of those who labour in the vineyard. May He be with the Old Colony people as they reestablish themselves in Canada, the country which once was their home.

Sources:

Memories: Sixty Years of Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties (South Essex Historical Association, Leamington, Ont., 1985), 77 pages.

Biographies of Our Late Leaders in Histories of the Mennonite Churches in Essex and Kent Counties (Essex and Kent Mennonite Historical Association, Leamington, Ont., 1995), 141 pages.

Victor D. Kliever, *The Mennonites in Essex and Kent Counties* (Essex and Kent Mennonite Historical Association, Leamington, Ont., 1999), 110 pages.

Henry Friesen, *Unsere Herkunft Eine Kurze Betrachtung über die Mennoniten von Latin-America in Ontario, Kanada Zum Dankfest auf das Mennoniten-Treffen in Aylmer und Leamington, Ontario* (Wheatley, 1997), 8 pages.



The Virgil Old Colony Mennonite Church, only 10 miles from Niagara Falls, is situated in the midst of Ontario's most productive vineyards and fruit country.

Old Colony Mennonite Schools in Ontario

“Old Colony Church Schools in Ontario: A collection of articles and reflections regarding education in the Old Colony Mennonite Churches of Ontario,” written and compiled by deacon Henry R. Friesen, Box 53, Wheatley, Ontario, N0P 2P0.

Background.

“In the early 1900s the governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan legislated increasingly strict guidelines to unify their provincial education systems. However, the Mennonites who had immigrated there earlier, had come with the clear understanding that the education of their children would be entirely in their own hands. Now the OCMC, who saw one of their central convictions being threatened, was the group that most sharply opposed the new laws. They did this in the spirit of their overall faith convictions, offering passive yet passionate resistance, boycotting public schools, and refusing to assist the authorities in other ways. They were fined repeatedly and even taken to court several times for violating the School Attendance Act.”

“Finally, the Old Colony Mennonites saw no other alternative but to move out of the country: in 1922 an unprecedented mass emigration began to Mexico, which offered, among other things, complete freedom of education in exchange for their work in land development. Later emigrations followed as well.

“In Mexico, Mennonite leaders intentionally limited the level of education, for example, by using only internal teaching resources. Gradually, however, their children began to attend the schools which the Russian Mennonite immigrants of the 1920s had already established there. When a secondary level was added to these schools in 1967, tension increased in the Old Colony Mennonite Church, as the “Ohms”, the church leaders, remained firmly opposed to any education beyond elementary school. (See also Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 5, pp. 258-259.)

“Subsequently, Old Colony Mennonites came to Ontario because of different hardships in Mexico, but they brought many of these deep convictions along. Hence, they developed their own school system, starting no less than five private schools by 1994. In Essex County, the Kingsville Old Colony Christian Academy was opened in September 1990 in the Kingsville Old Colony church. The school’s curriculum, which is recognized by the Ontario Department of Education was produced by an Old Mennonite—not an Old Colony Mennonite!—group in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In this system, children go to school 186 days per year and are free to work on the farms during the remaining half year (See Karin Kliever’s history of the OCMC, p. 12)

“Aside from this school program, the OCMC has placed great value on their German Sunday School Classes, which began in the early 1960s. These are one of the main means of preserving the German language, since all other education is in English. In the early years the curriculum materials were the same as the schools used in Mexico. Young children started with the “Fibel”—a phonics and alphabet starter text; the “Katechismus”—the traditional catechism—was used for the students who were a little older; finally, the oldest

children used a reader called “Biblische Geschichten”—stories from the Bible.

“Sunday School teacher seminars, conducted by church ministers and deacons, are held four times a year for all Old Colony teachers in Ontario. In these seminars, problems and changes are addressed, the teachers receive help for their tasks. One major project that was underway in 1996 was the development of a new Sunday School curriculum, as the church sought to address the changing needs, especially related to the increasing use of the English language.”

Reprinted from “Education in the Old Colony Mennonite Church,” in Victor Kliever, *Mennonites in Essex County*, pages 53-55.

Reflections, Henry Friesen.

“A Few Notes on the Old Colony Mennonites,” from *Memories: Sixty Years of Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties*, pages 64-65..

“I’m writing this as an individual and I want to describe a little bit about the Old Colony Mennonite Church and some personal experiences. I was born in Patos (later called Nuevo Ideal), Durango, Mexico, and lived there for 16 years with my parents; then we moved to Ontario, Canada.

“I was raised on the family farm until I was sixteen. There I experienced the so-called old-fashioned way of life. Travelling was by horse and buggy and working the land with old machinery, such as old John Deere tractors, Models B & A & G on steel wheels. Tires were outlawed by the church since one could abuse the machinery by using it for travel.

“As a Mennonite family in Mexico we also raised some livestock such as cows, pigs, chickens, etc. My father was a mechanic and we had a machine repair shop, and I spent a lot of time in the shop as I grew older.

“Like all the others, I started school at the age of six in the Fibel level where I was taught the ABC’s, counting to 100, and some printing. Next I progressed to Katechismus where I was taught writing and spelling and beginner’s math; then I progressed to “Testamentler” where reading was enhanced and writing and math got heavier, and finally to “Bibler” with math in general and good writing and good reading.

“Discipline was good throughout the school, as the teacher had the right to punish any student who disobeyed, by having him stand up for a length of time, by having him sit on the “Faul Banke” (lazy bench), or by lashing him with a whip. (The lazy bench was a bench on the stage.) The sports in the schools consisted of baseball and soccer and other easy games, but they were never played in competition.

“The social life was very limited. The young men would go out at night and visit friends or meet at the fireside on the side of the road in the village, even though the fire was discouraged by parents and neighbours, or they would meet at the local variety store and chat over a coke and chips

or peanuts or chocolate. Hunting and fishing were sometimes done in groups, and going shopping in town became a social event sometimes.

“To think back a bout sixty years when the Mennonites settled in Mexico in only two communities, Chihuahua and Durango, one is amazed to realize that there are now about ten or more communities in Mexico alone, and various others in Honduras and Paraguay and Bolivia, and in the last twenty years some in Ontario, Canada, as well.”

Written by “Heinrich R. Friesen, January, 1985, and published in *Memories: Sixty Years of Mennonite Life in Essex and Kent Counties* (Leamington, 1985), pages 64-65.

New School, 1989.

“Several years ago, a conscientious group of church members from the Old Colony Mennonite Church, north of Wheatley on County Rd., attempted to institute a private school. Unfortunately, the financial support they required was lacking.

“However, their efforts have not been in vain. Last winter, church members, along with their ministerial counterparts, pulled together to form a volunteer board and provide the necessary funding. Thus the Old Colony Christian Academy was established.

“The reality of their effort and hard work put into this project is evident and can be seen throughout the Sunday School building of the Old Colony Mennonite Church from which the school functions.

“The hallways are filled with smiling, friendly faces and the school yard rings out with laughter and discipline. On the front of each desk is the young occupant’s name card is done in the pupils’ own hand writing. Inside, the compartments are filled with books and necessary tools of knowledge.

“Mr. Henry Friesen fills the role of principal and teacher at the Academy. He feels that there were various motivating factors behind the efforts to establish the new school.

“First of all, many of the Mennonite children who had been attending school within the Public School Board system, were experiencing difficulties due to language barriers and cultural differences.

“The Academy however, provides a sense of equality and shared beliefs that the students can feel comfortable in. Also, being that the teachers and students have a common background, it provides for a deeper understanding throughout the curriculum. Consequently, it is the Academy’s function to eliminate previous learning difficulties for its students and in so doing, raise the calibre of learning and understanding the pupils receive.

“Although various publishing programs were considered for the school’s curriculum, an in-depth study proved Christian Light Publications to be the best suited for the Academy’s program.

“Two factors that played key roles in the deter-

mining process were quality and religion. The quality of the Christian Light Publication program is considered, by those involved, to be exemplary. Thus they feel that this program will assist in their students achieving high ranking academic accomplishments.

“Yet, although the calibre of the program is important to those involved, the religious element is essential. Considering this, it is obvious that their choice of “Christian Light Publications” is compatible with their church and faith. Devotion and dedication to the values and principles within the realm of Christianity, on which their church is based, is also one of the strongest motivational forces behind the Academy’s establishment.

“As the students move upward in this academic structure, they will grow mentally, physically and spiritually. Such a growth then, prepares them not only for life but more importantly for eternity. This preparation, when achieved by the individual, serves as a testament to the belief in eternal life, which is the back bone of their Christian religion.

“The ancestry of most of the children in attendance is Mexican and although the children speak both High and Low German, they are required to converse in English when in class. As a result, the language barrier that serves as an obstruction in the children’s daily life is obliterated.

“Presently, the school accommodates grades one through nine and Board members remain optimistic that one day the Academy will eventually continue to grade 12.

“Throughout the course of a typical day, the students will receive instruction in Bible Study, Social Studies, Science, Math and Language Arts. The only exception to this can be found in the first grade program in which the emphasis on science and social studies is lessened so that Language Arts, and its importance, is increased. Therefore, with intense study of the English language, the children can create a basis on which their future studies can thrive.

“For the most part, the teaching staff is on a salary basis, aside from volunteers who donate their time. As preparation, those wishing to fulfil teaching obligations must complete an intense Christian Light Education Teachers Training Course. Following this, they must also pass a series of exams and if successful, will receive diplomas and accept positions at the Academy. In addition, these individuals are also recommended to attend annual Alumni Courses that serve to refreshen and keep them up to date on current practices.

“The present enrolment at the school is 88 with an expected total of 120 to be reached. Adequate records of each enrolled pupil will allow the school to trace each student before a final enrolment total is given.

“A number of the students in the Wheatley area, assist their families on farms as the growing season nears its end in September. In the Public School system, these children are granted work permits which allow them to start the school year later. The Academy foresees problems with this system in that these children fall behind in their studies and the language obstacles they already have to face, are intensified.



The Old Colony Mennonite School north of Wheatley in 1997. Photo by George Schartner and courtesy of Mennonites in Essex County, page 53.

“The Academy has found a solution to this problem. Their school year, for the student body as a whole, commences two weeks later than many other schools this allotting for any time the students may have missed in the Public School system.

“As compensation for this change, the school does not break in March and Christmas vacation is only one week in length. While they will observe certain religious holidays in accordance with their faith, some of the statutory holidays observed elsewhere, will function as full school days for the students.

“This being their first year of operations, the Old Colony Christian Academy is still setting precedence in many ways. For example, enrolment at the school is open and any child wishing to become educated in their system, will be given an opportunity.

“As the Board, which governs the Academy, becomes finalized, a sense of solidarity is appearing. They have chosen not to pursue government funding and although their self funding and tuition based enrolment can, at times, prove to be somewhat of a strain or slight financial limitation, school representatives feel such support is inspiring. In their opinion, it assists not only in making the school easier to run, it also serves to unite the community in a very special manner.

“There will not be “Grand Opening” ceremonies at the school for it is the intention of the Board and all involved, to keep publicity to a minimum. Their main concern is to ensure that the school remains community oriented and that it functions, not only to serve and understand, but also to detect and nurture the needs of each individual student. Source: *Wheatley Journal*, September 27, 1989

Wheatley School, 2000.

In 2000 the Old Colony Church at Wheatley purchased the Romney Central Public School for \$300,000.00. The building is 16,000 square feet and is situated on 10 acres of land, 10 miles from the Wheatley worship house where students were crowded into overflowing classrooms in the Sunday School building and church basement.

The Romney public school was built in 1965. It had a fully developed playground. Because there were too few people living in the area the school was closed in 1998.

Some 220 students will have classroom space

in the new school. The first teaching day was held on October 25, 2000. The new school will become the centre of the Old Colony Church school system and also serve as a community centre for the Old Colony people.

A dedication service for the new school was

A Day at the Academy...

Starting a day of school is basically the same every day. We, the teachers, arrive sooner than the students, so, we have some quiet time to get ready. After we all arrive we go into our staff room and start the day with devotions together. Then we go our separate ways and finish preparing our classrooms, making sure we have the schedule put up and answer keys set out.

Soon the students start arriving. At ten to nine we blow the whistle, which calls all the children in. It’s a bit rowdy in the morning, but eventually we get them all settled down. We start our day as a whole school with a song and a prayer. After that we close our doors and begin our classes. In class we start off with devotions. Normally one student will read the required Scripture passage, as well as the moral. We discuss it for a few minutes and then carry on. Homework assignments are handed in, and attendance is taken. The students begin working independently with their books for the next hour, so I can work classroom-style with another grade.

Recess is at ten o’clock. One of the teachers goes out on duty with the students. After the fifteen minutes are up, we blow the whistle again. Another hour and forty minutes go by with classroom-style work before lunch. Then we all pray together. By then the lunches are warmed up. We eat and a twenty after twelve the students go outside. One teacher will again go out on duty. The afternoon hours are similar, with classroom-style work and recess.

At the end of the day we close together with a song and a prayer. Then the students are dismissed. We teachers, stay until all have left and we have cleaned up for another day. Then we also take our leave.

Tina Schmidt, Old Colony Mennonite Church
Reprinted from “Education in the Old Colony Mennonite Church,” in Victor Kliewer, *Mennonites in Essex County*, page 54.



The former Romney Central Public School purchased by the Old Colony Church in 2000, and now in use as its largest church-run school. Photo courtesy of Rev. Peter Dyck, Wheatley, Ontario.

held October 22, 2000, with over 1000 people taking part. Money was also raised for the project.

Bob Shepard, from the Wheatley area, the last chairman of the public school before it was closed, spoke during the program. He congratulated David Dyck, chair of the school committee, Treasurer Peter Enns, Trustee Rev. Peter Dyck, committee members and the entire congregation.

Source: Marvin Dueck, "Altkolonier in Wheatley, Ontario, kaufen eine Schule," *Mennonitische Post*, 1 Dec., 2000.

The Schools Today.

In 1989 a group of Old Colony members started having meetings about setting up church run schools for our children. The schools at Alymer and Wheatley were started in 1989, and the schools in Kingsville and Dresden in 1990. The school in Glenmeyer was started in 1993 and the school in Walsingham in 1997.

We now have six church schools in operation, three on the west end and three in the east end. These schools, even though they are Old Colony schools (in the sense that they are guided by the church), are not financed through the church directly. Most of the buildings belong to the church but the cost of purchasing curriculum material, paying staff salaries, and transportation, etc., must come from the students' parents as tuition fees.

These OCMC schools are financially totally independent of the Government or other corporate bodies.

As already mentioned some of these schools have been in operation since 1989. The first year or two we comforted ourselves in that we thought that some of the hardships might decrease with experience and familiarization. And it might have to a certain extent. But some of these schools struggle financially either because budgeting was done too conservatively or parents do not have the income as they had hoped when the school year started. Other problems such as finding and keeping qualified staff and the need for transportation have not lessened.

All of the schools use the CLE (Christian Light Education) curriculum with the exception of mathematics where it has been replaced by conventional text books and teaching methodology. All instruction is in the English language with about twenty (20) percent in German instead of French. To integrate the German language we open and close the school days with German language songs and prayers. To help teach the German language we also use books such as the German

"Katechismus" and "Grammatik" books published in Mexico.

We started the New Year 2001 with a combined student body of 846 students and 45 full time staff and teachers.

Conclusion.

In conclusion we should recognize that these stories (and captions) have a positive tone to them and this is only a very small part of our story, for, (I assume that) as in any other community, there have always been two forces at work.

As we continue the work of our forefathers--indeed, the work begun by our Lord Jesus Christ

Himself--we strive to enhance the lives of many and help prepare a blessed eternity for as many as possible by teaching children with a Bible based curriculum and by preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

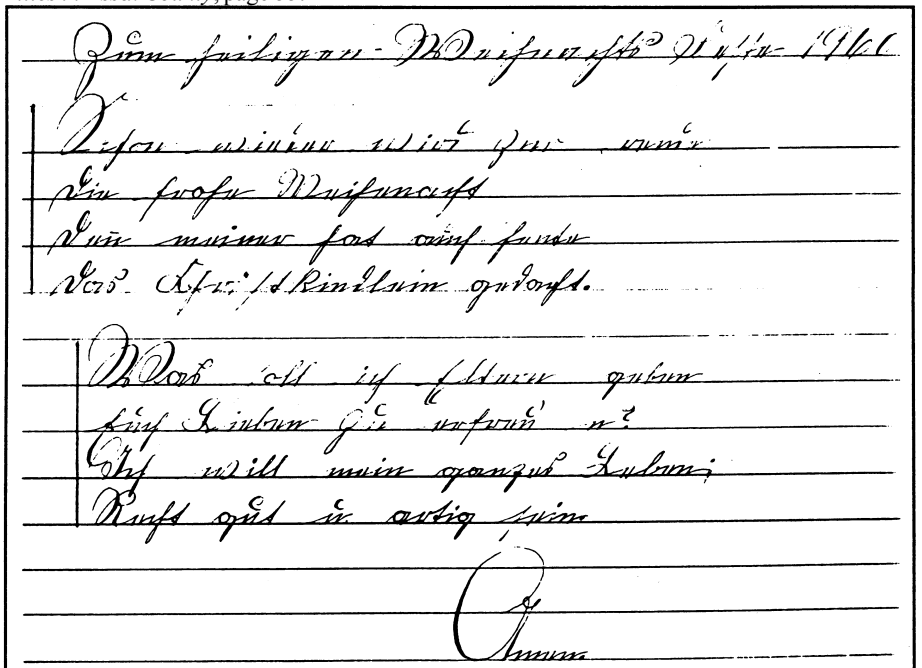
In spite of the pain caused by divisions and by individuals and groups leaving the church to form or join something better in their own view, God has richly blessed many people with great peace and fellowship because of the help that was provided to us in the 1950s and later by dedicated Old Colony ministers from Manitoba. God has given us a great responsibility. We pray that God will continue His blessing.

The "Wunsch"

Among the Old Colony Mennonites, as also formerly among other Mennonite groups, there has been the tradition of the Wunsch—literally, a "wish"—normally a short piece of poetry that school children learned by memory or wrote out very carefully in order to present it to their parents or others at special occasions. A typical Wunsch would relate to Christmas or New Year's Day.

The following sample of a Wunsch was written and placed inside a special cover by Henry Friesen of the Old Colony Church in 1960. It is in the old "Gothic" writing, and blue and red ink are used in the original.

Reprinted from "Education in the Old Colony Mennonite Church," in Victor Kliever, *Mennonites in Essex County*, page 55.



Text of the Christmas prepared by Henry Friesen, Wheatley, Ontario, in 1960, in accordance with an age-old tradition. The calligraphy was placed into a special colourful cover and given by the child to the parents as a special Christmas wish. Photo courtesy of Mennonites in Essex County, page 55.

Old Colony Mennonite Church, Seminole, Texas

“Old Colony Mennonite Church, Seminole, Texas, 1977 to 2000,”

by Rev. Abraham E. Rempel, R.R.1, Box 551, Group 40, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1, Minister of the Old Colony Church

Background.

Over the centuries Mennonite people have migrated or moved to different countries for various reasons. One such migration took place in 1977 when a group moved to Seminole Texas. Seminole is a town located about 350 miles west of the Dallas Fort Worth area.

The group that moved were people from southern Ontario, who had moved from Mexico to southern Ontario in the 1950s, and also included some coming directly from Mexico. By June, 1977, 125 families had moved to the Seminole area. They were mainly of Old Colony background and belonged to the Old Colony Church.

The Ranch.

The group purchased 10 sections of land (6400 acres) located about 20 miles southwest of Seminole, from Dennis Nicks for a purchase price of over two million dollars U.S,

with \$400,000.00 paid as a down payment. Some of the land was cultivated. The intention was to farm all the land with irrigation and to establish two villages on the property.

Most of the group did not have immigrant status to live in the U.S.A. However, the realtors Seth Woltz and Jim Perry told them once they owned five acre of land and lived there they could easily get their immigrant status. This information, however, turned out to be incorrect and later they discovered they were illegal residents.

The settlers established one village on this property, which consisted mainly of mobile homes, and some people lived in the older buildings that were bought with the ranch property.

Presently another problem came to light. The settlers discovered they did not have the water rights for the entire ranch, only for some parts. They would not be able to develop the property as planned. Without irrigation it was

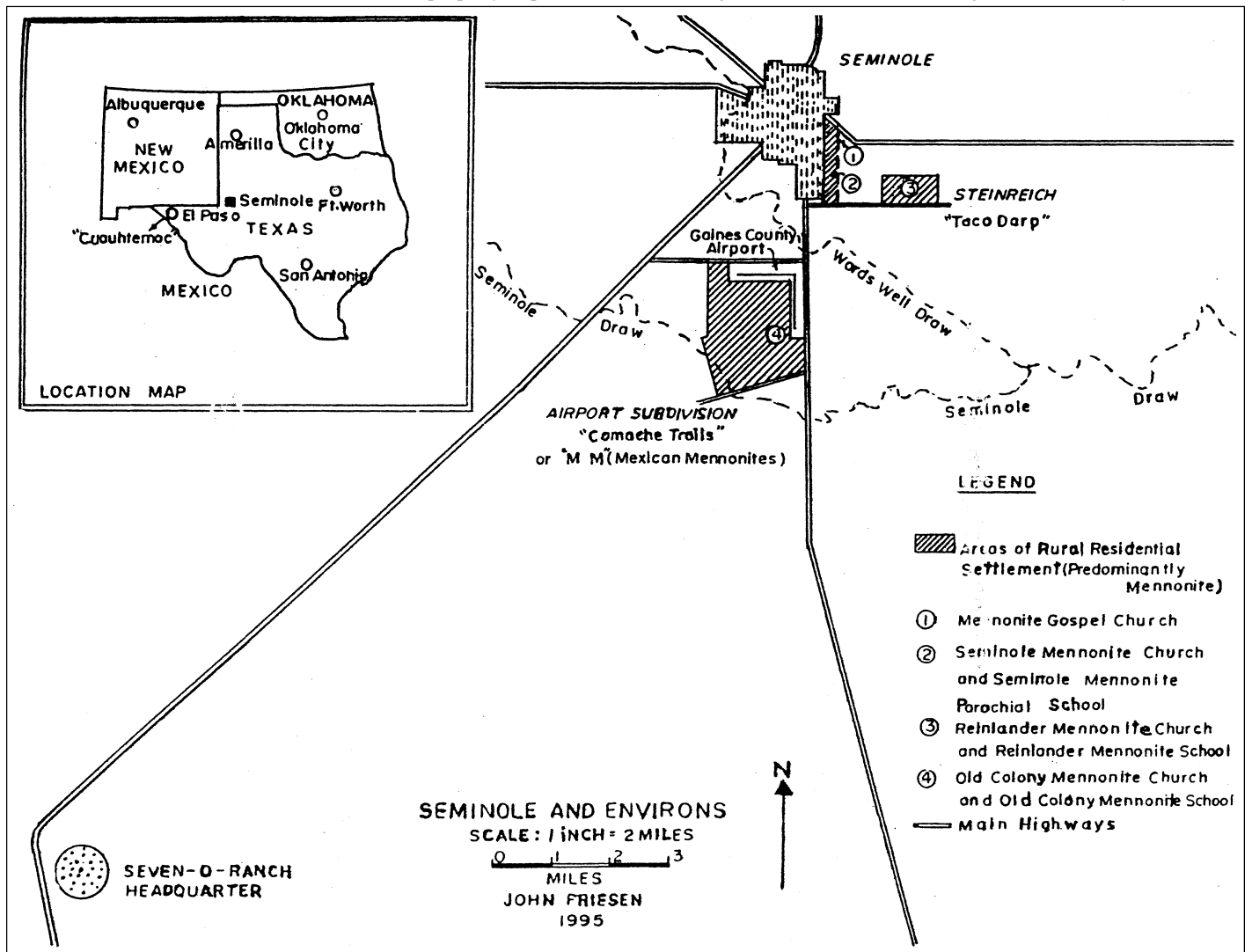
useless to farm this land.

After having lived on the ranch property for several years and having made further payments of \$150,000.00, they had to abandon the property and their idea of developing it. The original owner took it back. The Mennonites lost more than half-a-million dollars which they had invested in the venture.

Resettlement.

Most of the settlers who moved off the ranch remained in the Seminole area. Many worked on farms and housing was provided for many of them. Others worked in various businesses, machine shops, etc. and rented or purchased property in or close to town. Some went into farming on their own so that most of them could stay in the area and make a decent living.

Most of the American people of Seminole appreciated the Mennonites there; many were amazed what good workers they were. I could



Map of Seminole, Texas. Courtesy of John Friesen, Field of Broken Dreams (Winnipeg, 1996), page 7.

Part Four: Congregations

relate several stories to this effect but will not take the space here. Most of the Mennonites now live in the surrounding area of Seminole encompassing an area east past Lamesa and north to Lubbock, with some living in Lubbock, also north of Lubbock, west almost to the New Mexico border, and south to Andrews.

They have also established two villages in the Seminole area, one just east of Seminole, and one about four miles south of Seminole.

In 1980 the owner of some property south of town offered to subdivide it and sell five acre lots for residential development. He offered good terms: a 10 year lease at \$800 an acre with \$50.00 down and \$50.00 a month. The lots sold quickly. Today the village has three streets each about two kilometers long plus some cross streets, one being about a kilometre long.

The Old Colony Church and school are located in the village.

Citizenship.

According to U.S. immigration law, most of the settlers were illegal residents, and were threatened with deportation. I contacted immigration officials in Dallas regarding this matter, but to no avail. A phone-in survey was done to see how the Americans at Seminole felt regarding the Mennonites remaining in the area. The results were very positive.

Senator Lloyd Benson of Dallas and Mayor Bob Clark of Seminole began an effort to help these people. Private immigration legislation was introduced in the U.S. Congress to enable the Mennonites to receive permanent residency. This bill was passed and signed by President Carter, giving these people special permission to remain in the U.S.A. and apply for immigration status.

M.C.C. also provided assistance and engaged Carlos Neuschwander, who worked in Washington with Immigration and Refugee concerns, to assist the Mennonites with the documentation work. I met with Mr. Neuschwander and he asked me to draft a letter on behalf of the church stating their reason to be exempted from military service. The letter was drafted. I also drafted letters for some individuals.

I also assisted them in filling out a certain questionnaire pertaining to their beliefs. Neuschwander had hoped for a 90 per cent

success rate. In the end, however, about 99 per cent from those listed on the bill received their immigration status. So the all around effort proved to be fruitful.

The Church.

There are a number of churches serving the Mennonite people in the Seminole area today. They are the Old Colony, Conference (later the Rudnerweiders/E.M.M.C.), the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Church (from Arborg, Manitoba), the Reinlander, Gottes Gemeinde and recently the Sommerfelder Church.

The Old Colony church started out in 1977 when they moved to the Ranch that had been purchased. This was the first Old Colony Mennonite church to be established in the U.S.A. and, therefore, history was made. The first

place of worship was an old farm house located on the ranch they had purchased, which had been renovated for that purpose.

In 1979, after they had to move off the ranch, they were able to purchase an empty church building about seven miles east of Seminole, for a reasonable price. This was purchased from Jack Stinger, who was glad that this building would again be used for a place of worship.

It was registered as "Gains County Mennonite Church". The words "Old Colony" were omitted for legal reasons in case any lawsuits would be filed against the Old Colony people. They had not been able to meet all their financial obligations in the ranch deal and thus the church property would be protected.

At first this building was divided into two



The original church building purchased by the Old Colony church seven miles east of Seminole in 1979. Photo courtesy of Rev. Abram Rempel, Winkler, Manitoba.



1996 The Old Colony Mennonite Church in the "Airport subdivision" just south of Seminole, Texas. The building has electric lights and air conditioning. Photo by Tony Enns, Winnipeg, MCC Kanadier Committee, and courtesy of Henry Unger, Box 181, Crystal City, Man., R0K 0N0.



"Welcome to Seminole" sign at the outskirts of the town, showing a typical street landscape and Texas skyline. Photo courtesy of John Friesen, Field of Broken Dreams (Winnipeg, 1996), cover.



1996 The Old Colony Mennonite School building and church at Seminole, view from the rear. Otto Loeppky, Steinbach, is currently the principal at the school. Photo by Tony Enns, courtesy Henry Unger.

sections, one used for school purposes and the other section for church services. Later on when the school was started in the village south of Seminole, the whole building was used for church services. In 1990 a new worship house was built in the village on the same lot where the school was located. The size of the new church is 90' x 45' and is air conditioned. It can seat over 500 people. The church is still in use today.

Ministerial Support.

When the move was made from Ontario to Seminole, Aeltester Henry Reimer was the leader of the church and he was the only minister that moved to Seminole. However, he resigned his position from the church in late 1977 and this left the Old Colony Church with no minister. The church congregation would come together on Sunday morning for singing and praying but no sermon was presented, except when Old Colony ministers from Canada would come to visit and bring a sermon.

In the spring of 1978, they asked for assistance from Manitoba, regarding the "Jugend Unterricht" (youth education). My wife and I decided to go to Seminole for this purpose if we could make arrangements at home, as we still had young children and operated a dairy farm. We decided that if we could get someone to care for our cows while we were gone, we would go.

I went to check with my youngest brother whether he would consider to do this for us. But before I could even ask him, he replied, "I know what you want to ask me about and I am willing to do chores for you while you're gone."

The decision was made and we went. I pre-

sented the "Articles of Faith", and later Rev. Jacob Elias, Winkler, came for the Catechism part. Bishop John P. Wiebe from Manitoba came to conduct baptismal services and communion. This was again done in the spring of 1979.

Sometime in 1980 Rev. Jacob Giesbrecht of Vanderhof, B.C. of the Sommerfelder Church moved to Seminole to serve the Old Colony Church. However, dissent and friction occurred in the church and in 1981, Rev. Giesbrecht and a group left the Old Colony Church to form the Reinlander Church, leaving the Old Colony Church with no minister.

The Manitoba Church was again asked for help and in 1982 and 1983 the "Jugend Unterricht" was done by the Old Colony ministerial from Manitoba. A couple of times I did the "Articles of Faith" and "Catechism" portion by myself on a condensed agenda.

We usually arrived in Seminole toward a week-end. On Saturday evening I would have a meeting with the church brethren to discuss the procedure for the "Jugend Unterricht" and other matters. On Sunday morning we had church service and the first half of the "Articles of Faith" were presented. On Sunday evening, another service was held when the other half was presented. On Monday evening I met with the baptismal candidates, meeting with each one individually to give them the opportunity to discuss their faith and also share any life experiences they wanted to relate to me.

On Tuesday night we had church services, at which time the first quarter of the Catechism was presented. On Thursday night services were held for the second half of the Catechism.

On Saturday night there was usually another meeting and on Sunday morning the last half of the Catechism was presented, and Sunday evening we had the "Vorbereitungs Predigt" or preparatory service for communion.

The intervening time during the week was used for preparation time for myself, for visitations, and also to meet with the numerous people that came to see us for various reasons. So the total program required about nine days. Our Bishop came later to hold the baptism, communion, Dank predigt (Thanks-giving sermon), and usually conducted some weddings.

In 1983 Rev. Jacob Giesbrecht from Paraguay, an Old Colony Minister moved to Seminole to serve the church.

I recall that the one year we had decided we would not go again for the "Jugend Unterricht". Then one morning after breakfast we received a phone call from Seminole from our friends, and they wanted to share with us their feeling of sadness. Their son intended to get married, and because there would be no "Jugend Unterricht" he could not have a proper church wedding and intended to get married by the State or by an attorney. This made them sad because it was against their beliefs and wishes, and they just wanted to share their feelings with us. After the phone call, we decided we should do something about their situation. So arrangements were made and we went to Seminole again for the "Jugend Unterricht", and their son could have a proper church wedding.

Organization.

Discussions, regarding ministerial elections for their midst had taken place for some time. Our church ministerial was somewhat reluctant to have a clergy election, until the people had obtained permanent residency.

After this had happened it was decided we were willing to consider such an election. In the spring of 1984 Rev. Jacob Elias and we went to Texas to do some preparation work in this regard and the decision was made that a ministerial election be held to elect two ministers and one deacon.

The first election was conducted by Bishop John P. Wiebe of Manitoba with several other ministers assisting. It was held on April 11, 1984. Frank Wiebe and Peter Thiessen were elected as ministers and Diedrich Banman was



1996 Seminole Old Colony school, view from the street. Note the original school, front right, with the large eight classroom addition behind it. Photo by Tony Enns, courtesy of Henry Unger.

Part Four: Congregations

deacon. They were ordained on April 15, 1984. Then in 1989 another ministerial election was held on January 26 by Bishop William Fehr of Ontario, and two more ministers were elected, Cornelius Fehr and John Peters. They were ordained into the ministry on January 29, 1989.

January 25, 1990, the first Bishop election was held by Bishop John P. Wiebe of Manitoba. Rev. Peter Thiessen was elected and ordained as Bishop on January 28, 1990. All five are still serving the Church today.

In 1981 the church consisted of about 90 baptized members and today it has about 500 baptized members.

The clergy are also serving a Mennonite settlement in Mexico with church services, twice a month. This settlement is located near the Oasis Colony about 85 miles southwest of the Presidio Border Crossing, or about 365 miles from Seminole.

Cemetery.

When the church building east of Seminole was purchased in 1979, the intention was to start a cemetery for the church on that property. However due to rigid regulations and legal complications involved in establishing a cemetery, the idea was abandoned.

The Town of Seminole offered to set aside a certain portion of their cemetery for the Mennonites, and they could purchase those plots for \$25.00 each as needed. This was accepted and this arrangement has worked very well. The plot price was later increased from \$25.00 to \$100.00. However, the town offered to presell some plots at the old price and the Old

Colony Church has pre-purchased 20 plots. Since the 1979 Church building was sold, they were fortunate that they had not started a cemetery at this location.



The home of Peter Thiessen, Seminole, elected as Aeltester of the Old Colony Church in 1990. Aeltester and Mrs. Thiessen are just saying "Goodbye" to visitors. Photo courtesy of Rev. Abram Rempel, Winkler, Manitoba.

School.

In the beginning when they lived on the "Ranch", school classes were held in the same building as church services. Isaac Wall was their first school teacher.

In 1979, after they left the "Ranch", school classes were held in the church building east of Seminole. The building was divided into two parts, with one section being used for school classes and the other for church services. When the village south of Seminole was started in the early 1980s, the Old Colony purchased a lot there for the purpose of establishing the school and church there. Approximately in 1983 the school was started in the village, in a small building which had been moved onto that lot.

In the last half of the 1980s, the school received two additions to accommodate the growing school population. Pressure was being put on the Old Colony Church by the Seminole School Board and some parents, that the quality of education needed to improve and that more English should be taught and chil-

dren should attend school through the age of 17.

As a result a large addition was built in 1995, so that these recommendations could be implemented. The addition was about 150 feet

by 45 feet with eight classrooms, two washrooms, a principal's office, and storage rooms, etc. The school has about 130 registered students and a staff of nine.

In the first school term, the instruction format was structured similarly to many schools in Mexico, with the Fibel (a primary reader), Catechism, New Testament and Bible being the text books used. Instruction was mainly in the German language. They did however, have one hour per week of English language instruction and this was later increased

to one hour per day. In 1995 when the big change occurred, they started using the CLE Curriculum and reduced the German language instruction to two subjects.

Most of their teaching staff have been from their local people. However, in 1995 the need and desire was to have some trained teachers and some were recruited from Manitoba and other areas. There are still some teachers from Manitoba employed there today.

Henry Unger of Crystal City, Manitoba, a retired teacher, was the first principal of the enlarged school of 1995, and with his wife Betty, took on the responsibility to assist in the transition to CLE curriculum and to more English instruction. The Ungers had a good understanding of the people and were sensitive to the peoples' desires and supported their religious beliefs and practices. They tried to keep the school in line with the church principles. The work they did, has been much appreciated by those people involved with the school.

The school costs are partly financial by the church, (each member is supposed to pay \$35.00 per month for school costs, and this is called the "Noba Richte") and partly by tuition fees paid by the parents of the students.

Conclusion.

Despite all the difficulties the Mennonites encountered in the beginning, the migration to the Seminole area has been successful. Their efforts and persistence have produced positive results.

Seminole, which used to be just another town of Texas, has become known far and wide and has benefited in many ways because of the Mennonite movement to that area.

For Further Reading:

John Friesen, *Field of Broken Dreams* (Winnipeg, 1996), 48 pages.



1996. Old Colony School Committee Chairman Isaak Wiebe (centre), converses with Henry Unger, school principal at the time. Lisa, Mrs. Wiebe, and daughter Katie, look on. Isaak Wiebe was instrumental in bringing about the major school expansion in 1995. Photo by Tony Enns and courtesy Henry Unger.



Principal's office. Henry Unger behind the desk. Photo by Tony Enns, courtesy of Henry Unger.

Part Five: 125TH Anniversary

Fort Dufferin Reenactment, July 16, 2000

“Fort Dufferin Reenactment, July 16, 2000: Celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the founding of the Mennonite West Reserve Settlement by the Reinländer (Old Kolonier) Gemeinde,” by Priscilla Reimer, Box 57, Woodmore, Manitoba, R0A 2M0.

Background.

In mid-July, 1875 a Red River steamer docked on the west bank at Fort Dufferin just north of Emerson/West Lynne. Hundreds of weary men, women and children disembarked after a journey of six weeks by boat, train and ship from south Russia to a new homeland in Manitoba's Pembina Reserve, later known as the Mennonite West Reserve.

More than a 1500 people gathered at historic Fort Dufferin on Sunday, July 15th to mark the 125th anniversary of their arrival.

Opening.

In a show-of-hands survey, chairperson John Friesen established that a majority of the assembly were descendants of those first settlers, while a smaller segment were members or descendants of the 1920s influx and an even smaller group belonged to the 1940s and early 50s Mennonite immigrations. By comparison, only a few raised their hand to the question: How many of you are visiting from the East Reserve?

Friesen's final question in *Pautdietsch*, “How many of you still speak Low German?”, drew enough laughter to confirm his conclusion that the celebrations could easily continue in Low German.

Greetings.

The commemoration took the form of a worship service which included greetings from host organizations, the various levels of government and fraternal societies. A number of recurring themes emerged from these comments.

The first was raised by Emerson MLA Jack Penner, himself a descendant of these immigrants and one of the first Canadian Mennonites to enter public life as a politician. He expressed gratitude to his forbearers for seeking out a country in which “we would be able to worship freely,” a

country which was willing to negotiate the Mennonite's exemption from military service.”

“Many of us,” Penner said, “forget how important that was for our people.”

A second recurring theme was hinted at by Penner and stated concretely by Peter G. Dyck, MLA for Pembina. “Canada,” he said, “is a wonderful country. It has been rated the best place in the world to live, by the United Nations.”

David Iftody, MP for Provencher, concurred but also raised another issue: The courage of these 1870s immigrants

who got off the boat on that mid-July day in 1875 couldn't possibly have guessed “how far they would come,” Friesen suggested.

It has become a truism that Manitoba's Mennonites have contributed to the economic health of the province to such an extent over the years, that the words of Deuteronomy 8:10-18, which were read in German and English by pastors Henry G. Rempel and Dave Dyck respectively, might very well have been written expressly for the people present. “When you have eaten and are satisfied praise the Lord your God for the



A view of the crowd beginning to assemble under the tent. By the time the program started the listeners were seated all around outside the tent, some 1,500 in number.

“Their courage came from their faith,” he said, comparing it to the similar courage of his own Romanian ancestors. He went on to attribute the current economic prosperity experienced by residents of the “historic riding of Provencher” to the fact that “all of us have participated in that faith journey.”

Thanksgiving.

The foundations for economic success laid down by the early immigrants and the subsequent prosperity realized by their descendants became another theme for the afternoon. The folks

good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. . . . But remember...it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth....”

Drama.

The road to prosperity was never a simple or



Manitoba Mennonites gathered in a tent at the site of Fort Dufferin on July 16, 2000, to remember the forebears who landed here in 1875, 125 years ago. Photos for this article except as indicated are courtesy of Priscilla Reimer, Box 57, Woodmore, Manitoba, R0A 2M0.

an easy one, however, especially for those first West Reservers. Written by Wilmer Penner of Landmark and directed by Henry G. Enns of Reinland, the drama "Their Tears, Our Sheaves," captured the mixed emotion and the dilemmas that were their early experience.

Set in the immigration sheds at Fort Dufferin where the first families waited for several weeks while surveys were completed and other arrangements were finalized, the dialogue moved back and forth between two immigrant families. The historic character Jacob Fehr (1837-1916), was played by John Martens of Rosengard and Henry Penner of Rhineland performed the opposing voice of fictional character Petta Braun.

"This Manitoba," Fehr declared, "will be a new Garden of Eden."

But Braun, wasn't so sure. He had already encountered the snake in the tall grass of this prairie at a stop-over in Fishers Landing where a delegation of Mennonite brethren from Kansas tempted him to leave the group for the better land of the mid-western states and its more hospitable climate.

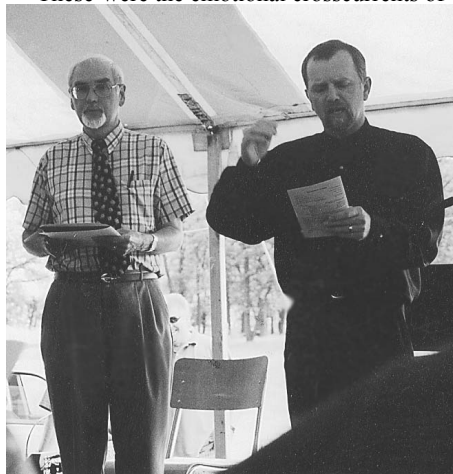
"They came and tried to persuade us not to go to Manitoba. They said that two settlements had been made there before and these settlers had to turn back. They could not survive there because of the cold, raw, long winter" (from the journals of Jacob Fehr (1859-1952).

"And why not go to Kansas? In this new Eden there wasn't a tree in sight. Not even one in the centre of the garden by which to orient themselves. In winter, you could freeze your breath and your bones, and in summer...the mosquitoes. And this garden--while it produced cherries, they were so *strif*, so tart that they left your mouth puckered for days. Had they really given up their orchards for these...these chokecherries?"

Braun was convinced that Ohm Johann Wiebe was misleading them all. With a few simple compromises to please the Czar, he was sure they could have stayed in Russia, comfortably.

But what about the promises and privileges that the Queen, their Queen, had given them, Johann Fehr countered. Petta should just stay loyal. Wait and see, and everything would work out.

These were the emotional crosscurrents of



Professor John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, chaired the program at Fort Dufferin. Vorsänger Wes Hamm, Morden, leads the singing.

their uprooted lives—tears of farewell and the anticipation of welcome in a new land; new opportunities and homesick-nostalgia for what had been left behind—and their inescapable doubts. Should they remain loyal to the group or cut their losses and pursue what looked like more promising opportunities elsewhere?

Conclusion.

By the end of 1875, the ones that stayed and those who joined them--almost 300 Mennonite families--had settled in 18 new villages and went on to turn what appeared to be dubious opportunity and the 500,000 acres allotted to them, into the thriving communities of what are today's Rural Municipalities of Stanley and Rhineland.

"They were people of vision and children with a new future," Rev. Peter D. Zacharias commented.

Afternoon celebrations ended with a brief presentation by Ruth Swan and elders of the Metis Federation. They asked for support of their project to preserve an ancestral cemetery, the first Christian burial place in North Dakota. Swan expressed confidence that Mennonites would share their concerns and presented the gathering with a braid of

sweet grass.

A *vaspa* break was followed by an evening concert of music in the spirit of the theme: *Nun Danket alle Gott*. The program included a variety of singing and instrumental groups from Altona, Gnadenthal, Rosenort, and Steinbach.

Other Reports.

Elmer Heinrichs, "Gathering marks 125th anniversary of West Reserve," in *Canadian Mennonite*, August 21, 2000, page 30.

Elmer Heinrichs, "1,500 attend to see West Reserve mark 125," in *Heritage Postings*, No. 30, Sept. 2000, page 1.

Elmer Heinrichs, "125 jährige Jubiläumsfeier der Westreserve," in *Mennonitische Post*, July 21, 2000, pages 1 and 3.

Priscilla Reimer, "Fort Dufferin event celebrates West Reserve anniversary," in *The Red River Valley Echo*, July 24, 2000, page 1.

Doris Penner, "Praise rings in service marking settlers' arrival," in *Carillon News*, July 24, 2000, page 3.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 72-73.



A view of the actual spot on the Red River where the Mennonite settlers disembarked from the river boats. From here, they ventured west by wagons to the sites of their new villages.



From "Their Tears, Our Sheaves," the drama by Wilmer Penner captured the spirit of sacrifice and equality which made the Old Colony settlement of the West Reserve so successful. Joakob Fehr (John Martens) and his son Joakab (Henry Giesbrecht)--followed by Fehrsche (Marlene Ens)--bring up the trunk into the immigration shed in the re-enactment of the Fort Dufferin landing. Photo by Doris Penner and courtesy of Carillon News, July 24, 2000.

Johann Wiebe, Memorial Dedication, July 22, 2000

“Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, Manitoba, Memorial Dedication, July 22, 2000,”
by Elaine Wiebe, 24-1605-7th Street East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7H 0Z3.

Introduction.

July 22, 2000, some 200 people gathered at the Reinland Community Centre, Reinland, to dedicate a memorial in honour of Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengard, Manitoba.

The event was planned by Corny Rempel, Reinland, C.E. Thiessen, Rosengard, Henry Ens, Winkler and Bruce Wiebe, Winkler. Corny Rempel chaired the proceedings.

Speaker.

Rev. Peter D. Zacharias, author of the well-known *Reinland* book, spoke in Low German and English.

Johann Wiebe was 33 years-old when he was ordained as Aeltester in the Fürstenland Colony, Imperial Russia. The decision to leave Russia was difficult for many; the separation from other church leaders and members, as well as the many family and friends were a strong emotional tug.

Aeltester Wiebe challenged his parishioners to be willing to pay the price. He heard the voice of God similar to one made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 “Get out of your country and from your family, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you.”

Wiebe was convinced of the rightness of this decision. As a leader he saw the church slipping away. He wanted to re-establish the church – not dominated by personal ambition or materialism but following the principles laid out in the Gospels.

Johann Wiebe was a thinker. He wanted to follow the example of the Anabaptists who did not want to re-establish the old church but wanted a renewal, a new start. He believed moving to Canada was God’s path to renewal.

The settlers came from various colonies and



Jake and Mary (Klassen) Wiebe, Swift Current, Sask., a descendant of Aeltester Wiebe, unveiled the cairn beside the Rosengart cemetery. Jake retired from general construction in 1993. Now they volunteer at nursing homes presenting musical programs. Photo by Elmer Heinrichs, Altona.

villages. To get them together as one Gemeinde attests to his tremendous love, administrative skills and sense of conviction. Within the first year the worship house (now the community centre at Reinland) was built and became the centre of spiritual life of the community

Worship was not to take place only on Sunday mornings but everyday, all week long. It was walking in obedience to Jesus Christ as well as healthy relationships with other human beings.

A story coming out of the Hague-Osler Reserve goes like this. An Old Colony minister was asked, “Are you a Christian?” The response was “Go and ask my neighbour.” This was the

attitude that Johann Wiebe wanted portrayed.

Living in villages was seen as part of church teaching. He stressed the Christian day by day living as exemplified with love, making sure everyone’s needs were met including the widows and orphans. The rich did not have more and the poor did not have less. Equality meant sharing; this was their aim although sometimes it fell short. All families had some good land and some poor land, they all had property in the village, they all had pasture land.

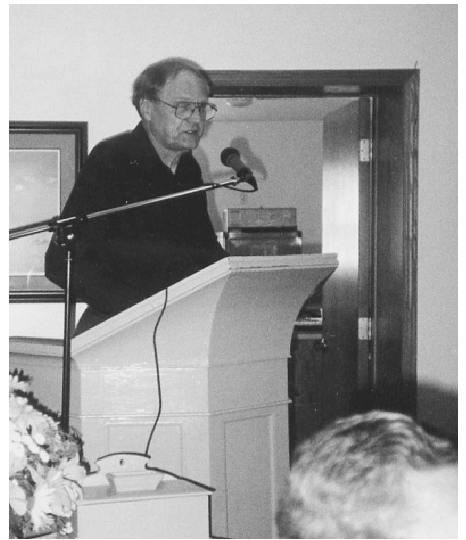
Unveiling.

This was followed by the unveiling of a plaque placed on the outside wall of the Community Centre. Corny and Mary Wiebe from La Crete, Alberta, a great grandson of Johann and Judith, did the unveiling.

The plaque reads, “*Johann Wiebe 1837-1905 served as Aeltester of the Fürstenland Colony of Ukraine and as the first Aeltester of the Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde in Manitoba. In 1876 he officiated at the dedication of this building. He lies buried in the Rosengart cemetery.*”

Rosengard Cairn.

The crowd drove two miles south to the village of Rosengart. Village mayor John Mar-



Rev. Peter D. Zacharias, minister of the Blumenort Mennonite Church, speaking from the original pitcher-shaped pulpit in Western Canada’s oldest Mennonite church building. An original collection box now sitting on the table was usually up on the wall near the door to collect the tithes and offerings of members.



The Reinland Community Centre as seen today in Reinland, Manitoba, view to the west. This building was the Reinland Mennonite Church from 1876 to 1922 when many emigrated to Mexico. As of 1923 the Blumenort Mennonite Church used it until 1968. The church building became the Community Centre in 1970 when a kitchen was added. The memorial plaque is located at the front right side of the building, just beside the pine tree.

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tens welcomed everyone. He reflected on how they started the upkeep of the cemetery in 1992. It had been said that "someday they would be glad they did."

A memorial stone was placed near the village cemetery on the west side of highway P.R. 243. Jake and Mary Wiebe from Swift Current, Sask., a great-great grandson of Johann and Judith unveiled the cairn.

The cairn reads, "Johann Wiebe 1837-1905 Aeltester der Gemeinde zu Reinland. In this Rosengart cemetery lies buried Aeltester Johann Wiebe, his wife Judith Wall 1836-1910 and many of the pioneer congregation he served."

The following is the prayer of dedication by Rev. Zacharias. "We thank You for Johann and Judith Wiebe, for the way they have given themselves to You and for the legacy and inheritance they have left You. They did not point to themselves but pointed simply to You, Lord. May that be a lesson, an epistle to us in our own lives."

Faspa.

Everyone was invited back to the Community Centre for faspa – delicious home made buns, cheese, jam (the plum jam was *the best*), and dainties! *Nu woat daut spatzearen aunftangen!*

The Reinland ladies accomplished a remarkable feat – they had no idea how many people were coming and yet they had enough for every one!

After dinner speaker, Elaine Wiebe, Saskatoon, Sask., read portions from Aeltester Wiebe's sermon "The Immigration from Russia to Canada 1875."

She referred to how at a critical moment Aeltester Wiebe's *Gesangbuch* had fallen open to song number 346, "Great is the Lord; very great is Your faithfulness and Your goodness." He wrote, "Each word of this song was powerful and meant a lot to me, and helped me through these difficult moments of trying to decide the right."

Aeltester Wiebe concluded: "We decided in faith to go ahead, trusting that God would overrule for the best. God will have mercy on us poor sinners and give grace and strength to live according to His will and to become

strengthened in His Holy Spirit.... Amen."

Freiwilliges.

Evelyn Friesen from Steinbach (her great-

one is writing about the Old Colony people with respect." There was heartfelt agreement throughout the group!

Jake Wiebe, Swift Current, Sask. shared his interest in genealogy and seeing where his forefathers had homesteaded.

Others spoke, as well, words of appreciation and gratitude to all involved in making this day so successful.

Conclusion.

Rev. Gerhard Ens reminded those gathered not to let "things" spoil the taste of God in our hearts and lives.

A few years ago he had visited a group of Mennonites who moved from Russia to Germany in the 1970s–80s. He noticed their catechism. On opening it he found it to be a reprint of the one Aeltester Wiebe had printed in the 1881. When he inquired about this, they replied, "That's the way we want to know the catechism".

People who have experienced war, revolution and persecution want to go back to the very beginnings. Looking around he noticed no TV in the room. His host's observation was, "A funny thing happens every time I watch TV, I lose my taste for the Bible".

In the 1870s some Mennonites saw the way they were going, it was not just civil service, or military service, it was the greed of so many. Some thought God was punishing them and taking away what they had.

Coming to Canada was giving them an opportunity to plow anew, to make a new beginning, to be separated from the world.

The challenge Rev. Ens left was to "Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

A closing prayer ended this commemorative service.

Further Reading:

Elmer Heinrichs, "Gedenktafel soll an Aeltester Johann Wiebe erinnern," in *Mennotische Post*, August 4, 2000, pages 1-2.

Elmer Heinrichs, "Plaque, cairn unveiling honours early church leader," in *Heritage Postings*, No. 30, Sept. 2000, page 7.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 74-75.



Cornelius and Mary (Martens) Wiebe, La Crete, Alberta, a descendant of Aeltester Wiebe, unveiled the plaque on the outside front wall of the Community Centre. Corny and Mary are retired farmers who enjoy gardening and restoring old cars and tractors. Photo by Elmer Heinrichs, Altona.



Full house at the Commemorative Service. Evelyn Friesen is visible at the front right. Photo by D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

great-grandmother was Maria (Wiebe) Wall, sister of Aeltester Johann Wiebe) commented that while on holidays in Sask, she saw the *Preservings* magazine in many homes.

One lady had commented, "Finally some-

The Posted Link on the West Reserve

“The Post Road: The Posted Link on the West Reserve,” by Conrad Stoesz, 44 Ranpat Bay, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3T 0N3.

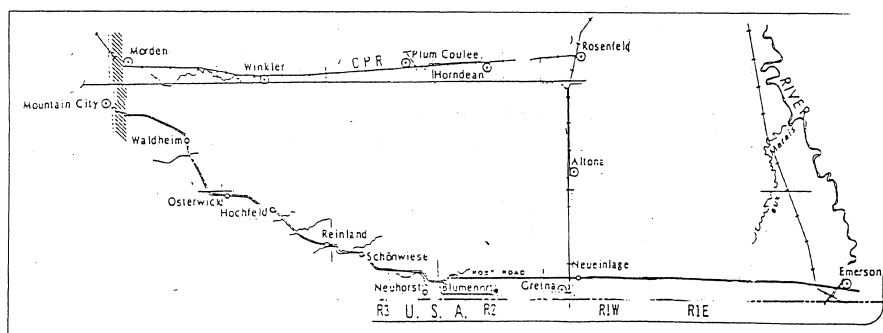
When Mennonites arrived in Manitoba, there was no road system. The most common method of travel was by boat, but where they were to settle and farm, there were no major waterways. The few native trails in the area were not very significant to the new settlers either.

Two expeditions passed through the West Reserve area just prior to the Mennonites arrival. The Boundary Trails Commission headed west from Fort Dufferin, three miles north of the American border on the Red River, in 1873. The following year the newly created North West Mounted Police began their inaugural ride to Edmonton and Fort Carleton from Fort Dufferin. These trails also were not of much significance to the Mennonites in their daily lives.

Travelling along the open, treeless prairies was no easy task - especially in winter. If someone was caught in a snowstorm it was next to impossible to find shelter or their way home. The civic leader of the West Reserve, Isaak Mueller, understood this hazard and devised a way to help travellers. In the spring of 1878 he initiated a plan to erect posts along the most used path. Each settler was to provide posts and labour to help with the project. The posts were to be ten feet long, six inches in diameter, and 250 feet apart. This post-marked road stretched a total of forty miles, hence the name Post Road.

The road began at the most important economic centre of the time – the towns of Emerson and West Lynn, on opposite sides of the Red River, at the Canadian and American border. In 1882, at the height of Emerson’s prosperity, it boasted 58 businesses. If anyone in the area needed to buy or sell anything, Emerson was the place to go. It was the biggest and most important commercial hub of the time. The population of Emerson is hard to determine. Reports state that the floating population was anywhere from 5000 to 8000 people.

From Emerson the Post Road ran straight west along the road allowance to what was known as the twelve-mile stop - the village of Neuanlage. The well-known David Schellenberg family frequently pro-



Karte mit dem „Pfostenweg“ aus dem Jahre 1892.

Map showing the “Post Road” from the year 1892.

vided lodging to travellers. The road then continued straight west, just north of Gretna and Blumenort, until it dipped south close to the village of Neuhorst. Here William Brown established a livery barn and hotel for weary travellers. It was considered to have the best accommodations anywhere in the west, according to an article in the April 25, 1881 issue of the *Southern Manitoba Times*.

From the north side of Neuhorst the road continued in a slightly north-westerly direction to pass through the south end of Schoenwiese and then on to Reinland. At Reinland the Jacob Giesbrecht home was also hospitable to the travellers of the Post Road. From Reinland, the road continued in a north-westerly direction, meandering its way across the prairie, paying no attention to the road allowances. It made its way through Hochfeld, Osterwick, Waldheim and ended at Mountain City, south of present day Morden.

After the Post Road became a well-marked road, its importance as a trade route grew rapidly. A reporter of the *Southern Manitoba Times*, wrote in 1883 “ behind one of Shorttreeds’s fast nags we were soon bowling along at a lively gait along the famous Post Road.” The road served people from the Mennonite villages as well 000as non-Mennonites from outside the reserve that travelled the road to

Emerson. Stagecoaches travelled the road, saw mills and hotels sprung up. The Post Road quickly became the preferred route of mail carriers. It is marked on an 1882 federal postal map.

The concept of using posts to guide travellers was not a new idea. In Russia there were also road markers along some roads as early as the 1700s. A post road existed connecting the two main Mennonite communities Chortitza and Molotschna, and then continuing on to the Crimea.

The western portion of the Post Road disappeared around the turn of the century. By 1930 aerial photographs of the area show virtually no signs of the once busy road. The eastern portion that followed the road allowances is still in use today and locals continue to call it the Post Road. Growing up in the area and asking for directions, I found that people would tell me, for example, that a certain farm is one mile north of the Post Road.

Over a hundred years after its founding, the Post Road is still an important part of the Mennonite experience on the old West Reserve.

About the Author: Conrad Stoesz is a researcher who is on staff for the summer at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 15, page 127.



The artist of this sketch, Richard N. Lea, emigrated from Birmingham, England in 1880. He settled in the Pembina Crossing area. He owned a business in Emerson, and was a member of the Masonic Lodge there. He traveled back and forth from his home to Emerson many times. He enjoyed sketching and would draw whatever met his fancy. He made this sketch depicting the village of Reinland and a post from the Post Road in 1883. It is the only known picture of a post from the Post Road. Reinland was the heartland of the Old Colony Mennonite Church originally known as the Reinlander Gemeinde.

Post Road Inauguration, August 19, 2000

“Post Road Inauguration, August 19, 2000,” by Conrad Stoesz, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Introduction.

One hundred people received a new appreciation for the 1875 pioneers of the West Reserve, Manitoba, on August 26 as the Post Road Memorial Trail had its inaugural opening.

Fort Dufferin.

Two buses left the north legislative grounds at 8:30 am with about 20 people on board. The buses arrived at Fort Dufferin (north of Emerson) where another 80 people eagerly anticipated the Post Road tour. Many of the people were from the Altona, Winkler, and Morden areas, but others came from Steinbach, Winnipeg, and Nebraska. The people came for their own interest but also represented organisations such as the Winkler Heritage Society, Winkler Chamber of Commerce, the Rural Municipality of Rhineland, the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, and other groups. MLA Harry Schellenberg and MP Jake Hoepfner were also in attendance.

After a short introduction by Historic Sites and Monuments Committee member Martha Martens, the first post in the memorial trail was erected by Rev. Abe Rempel representing the Old Colony Mennonite church, John Falk representing the R.M. of Rhineland, and Conrad Stoesz representing the Historical Society.

Following this everyone boarded the buses where bus hosts Lawrence Klippenstein and Adolf Ens welcomed them aboard and provided commentary along the way. Twelve points of interest had been marked by replica posts and a data packed, informational lectern, along the Post Road from Dufferin to Mountain City (south of Morden). A large format brochure has also been developed and it available to anyone interested.

Highway 75.

The next stop was at the junction of Highway 75 and the Post Road (Provincial Road # 243). Here Wayne Arseny, Mayor of Emerson, and Ray Hamm of the Historical Society unveiled the Post Road sign, which was painted by Olga Krahn of Altona. The sign depicts a family in a sleigh struggling through the snow, following the posts of the Post Road. On the reverse side of the sign is a collage of different images important to the pioneers.

From this point people boarded the buses and travelled along the historic route. To save time volunteers read the lectern texts on the bus.



Rev. Abram E. Rempel, Reinland, representing the Old Colony Mennonite Church, holds the ceremonial post while Conrad Stoesz, on behalf of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and tour organizer (right), and John Falk, Reeve of the Rural Municipality of Rhineland (left), fill the hole to mount the post in the earth at Fort Dufferin. From here the Post Road extended for some 40 kilometers west through the West Reserve to Mountain City, southwest of present day Morden.

Some of them had roots in the various communities. Local experts who had grown up in the areas augmented the bus host's informative comments.

Reinland.

Soon it was time for lunch. The buses stopped in the village of Reinland where many people took in an informal tour of the historic Heritage Homestead Museum, now owned by Ens Farms Limited. Others took in the sites and monuments around the Reinland community centre, which included a plaque to commemorate Aeltester Johann Wiebe of the Reinlaender Mennonite Church, a monument to the North-West Mounted Police ride, and a plaque designating the building as the oldest Mennonite church in Western Canada.

The participants of the tour then were called into the old church where prayer was said and a feast was laid out by the Reinland community centre's ladies group. Mashed potatoes, farmer

sausage, cucumbers, and platz were enjoyed by all.

After the meal we once again boarded the buses and took off down the Post Road. In Hochfeld we were shown where some original ruts from the Post Road still existed in a pasture. Touring the various villages and seeing the different modern houses and old house barns was an interesting juxtaposition of new and old.

Mountain City.

Our last stop on the tour was at the former Mountain City site. Now a cairn is all that marks the location. Nearby is the one-room school, which has been incorporated into a factory. Reverend Abe Rempel from the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Manitoba gave a quick overview of the Old Colony church today and then remarked how biblical it was to erect monuments to remind people of how God's hand had been at work in their lives. He read a text from 1 Samuel, which emphasised that God had helped His people this far, and will continue to be a source of strength.

Rev. Rempel noted how the posts in the Post Road guided travellers safely to their destination. Life is also a journey. For the Christian our guideposts are prayer and God's Word that guide people to Christ. Many people later commented that the message had struck a meaningful chord within them.

Conclusion.

From Mountain City the buses found their way back to Fort Dufferin

where a snack of drinks and home baked cookies awaited them. Here people began to part company. The buses with about 20 people began their trip back to Winnipeg.

The event went very well. People seemed to have had a good time and enjoyed visiting with one another. There was a lot of information given out, which in part helps us better understand the early pioneers and the importance of the Post Road to these people and the larger community.

For Further Reading:

Elmer Heinrichs and Conrad Stoesz, "Grand opening, inaugural tour of Post Road Memorial Trail," in *Heritage Postings*, No. 30, Sept. 2000, pages 8 and 4.

Ellie Reimer, "Rediscovering the old Post Road," in *Carillon News*, Sept. 18, 2000, page 5A and *Red River Valley Echo*, Sept. 25, 2000, page 22.

Reprinted from *Preservings*, No. 17, page 76.

Rempel-Ens Heritage Housebarn, Revisited

“Rempel-Ens Heritage Housebarn Revisited: A Pictorial History of Homestead Lot 7, Village of Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba, and Its Past and Present Owners,” by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

During the Post Road inauguration tour held on August 19, 2000, participants were invited to tour the Abraham Rempel-Gerhard Ens Heritage Housebarn in Reinland, Manitoba, by Abe Ens, its present owner. The housebarn is situated almost directly across the street from the community centre, the original Reinländer worship house built in 1876. Most of the tour participants availed themselves of the opportunity of tour the historical housebarn.

The housebarn was built by Abram Rempel, who moved to Mexico in the fall of 1923. Most of the buildings and indeed much of the contents are still in almost the same state as when the Rempels left. The “Wirtschaft” is typical of the large prosperous farming operations which the Old Colony farmers in the West Reserve left behind when they followed the dictates of their conscience to emigrate.

Pioneers, 1875.

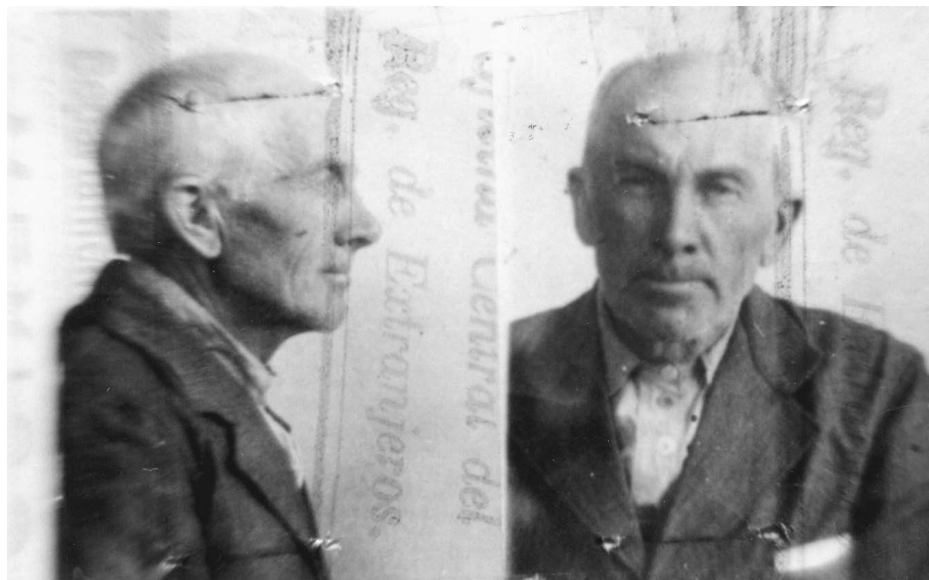
In 1877, two years after the village of Reinland was founded, Isaak Dueck (Dyck) and Susanna Vaehr (Fehr) were among the very first Reinland



Delegate Cornelius Rempel (1856-1921), Blumenort, W.R., Manitoba. He died in 1921 before actually leaving for Mexico. Mrs. Heinrich G. Wiebe, Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan, Mexico, is a great-granddaughter. Franz Rempel, Neuanlage, Swift Colony, owner of the largest cheese factory in the Cuauhtemoc area is also a descendant. Apparently a Kroeger clock from Russia is in the possession of the descendants of this family. Does anyone have any information about such a clock? Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 20.



The Abram Rempel Wirtschaft in Neu-Reinland, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, view to the west. The fence on the north side was built some years ago when the Abram Rempel Wirtschaft was divided into two half-Wirtschaften.



1933. Abram Rempel (1867-1954) side and front profile. Abraham Rempel moved from Reinland, Manitoba, to Neu-Reinland, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, in 1923. In 1933, all Canadians in Mexico had to be registered and photographed. Photo courtesy of Peter Rempel, Km 18, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

settlers to register their homestead. On May 31 they officially “entered” the nw 13-1-4W situated at the west end of the village, as their homestead. Isaak and Susanna Dyck were the first owners of what is now 141 Reinland Ave., Reinland, Manitoba (legal description Lot 9, Plan 282 Morden Land Titles Office).

Under the special Mennonite arrangement with the government known as the “hamlet privilege”, their residence, however, continued to be on Lot 9 rather than on their homesteaded quarter section.

According to 1886 records, Johann Wall (b. 1822), having married widow Susanna [Fehr] (Dyck), was living here, RGB 78-1.

Abram Rempel, farmer, blacksmith, and dealer in sewing machines and gasoline motors purchased the place about 1893.

Rempel Ancestry.

Abram Rempel was the son of Bernhard Rempel (1828-1916), RGB 188-1, who was the son of Bernhard Rempel (b. 1792), who was the son of Bernhard Rempel (b. 1761). In 1818 Bernhard (b. 1792) married Helena Neufeld (1788-1839). Bernhard (b. 1761) was married for the

second time to Margaretha Neufeld (b. 1756). She was a Lithuanian Mennonite, the daughter of Johann Neufeld.

Bernhard Rempel Sr. was the son of Peter Rempel (1731-88), listed in the 1776 Konsignation in the Petershagen, with two sons (Note One). Peter Rempel was married to Kristina Dyck (1731-86) and again in 1786 to Anna Braun (b. 1761).

The village of Petershagen was in the Mennonite heartland in Prussia. It was the birthplace of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde.



David Rempel (1869-1949), from Reinland, Swift Current Reserve, Saskatchewan, was one of the 1921 delegates to look for land in Mexico. He was a brother to delegate Cornelius Rempel and to Abram Rempel, owner of the housebarn in Reinland, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 20.

Bernhard Rempel Sr emigrated from Prussia to Imperial Russia in 1788, settling in Schönhorst, Chortitza Colony, in 1789. He is listed as the owner of Wirtschaft No. 19 in Schönhorst in the Revision of 1795 (Unruh, page 242), the village census of 1802 and 1803 (Unruh, pages 215 and 248).

“Rempel Ancestry” courtesy of Henry Schapansky, 914 Chilliwack St., New/Westminster, B.C., V3L 4V5, letter January 1, 2001.

Bernhard Rempel 1828-1916.

Bernhard Rempel (1828-1916) emigrated from Schöndorf, Borosenko Colony, Imperial Russia to Manitoba in 1879. The Bernhard Rempel family settled in the village of Halbstadt, West Reserve, together with his sister Maria and her teacher husband, Peter Friesen (1828-1903) RGB 144-1 where they are listed in the 1881 census, BGB 359-3 (Note Two).

In 1880 both Bernhard Rempel and brother-in-law Peter Friesen were appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor to represent Halbstadt on the Municipal Council of Rhineland (Note One).

Abram Rempel 1867-1954.

In 1887 son Abram Rempel married Sarah Froese, daughter of Peter Froese (1829-1905) of Schönwiese, W.R., RGB 27-3. As already mentioned, they purchased the Wirtschaft in Reinland a few years later.

Abram Rempel probably constructed the present house circa 1910. The barn, in all likelihood, predates the house.

By the 1920s, Abram Rempel was a prosperous farmer with three quarters of the finest farmland in Manitoba. His spacious stables had accommodation for 18 horses--big powerful Belgians for plowing as well as sleek trotters for pulling the buggy. This was the horsepower required in those days to work such a magnificent piece of ground. Many of the Old Colony farmers were also among the first to mechanize, also owning a 10/20 Titan or Fordson tractor.

Abram Rempel had also gone into business serving as a dealer and service shop for sewing machines and gasoline engines.

Exodus, 1923.

By 1922 the Old Colony (Reinländer) Gemeinde had decided to emigrate.

In 1921 Abram's brother Cornelius Rempel (1856-1921) served as a delegate to Mexico, inspecting land on behalf of the church, RGB 188-2. In 1914 Cornelius had married for the fourth time to the widow of Aeltester Peter Wiebe, Rosengart, RGB 188-2. After their marriage, Cornelius and his new bride moved into the village of Blumenort. Tragically Cornelius died in



Bernhard A. Rempel (1891-1968), son of Abram, Reinland, Manitoba Plan, Mexico, hauling his milk cans to the street with a special trolley. Photo courtesy of Peter Rempel, Cuauhtemoc.



Right: Bernhard A. Rempel (1891-1986), Neu-Reinland, Manitoba Plan, Mexico. Photographs of the Abram Rempel family are courtesy of Peter Rempel, Cuauhtemoc. Left: Gerhard Rempel (1910-69), Rosenort 6B, Manitoba Plan, farmer and worker. Gerhard was the youngest son of Abram Rempel. Photo courtesy of Peter Rempel, Cuauhtemoc.



Discussing the Abram Rempel family history Nov. 4, 2000, at the Pizzeria, Highway 28, Manitoba Plan, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Abram Rempel (left), Neuanlage Campo 105, Swift Colony, and Jakob Peters (right), Neu-Reinland, Manitoba, are both grandsons of Bernhard A. Rempel (1891-1986), and Franz “Pancho” Rempel (middle) and brother to Peter, Km. 18, is a great-grandson of Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901), Blumenort, W.R., Manitoba.

1921 before he himself was able to depart from Manitoba.

Abram's brother David Rempel (1869-1949) also served as a delegate to Mexico in 1921, RGB 189-2. David Rempel lived in Reinland, Swift Current Reserve, Saskatchewan, and settled in the village of Schöndorf, Swift Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

In 1923 Abram Rempel and his family joined the exodus to Mexico, settling in the village of Neu-Reinland in the Manitoba Plan, north of Cuauhtemoc. It was common for the families to take along the name of their village. They named their new home in honour of the one they had left, reflecting nostalgia and respect for a past which directed them confidently into the future, preserving their heritage as a beacon of inspiration for their descendants and future generations to come.

Abram Rempel died in 1954 in his 88th year.

Rempels in Mexico.

Bernhard A. Rempel (1891-1968), son of Abram, owned and operated a store in Neu-Reinland, Mexico. He was a sales agent for motors and windmills to pump water from wells.

Bernhard had two blind brothers Peter (1893-1918) and Abraham (1895-1918) who were nonetheless able to work on the threshing gang, bagging grain. As soon as they heard someone's voice they were able to tell who it was. Both brothers died of typhus in 1918.

Bernhard A. Rempel was one of the pioneers in water pumping and windmill technology. He had a 70 foot windmill on his Wirtschaft in Neu-Reinland.

Abram's son, Gerhard Rempel (1910-69), was a farmer and labourer. He lived in Rosenort 6B, Manitoba Plan.

Endnotes:

Note One: Abram Friesen, *Peter Friesen & Maria Rempel* (Box 1322, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, 1994), page 6.

Note Two: *1880 Village Census of the West Reserve* (Winnipeg, 1998), page 24. Bernhard Rempel is also listed in the 1881 census, *BGB*, page 359. It appears that the listing for the village of Halbstadt was incorrectly added to the Scratching River Settlement, instead of being placed under the R. M. of Rhineland, eastern part, starting at page 363. Peter Friesen (1828-1903) was related to movie actress Dyan Cannon (Friesen), see *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 130-131.

Gerhard Ens (1867-1949)

Historical Background.

In 1923, Gerhard Ens (1867-1949) and Margaretha (Rempel) Ens (1871-1955) arrived in Canada as refugee immigrants from Soviet Russia.

Gerhard was the son of Gerhard Ens (1828-

88), who had moved from Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony, to the village of Schöndorf, Borosenko, in the late 1860s. Gerhard Ens Sr. was the leading minister of the Old Colony Gemeinde at Borosenko, and is mentioned in the ministerial journals of Peter Toews (1841-

1922), Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde denomination that co-founded the Borosenko Colony in 1865 (*Profile*, page 158).

Margaretha Rempel (1871-1955) was born in Grünfeld, Schlachtin-Baratov, the daughter of Heinrich Rempel (1838-1920). Heinrich was



The Rempel-Ens heritage housebarn, Lot 7, Reinland, view to the northwest. It has upstairs rooms and a dormr window, features of this house which were unusual in early Reinland homes. This building is a magnificent example of hundreds of such structures which once filled almost two hundred "Strassendorf" street villages in southern Manitoba and in Saskatchewan. Photo by Henry G. Ens, R.R.1, Box 210, Group 17, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1.



The Rempel/Ens housebarn, view from the northwest, presenting the linkage between the house, the barn, and the summer kitchen to the right. The "Gang" or gangway between the house and summer kitchen was unique. The feature was commonly used to connect house and barn in prairie housebarns by the turn-of-the-century, but the summer kitchen was usually free standing. These innovations reflect adaptation to local building materials and styles. Photo by Werner Ens, courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland (Altona, 1976), page 95. A detailed floor plan of the house and barn, as well as an aerial photograph showing the outline of the structure, have been published by Zacharias, Reinland, pages 98-99.

the son of Dietrich Rempel (1793-1881), who was the son of Bernhard Rempel (b. 1761), owner of Wirtschaft No. 19 in Schönhorst, Chortitza Colony, already referred to above.

Purchase, 1923.

In the fall of 1923, Gerhard Ens and Margaretha Rempel Ens purchased the Abram Rempel housebarn and farm property in Reinland, West Reserve, Manitoba.

For a short time, they lived here together with the Abram Rempel family, who later moved to Mexico. Rempel, Magaretha's second cousin and Gerhard's classmate in grade school in Russia, was eight years old when he came to Canada from Russia with his parents in 1875 and 57 when he and his family moved to Mexico in 1923.

The Rempel-Ens property transaction included 7 horses, 3 cows, and a hog for slaughter, as well as 2 ploughs, 2 drills, 2 binders, and some other equipment. The land consisted of 480 acres. Total purchase price was



Closeup showing the main entrance into the Scheune (hay mow) where equipment such as buggies and wagons were stored and feed for the livestock was stockpiled for winter. Note the row of high small windows, typical in earlier Mennonite barns, and the detailed cross bracing of the double barn door. The original part of the barn dates to ca. 1880. The buggy was purchased by Abram Rempel in 1915. Photo by Henry G. Ens.



A built-in china cabinet ("Miraschaup") in the Atjschtove. Note the door to the internal central hearth, on the right. View to the west. This housebarn features a second built-in china cabinet with drawers in the Grootte Schtove. Photo by Henry G. Ens.



The kitchen door of the Tiajel-owen (the central brick heater), a feature of traditional Mennonite housebarns, is still intact. The internal brick oven was built literally in the centre of the house, so that most rooms were adjacent to it, thus minimizing the need for ducting. The central brick oven and chimney were built in such a way as to create a simple Riatjakoma (meat-smoking chamber) on the second floor, used to smoke hams and sausage. Photo by Henry G. Ens.



Gerhard Ens (1867-1949) and Margaretha Rempel Ens (1871-1955), who bought the Rempel housebarn in 1923. This photograph was taken in 1946 by Henry G. Ens.

\$14,000.00 to be paid in 10 years at an annual interest rate of 6 per cent.

Since the Ens family had arrived from the Ukraine (U.S.S.R.) as credit passengers owing the C.P.R. their entire fare of \$120.00 per person, they had no money for a down payment. This was then borrowed from Abram Rempel's older brother Franz of Blumenort. The agreement was that they would first repay the travel debt ("Reiseschuld") and then start payments on the farm and equipment.

Housebarn.

Lot 9, complete with all buildings, was sold to settle the Estate of Maria Ens and consideration was given to maintain it as a Heritage Homestead. Its location and some of the building intricacies are unique to the period of settlement of the West Reserve.

The barn has the original "face to face" horse stalls as well as the "face out" stalls for the rest of the horsepower that was so important in the pioneer days. The cattle played a very important role in providing the family with milk, cream, butter and meat. Their place in the barn was in the so-called owe-sided (lean-to) on the west side.

The democrat (buggy) dates back to the early 1900s. It was used for going to church and visiting relatives in the other villages. An original McCormick Deering two-tiered grain wagon with high, wooden wheels, the *dobblebax*, had to be there for hauling the grain from the threshing machine to the granary and later to town.



Seed cleaner (fanning mill) and cutter (top sleigh) as found in the equipment room of the Rempel/Ens Heritage housebarn. Photo by Henry G. Ens.

Most of the tools in the smithy and carpentry shop as well as the materials under the mechanic's workbench are still from Abram Rempel's era. The forge has bellows instead of a more modern blower. A number of tongs used for smithing are hanging at the forge. The plough shares beside

the forge are waiting to be sharpened and the Post Drill is ready to drill holes into steel items.

Gerhard Ens was more of a carpenter than a blacksmith, making furniture as well as some of his own tools. The woodwork bench is the one he worked at. The tools and instruments in the shop are the ones he used. There are also a few items which lie left unfinished. The table in the *Atjstov* (corner room of the house) is one of the last items of furniture that he made.

Although the house has seen some modernization, it is basically the same as when the Enses bought it. The *Tiajel-owen* (central brick heater) is still intact, as well as the *Riatjakoma* (meat smoking chamber) on the second floor. The *Sommatjäatj* (summer room) has been converted into a washroom and laundry area.

The *Sommatjäatj* (summer kitchen) also called *Wintjelhüs*, attached to the west side (of the house, was used in summer for cooking, canning and baking. The purpose was to keep the house cooler. It had a *Spoarhiat*, a cook stove, which was heated with fine tree branches or corn cobs, that provided quick, economical heat.

This particular summer kitchen has also been used extensively as living quarters for relatives and others in need.

Owners.

Gerhard and Margaretha (Rempel) Ens continued to live here for the rest of their lives. Their daughter Maria married Heinrich Andres



Blacksmith shop as found on the Rempel/Ens homestead. The work bench is situated on the right and the forge on the left. Photo by Henry G. Ens.

Part Five: 125th Anniversary

in 1924. When Heinrich died of tuberculosis two years later. Maria moved back to live with her aging parents whom she took care of with tender love until both had passed on to their eternal reward, Gerhard in 1949 and Margaretha in 1955. Both of them died in Reinland, their home since 1923.

In November 1959 Maria Andres married Jacob F. Ens and they continued to live here until Maria died August 10, 1995. In January 1996 widower Jacob Ens moved to the Heritage High Rise Apartments in Winkler.

When Maria Andres Ens died in 1995 the

property was sold to her nephew Abe Ens, retired dairy farmer, Reinland, a grandson of Gerhard and Margaretha Ens who had purchased it from the Rempels.

The Gerhard Ens family is to be congratulated for preserving this fine example of Mennonite life in southern Manitoba, dating back over a century.

Descendants.

Like the Abram Rempels, Gerhard and Margaretha Ens left a large progeny which includes many prominent leaders in the Menno-

nite community. Among their well-known grandsons are Gerhard Ens, former editor of *Der Bote*, Adolf Ens, Professor at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Henry G. Ens, retired teacher in Mexico and Altona, Manitoba, and grandson Phil Ens of Triple E Manufacturing, Winkler, and grandson George Wiebe, music director and instructor at CMBC for 40 years.

Conclusion.

The Rempel/Ens housebarn is a wonderful piece of Manitoba's history, largely preserved in its original configuration and condition. It is typical of the large prosperous *Wirtschaften* (village farms) of the Old Colony people who left for Mexico in 1922 to 1927, and also of the housebarn building style which the Mennonite pioneers of the 1870s had brought along with them from Imperial Russia.

Like the John D. McDonald house in Winnipeg, this building speaks for an important chapter in the history of Western Canada and deserves recognition as a significant historical site.

The participants in the Post Road Inauguration Tour of August 19, 2000, were fortunate indeed to be given a personal tour of the Rempel-Ens Heritage Housebarn conducted by Abe Ens, its current owner, and assisted by brother Henry G. Ens, Reinland, retired teacher and photographer who contributed many of the photographs for this article.

Abe Ens is committed to preserving the Rempel-Ens housebarn as a heritage property. Readers who are interested in viewing the premises may call to make an appointment by phoning him at (204) 325-4494.



Double crib and trough for six horses in the Rempel-Ens housebarn. Photo by Henry G. Ens.



Living room (Groote Shtove). Photo by Henry G. Ens.

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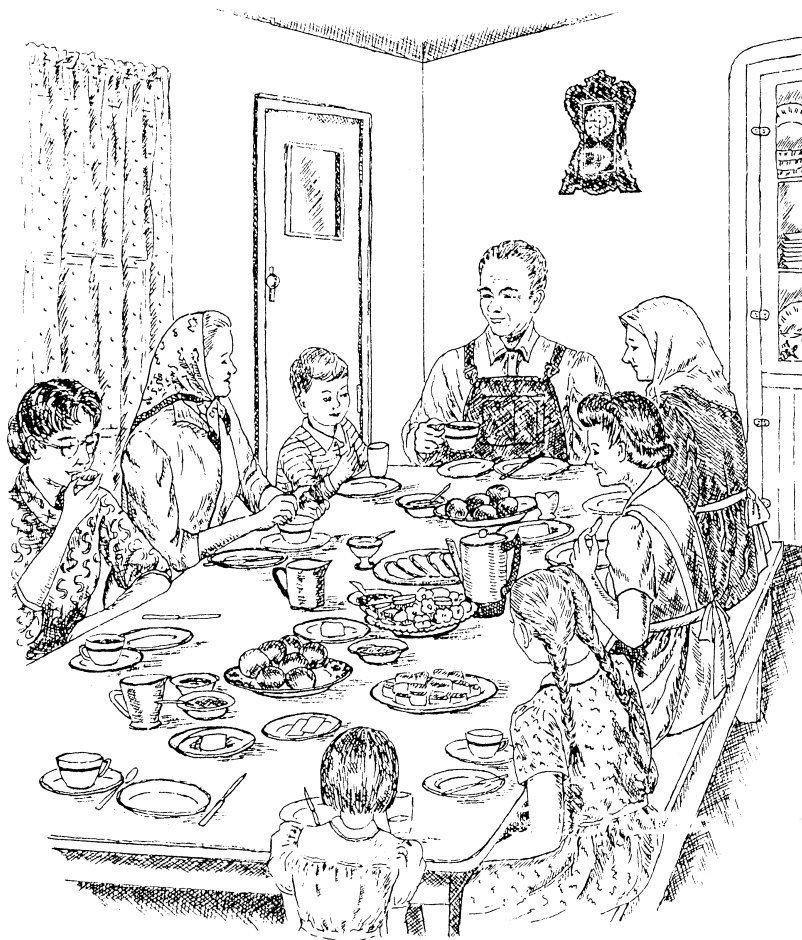
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M. Warkentine

An Old Colony family enjoying Vassa. Whether working in the fields or relaxing, Old Colony families are known for their togetherness, honesty and work ethic. Drawing by M. Warkentine, courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 76.



M. Warkentine

A mother reads to her daughter. Christian formation and family values are characteristic of the Old Colony people. Drawing by M. Warkentine, courtesy of Blumenfeld, page 180.



Quietude at the creek, Reinland, Manitoba, Canada, the heartland of the Old Colony Mennonites. The picturesque view symbolizes the love for the land and husbandry of the Old Colony people. Photo courtesy of Peter Zacharias, Reinland (Altona, 1976), page 154.

Back-cover paintings: The back-cover paintings of an Old Colony family sitting down for “Vaspa” and the farmyard scene of the the mother plucking a goose together with her daughters were painted by Salvador Marrero, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. The paintings were commissioned by the Mennonite Credit Union at Cuauhtemoc (“Union de Credito”), Mexico, to furnish their new banking and office building, officially opened on November 10, 2000 (see *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 83-84). The Union de Credito has graciously allowed these beautiful paintings to be reproduced for the cover of this book.