

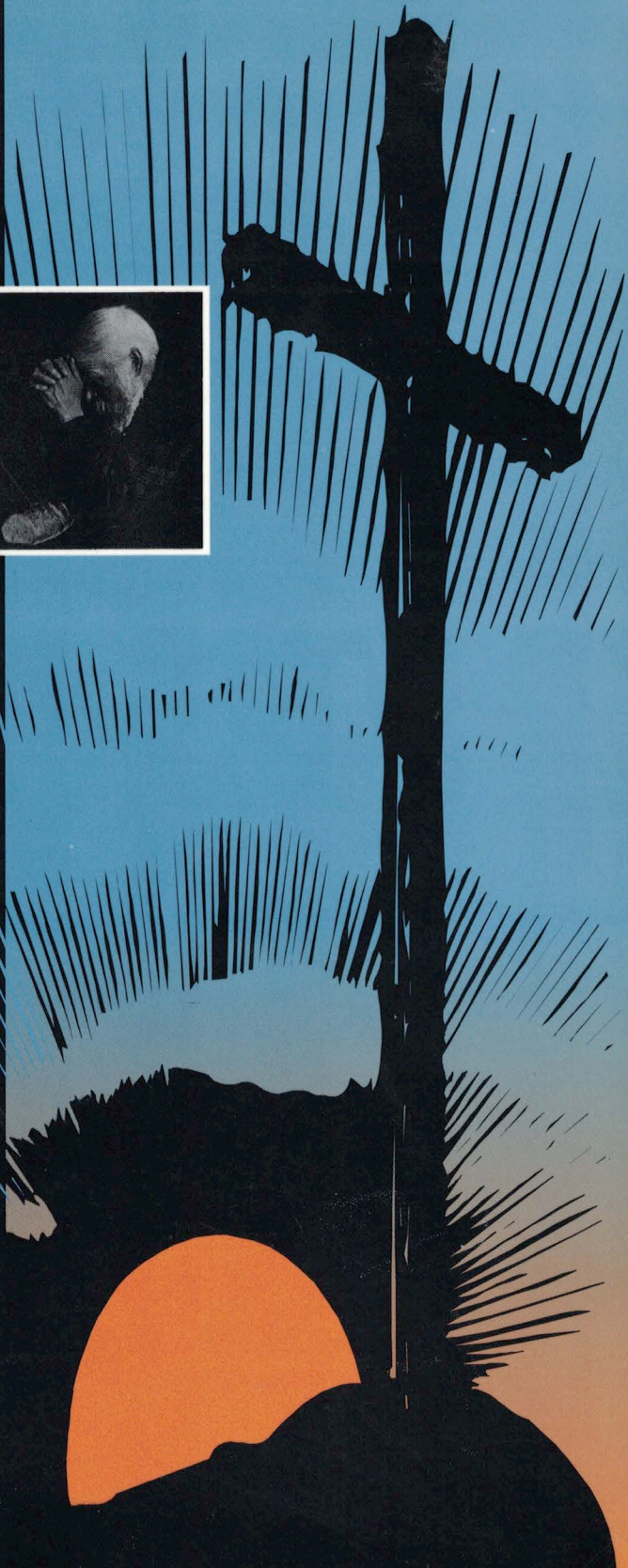
SAINTS

AND

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The Kleine Gemeinde
in
Imperial Russia
1812 to 1875

Delbert F. Plett Q.C.





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Preface

The writing of the “Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series” has been one of the greatest adventures of my life. Like Indiana Jones and “The Raiders of the Lost Ark” I discovered and had a small part in documenting for posterity the culture and spiritual ethos of an entire people. In my case they dated from the Reformation and earlier to the Low German Hanseatic League which dominated trade and commerce in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea during medieval times.

From the very beginning of my research in 1978 I realized that there was a great need for an introductory history book written for the general reader which would pull together, synthesize and integrate the mass of new primary source material found in the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) literary corpus.

In 1996 Dr. Harvey Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba, completed a history of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference entitled *Seeking to be Faithful: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Box 1268, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, 1996), 188 pages, a book very helpful for the general reader. I have decided to write my own interpretation of the KG story as well, not because Harvey’s book is deficient in any way, but rather as a vehicle to pull together the insights and viewpoints I have garnered over twenty years of research of the topic.

As the reader will realize “Saints and Sinners” is written from the perspective of the KG as representing the most fully embodied manifestation of the restitution of the “Anabaptist Vision” among the Russian Mennonites. In this sense, the KG and its story is a flashpoint for the conservative wing of the Dutch-Prussian-Russian Mennonite historical stream. Proponents of the Separatist-Pietist interpretation of Mennonite history were astute enough to realize that if the KG, as a rational intellectually-grounded reform movement, could be denigrated and brought into disrepute and disrespect, the other denominations could easily be disregarded, isolated and eventually marginalized as ultra-conservative, arch-reactionaries clinging desperately to outmoded and useless mores of the past.

When I originally thought about writing this book I sought an appropriate title. I wanted a name which would reflect both the KG’s aspirations for truth and purity in their lives, as well as their realization of the mortal limitations of all human beings, including themselves. The idea for the title, “Saints and Sinners”, comes from a statement made by founder Klaas Reimer, quoting Aeltester Mathies Serwas (1536-65), a Reformation martyr and one of his favourite writers, stating that “God is all powerful, but sometimes He chooses to work through sinful and mortal people”. The reference meant that God could have chosen to create His perfect church by angels or by simply creating saints, but chose, instead, to build his church with ordinary imperfect human beings, namely, sinners.

In the interest of sparing untold repetitions I have used the abbreviation “KG” to refer to the Kleine Gemeinde. I have also treated citation of sources and

quotations more informally than normal. Since the primary source material used is abundantly footnoted in the “Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series” no footnotes are used in the present work.

The material is presented topically by components with analytical overview as well as focus on biographies, specific topics and issues, developing the unfolding story on different levels and from various perspectives.

The intention was to produce a reader friendly book reasonably accessible to the lay readers. My hope is that the readers will find the work to be of some assistance in their understanding of the KG and its role in the cosmic battle between good and evil.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge my mother, Gertrude Friesen Plett (1913-93), who patiently attempted to answer the questions of a young inquisitive son. I acknowledge two gracious "Ohms", Cornelius L. Toews (1891-1982), Steinbach, and Peter A. Plett (1898-1990), Landmark, who took time to introduce me to the history of the KG in the late 1970s when my interest in my own past was first aroused. Both of these men have long ago passed away but I will always remember them fondly.

I would like to acknowledge several others who like me have been inspired by the KG story and have written about the experience. Dr. Royden Loewen, now Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, has been a friendly competitor and helpful colleague from the beginning. His widely acknowledged work on rural social history has always been an inspiration to me.

Steinbach historian Henry Fast, author of a history of the KG in Nebraska and Kansas, has encouraged and often tantalized me with nuggets of information discovered by scouring through the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, and other sources. Dr. Harvey Plett, author of the recently published *Seeking to be Faithful*, about the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and particularly its KG roots in Imperial Russia, has been a steady influence and advisor. More recently Ralph Friesen, son of Steinbach minister Peter D. Friesen, has brought his exceptional writing skills to focus on his KG roots. Through the pursuit of our common interests and history--that of the KG, all four have become dear friends and colleagues.

I acknowledge the assistance of John J. Friesen, Professor of History, Canadian Mennonite Bible college who read the manuscript and shared his advice. He has previously assisted in editing various of the volumes in the "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series", for which I am grateful.

The editing assistance of Harry Loewen, former Mennonite Chair, University of Winnipeg was appreciated. I acknowledge HSHS Research Director John Dyck, Winnipeg, as well as two younger historians, Lori Scharfenberg, Rosenort, and Heide Harms Friesen, Steinbach, who have assisted by reading the manuscript.

The members of my readers committee have shared with me their comments and opinions for which I am grateful. I alone take full responsibility for the interpretations which I have propounded, realizing that history writing, like life itself, is an inexact science at best.

Any historical work is always only a modest beginning. Hopefully this work about the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812 to 1875, will be useful for those who follow.

Chapter One: The Anabaptist Vision

Section 1.01: Introduction.

The purpose for the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Mennonites in the Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, was the restitution or restoration of the Apostolic Church, as rediscovered by the seminal leaders of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith in the Reformation times. It is necessary, therefore, to have an understanding of the Reformation and the forces which gave it birth.

It is likewise important to have an understanding of the Mennonite people since the time of the Reformation and the various migrations from Holland to Prussia, to Russia, where the KG was founded in 1812. In this work I have attempted to provide a minimum of information, hopefully sufficient to provide the reader with some historical continuity as the story unfolds. At various points in the book I have provided suggestions for further reading in the hope that this brief overview will awaken in the reader such an interest.

Some readers may wonder at the lengthy sections on the “Anabaptist Vision” and “Prussian Mennonites” with space being at a premium in an introductory history. Ordinarily I would have assumed the reader to be familiar with these segments of the story, dealt with it in a brief chapter and proceeded to deal with the KG in Russia. I decided to include these preliminary chapters as the book is intended for lay people who will have only limited background information, nor will they have a library with which to reference such information. Because the KG was “restitutional” in its theological disposition, these earlier segments are more important in their case than with other churches, for much of their story was articulated by their interpretation of history and sense of historical consciousness.

The negative press which conservative Mennonite groups in the Prussian/Russian stream have received is already well known among their descendants. Fortunately we are now living in a neo-conservative age when traditional values and the concept of conserving the past in terms of institutions, philosophies and ways of doing things are once again viewed with favour. It seemed appropriate, therefore, to also rewrite our history from the viewpoint of those who cherished past values, namely, the matriarchs and patriarchs of the past, whose vision was for the restitution of the New Testament church. Surely there is something significant and valuable in all cultures and faiths which are of God.



*Apostle Peter being beheaded in Rome, AD 69.
Martyrs' Mirror, page 74.*

Section 1.02: 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. At the heart of this growth was extreme persecution which commenced with the stoning of Stephen in Jerusalem. Antioch became the centre of growth where many Greeks were gathered to the church. Here they were referred to for the first time as "Christians". The ministry and the churches founded by the Apostles and their followers are referred to as the apostolic churches.

The apostolic church was a suffering, persecuted church. Many apostles came to untimely deaths for the sake of their faith. Numerous accounts of the martyrs of the early church were gathered by Thielmann J. von Braght who published them as Part One of his *Bloody Theatre of Martyr's Mirror of Defenceless Christians*, or simply the *Martyrs' Mirror*. The persecution of Christians became an official policy of the Roman Empire in the year 66 A.D. The persecution continued into the second century. In 166 A.D. it became law to give property of Christians to their accusers which resulted in another wave of persecution.

The apostolic church also grew inwardly through the development of doctrine and organization. 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."

Some of the early congregations (Gemeinden as they were known in German), possessed an unlimited confidence in charismatic leadership and gifts. Such a Christianity was very susceptible to false teachings. Self-seeking and false claimants to divine guidance soon arose who mislead the church. Two of these movements were Gnosticism and Montanism.

Such adversity underlined the need for the establishment of sound doctrine and out of this came the Apostles Creed. The doctrines of the trinity and Christology were developed by a series of councils: Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).

Each group or society of believers in the apostolic church was constituted as a community or Gemeinde with a threefold ministry of Bishop (Aeltester), ministers (Lehrer) and deacons. The apostolic church consisted of peaceful non-resistance believers who had committed themselves to follow Christ.

Section 1.03: The Fall of the Church, 333-1517.

The year 313 is often seen as marking the decline of the church. In that year the Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan whereby Christianity was recognized as a lawful religion. In 380 the Emperor Gratian issued an Edict that Christianity was the only religion legal in the Roman Empire. The church grew in wealth and soon became the richest religious organization. Soon it became an honour to be Christian and a requirement for state and military service. Christianity became a tool of the State. The New Testament Church now became the Catholic or universal church as opposed to small persecuted groups of believers.

The flood of new believers brought a host of heathen practices into the church, including exorcism, prayers for the dead, purgatory, the Lord's Supper became a sacrament, veneration of saints, the veneration of Mary, veneration of relics of martyrs, pictures, images and altars in churches, ritual, persecution of heathen and heretics.

A powerful hierarchial structure developed under the five patriarchs, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Rome. Mohammedan expansion eventually removed all except Rome. The patriarch of Rome became more powerful, a natural development as Rome continued to be the capital of the Roman Empire. Eventually the supremacy of Rome was acknowledged by all the Bishops of the western or European churches. The Bishop of Rome was called the Pope and ruled as supreme head of the Christian church in western Europe.

Gregory the Great was one of the leading popes of the medieval church, reigning from 590-604. He appointed heads of states, raised armies and made peace treaties. He sent forth missionaries resulting in the conversion to Christianity of England.

The barbarians of northern Europe were conquered and forced to convert to Christianity over the second half of the first millennium. The church suffered a major setback through the growth of Islam in the seventh century. The followers of Mohammed conquered the eastern half of the Roman Empire as well as Africa which included several early church strongholds. They also invaded Spain and France. They were defeated by Charles Martel (the Hammer) in 732.

The advances of Islam had removed all major rivals of the Roman Bishop. The doctrine of Apostolic succession came into being. The doctrine held that the pope stood in direct succession to the apostle Peter to whom Christ had intrusted the keys to the Kingdom.

During the years 1096 to 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, who ruled from 1198 to 1216. Innocent tolerated no opposition from secular powers. He excommunicated the King of England in 1208 when he became insubordinate.

Section 1.04: The Struggle for Truth

The union of church and state under the Emperor Constantine in 313 heralded the decline of the New Testament church as a body of believers practicing the teachings of Christ in their daily lives. But the vision was not completely eradicated. *The Martyrs' Mirror* contains the record of those who remained true to the concept of a believers church and who gave their lives for the faith.

The multitude of heathen flooding into the church after the time of Constantine brought pagan practices with them. They knew nothing about experiential Christianity in the apostolic model. The church soon adopted their sacrifices, priests, altars, relics, images and superstitions. Heathen superstitions were transferred to crucifixes. Many considered themselves Christian by virtue of being born to Christian parents.

The universal Catholic church also had many sincere and earnest Christian leaders. Augustine (354-430) defended the church against those who denied the concept of original sin. At the same time the ascetic ideal of Christian perfection, developed in Monasticism was based on abstinence and voluntary poverty. The monastic movement was viewed as an elite formation of Christian workers. The Dominican and Franciscan orders were established in the 12th century.

The Waldenses were the followers of Peter Waldo, a rich merchant in Lyons, France, who believed that the church should be founded and guided solely by the New Testament model. In 1176 he sold all his possessions and gave his money to the poor and with his followers travelled around the country preaching and helping the needy. Their work was so successful that the Catholic church instituted the Inquisition to eradicate them. A crusade was declared against the Waldenses and many were burned at the stake.

Other individuals challenged the teachings of the church. John Wycliffe (1320-84), professor at Oxford University, England, criticized the church for its wealth and secular power. He advocated restitution of New Testament ideals of poverty and simplicity and preached that the Bible should be the ultimate authority. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English. His followers were excommunicated and burned at the stake.

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 bloomed in Italy. Humanism 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. Erasmus (1466-1536) was a leading scholar among Christian humanists. He ridiculed the abuses of the church, but believed that reform should come without destroying the Catholic Church. 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.

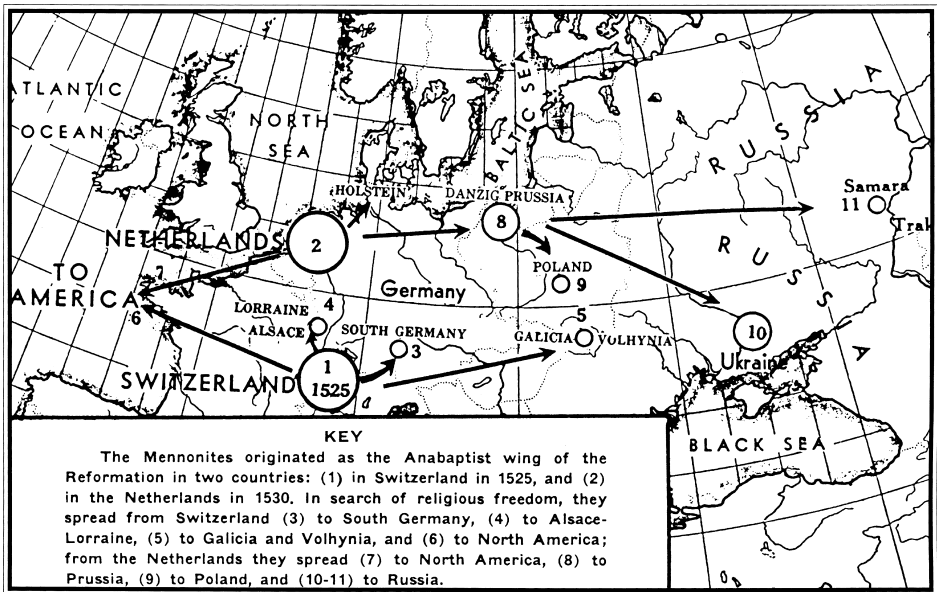
Section 1.05: The Eve of the Reformation.

By the 16th century the church had become a corrupt political machine more concerned about its own power and self-perpetuation than with the teachings of Christ. The church was filled with immorality and greed. It had amassed enormous wealth owning three-quarters of the land in some areas. It regarded itself as the principal instrument of civilization. Church rulers taxed and spent like princes, often living in open immorality.

Anything was available for a price, including ecclesiastical offices, dispensations, and divorces. The personal 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.” Some confessors solicited sexual favours from female penitents.

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 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 socio-economic and political oppression. Heretics were brutally eradicated by the Inquisition.



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

Section 1.06: The Protestant Reformation.

Such was Europe on the eve of the Reformation--a tinderbox of discontent and revolt waiting for a spark which would set it ablaze. In 1517 Martin Luther (1483-1546), a Catholic monk and doctor of theology, ignited the fire which soon spread across Europe. The conflagration started when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the castle door in Wittenberg, Germany.

Through a time of utter despair and "Seelenangst" and through the study of the Bible he found comfort for his soul, especially in the teaching of the Apostle Paul that "The just shall live by faith," Romans 1,17. The idea that sinners were saved by grace was in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Catholic church that salvation came through the sacraments. He also believed that the Bible was to be the sole authority on all matters regarding the church. Luther and others were committed to reforming the Catholic church and were known as reformers and their movement as the Reformation. The church responded by denouncing Luther as a heretic in 1520 and excommunicating him.

Luther's ideas spread across Europe like wild fire. Slowly but surely central and northern Germany, which had sympathetic rulers, was reformed. Freedom of religion meant freedom for the ruler to choose the religion of his subjects. The papacy was rejected and only two sacraments were recognized, the Lord's supper and baptism.

Although Luther originally believed in the concept of a believers' church he eventually dropped the idea. During the peasant revolt in Germany (1524-25), he supported the ruling princes who butchered thousands to put down the rebellion. Luther believed that man had a dualistic nature, meaning that murder and other crimes committed in the service of the state were not attributable to the individual as sin. The Lutheran church replaced the Catholic church as the State church in Germany and elsewhere in northern Europe.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Zurich, Switzerland, was another major reformer. He attacked the sale of indulgences and removed relics, altars, musical instruments and paintings, from the church in Zurich.

John Calvin (1509-64) was the third great protestant reformer. He was born in Paris, but in 1536 settled in Geneva, Switzerland. He wrote the famous *Institutes of Christian Religion*. 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. Calvin advocated a thorough organizational reformation of the church promoting a polity or governance resembling the New Testament church. Calvin's teachings spread to England (Puritans), Scotland (Presbyterians), France (Huguenots) and Holland (Reformed).

The Protestant Reformation stimulated some reform from within the Catholic church seen in the movement known as the Counter-Reformation. Mighty armies were fielded by King Charles V of Spain to conquer the upstart Protestants. 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 Mennonites were persecuted for their faith. An estimated 4,000 were executed by hanging, burning, quartering and drowning. More often than not, women bore the brunt of the persecution. Maria van Beckum was chained to the stake just before her execution by fire. Her sister, Ursual van Beckum, was lead away, to be burned at the stake later that day, November 13, 1544. Etching by Jan Luyken. Photo courtesy Snider and Hecht, Profiles of Anabaptist Women, page xvi.

The Catholic counter attack reached its zenith in the Low Countries, the Netherlands and Belgium. The Inquisition disposed of more than 18,000 martyrs in Holland alone where the persecution reached great intensity under King Philip of Spain. But the Calvinist reform in Holland gained strength and by 1571 the first synod was held. The Calvinists in Holland became known as the Dutch Reformed Church. It was more tolerant of other Christians than their brethren elsewhere in Europe.

The development of Arminianism within the Dutch Reformed Church was quite significant. 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. He also taught that it was possible to fall from grace. These teachings caused an uproar and were rejected by the Synod of Dort (1618). But they were later accepted by John Wesley (1703-91). Wesley and his Methodists, in turn, heralded the rise of the 19th century Protestant evangelical movement, American revivalism, etc.

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.

Section 1.07: The Radical Reformation.

The third wing of the Reformation has been referred to as the Anabaptist movement. 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 more than forty groups of Anabaptists 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 the revolution of peace proclaimed by Jesus and the New Testament church. Their fundamental premise 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.

Conrad Grebel (1498-1526) was the leader of the Swiss Brethren or Swiss South German Anabaptists. He came from a prominent family and received the best university education of his day. Grebel had been a friend of Zwingli but broke with him in 1525 over the issue of the believers' church. The persecution of the church in Switzerland continued for 200 years. The Swiss-South German wing of the Mennonite church spread to Germantown, Pennsylvania, in the late 17th century, and included the Amish and Old Mennonite denominations.

Jakob Hutter was the most prominent leader of the peaceful Anabaptists in Moravia where they became known as Hutterites. They were unique in that they practised community of property. In 1536 Hutter died for his faith by burning at the stake. In 1770 his followers relocated to Wishenka, 200 kilometers northeast of Kiev, and in 1802 to nearby Radichew. In 1842 a remnant moved to Hutterthal on the Molochnaya River. In 1874 the descendants of this group immigrated to the United States from where they moved to Canada in 1918.

Menno Simons (1496-1561) was the best known of the radical reformers, the peaceful Anabaptists in Northern Germany. He was a Catholic priest in Witmarsum, Friesland, Netherlands, and well educated for his time. He joined the Anabaptist movement in 1536, and soon became an Aeltester or Bishop. He travelled tirelessly throughout northern Europe where he inspired, organized and guided numerous small groups of believers "who were like sheep without a shepherd."

Menno Simons called for nothing less than the reformation of all of life according to the ethic of the Sermons of the Mount and the fellowship of believers, the Gemeinde. He was a prolific writer with an aggressive style. Eventually the entire movement came to bear the name "Mennist" or Mennonite. He died a natural death and was buried on an estate in Wustenfelde, Germany, near Bad Oldesloe.

Chapter 1.08: The Golden Years.

The period of martyrdom in Holland came to an end by the mid-16th century. The century which followed was marked by a flowering of writing characterized as the golden years of the Dutch Mennonite Church or “Doopsgezindte”, as they preferred to be called.

Menno Simons himself was a prolific writer whose writings were circulated and published extensively. Another important writer of the period was Dirk Philips (1504-68), a contemporary of Menno's.

The first 100 years of the Dutch Mennonite church saw the establishment of a number of denominations, including the Flemish, who had recently fled from Flanders to escape persecution, the Frisians and Waterländers.

The Waterländer Gemeinde, particularly, was important as it originally practised a strict Biblical concept of preaching and faith. They also stressed a warm inward faith (ME,IV, pages 895-6). This group was to exert strong influence upon the KG in Russia through minister Pieter Pieters (1574-1651), a carpenter and windmill builder. Pieters was said to have been a gentle, peace loving and pious man, who was read and frequently published by the KG (ME,IV, page 175). Jan Philips Schabaelje (1585-1656) was a minister of the Waterländer congregation at Alkmaar, Holland. He wrote a large number of writings, the best known being *The Wandering Soul* (“Die Wandelnde Seele”) published in 1635, a fictionalized account of world history, based on the Bible and contemporary historical sources. This book was later translated into German and frequently republished.

Peter J. Twisck (1565-1636), served as Aeltester of the “Hard Frisians” in Horn, Holland and energetically defended the teachings of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, against the pietistical influences of Hans de Ries (1553-1638), Waterländer Aeltester from Alkmaar, Holland (ME,IV, page 330). Hans de Ries could be regarded as an early forerunner of those adherents of Separatist-Pietism in Prussia and Russia who ultimately led to the decline of these two branches of the church. Twisck, who had personally known such early leaders as Menno Simons, unashamedly defended the purity of their teachings. Twisck, who wrote over 20 books including a Bible commentary, was an important writer well-known to the KG.

One of the most significant works published during this time was the *Martyrs' Mirror*, by Thielmann von Braght (1625-64), a well educated man who became a preacher in Dortrecht in 1648. In the struggles with those favouring reformed theology and assimilation, Braght was completely on the side of the conservatives. Like Peter J. Twisck, van Braght wrote and published many works, but is remembered chiefly for the *Martyrs' Mirror*. The *Martyrs' Mirror* outlined the history of the suffering church since Apostolic times in Part One. Braght collected 4000 accounts of Anabaptist martyrs of Reformation times which he published in Part Two (ME,I, pages 400-401).

Herman Schijn (1662-1727), was a medical doctor who devoted himself to the interests of the Mennonite church. He became Aeltester of the Rotterdam Flemish Gemeinde in 1690 later moving to Amsterdam as Aeltester of the Zonists, a conservative denomination. Schijn was a great leader of the conservative church and one of the first Dutch scholarly historians. He wrote a large number of books



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

the most important being his *Historiae Mennonitarum*, 418 pages, a history of the Dutch Mennonite church, published in Latin. A Dutch translation by colleague G. Maatschoen published in 1729 became the standard edition of this important historical work (ME,IV, pages 454-5).

The golden years were followed by a time of unheralded wealth and prosperity, coupled with decline in the religious faith of the fathers and rapid assimilation which decimated the Doopsgezindte. Hans de Ries (1553-1638) was one of the leaders in this direction placing greater emphasis on the internal spiritual life, with little regard for church regulation and governance. He was a prolific writer. He had great authority, but was headstrong and often called "Pope Hans." Hans de Ries was inclined in favour of the teachings of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Section 1.09: The Anabaptist Vision.

Of the Anabaptist Vision, Harold S. Bender has written as follows: “The Anabaptists ... retained the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, enlarged it, gave it body and form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience. They proceeded to organize a church composed solely of earnest Christians, and actually found the people for it. They did not believe in any case that the size of the response should determine whether or not the truth of God should be applied and they refused to compromise. They preferred to make a radical break with 1500 years of history and culture if necessary rather than to break with the New Testament.”

The following are some of the major beliefs and teachings of the peaceful Anabaptists or Mennonites:

- 1) Both Luther and Menno Simons believed in the separation of church and State, as two separate and distinct bodies, both ordained of God. Luther believed that the dictates of the State were paramount and that actions such as murder if preformed in the service of the State as in a war were not attributable as sin to the believer. Menno Simons, in contrast, believed that the Church of God and its ethics prevailed over the commands and dictates of the State.
- 2) Another integral concept was “the theology of the Kingdom” through which Mennonites understood Biblical revelation, the history of the Christian church as well as that of the individual believer. They believed that there was only one historical dispensation or period of grace which was instituted by the birth of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the Jews had been the chosen people but under the new covenant all who accepted God’s grace were chosen. The physical nation of Israel was replaced with the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. Through conversion the believer became a part of the spiritual kingdom which was a kingdom of peace. Dr. Robert Friedmann has written about “the doctrine of two worlds”--the kingdom of peace was engaged in a titanic battle against the kingdom of evil and darkness.
- 3) Discipleship was fundamental to the Anabaptist understanding of the New Testament church. Conversion and regeneration demanded an outward expression of the inward experience. Faith was incomplete if it did not result in a life which was under the Lordship and dominion of Christ.
- 4) The Anabaptist movement was predicated, of course, on the concept of the believers church. “Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept.” An essential corollary was the commitment of the church on separation from the world. The principal of nonconformity also resulted in a suffering church, one which suffered persecution for the sake of its faith.
- 5) Among conservative Mennonites the church was more than a collection of believers, meeting for edification and worship. Like the New Testament church upon which it was modelled it was organized in smaller groups known as Gemeinden. The Gemeinde was a socio-economic unit and not merely a conventicle of worship. Tönnie’s “Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft typology” is helpful in understanding the difference between a church congregation and a



Arlin and Florence Yost, Linda Reimer-Tremere, and Pauline and Menno Penner, members of the “Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour” group of 1996, inspect the Catholic Church in Pingjum where Menno served as Pastor at the time that he made his decision to join the Anabaptists in 1536. Note the Roman style arches of the windows. Pingjum is three miles north of Witmarsum. Local tour guides in the Ukraine such as Olga Schmakina tell us that an arched window style similar to this is often the first indicator that a particular building is of Mennonite origin. Photo by D. Plett April 23, 1996/Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 26.



1998 Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour. Our final worship service in the “Menno Simons Memorial Church” in his birthplace, Witmarsum, Netherlands. On the wall to the left hangs a portrait of Menno. On the beam overhead the words, “bear God’s Word, believe God’s Word, and do God’s Word.” Walter F Reimer, Steinbach, Canada, a descendant of Klaas Reimer; founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, is leading the service. Sitting in front, right, are Milton and Margareth Penner Toews, Neilberg, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 12, page 49.

For Further Reading:

Further information regarding the “Anabaptist Vision” and the history of the Mennonite church during the 16th century is found in Part One, “The Anabaptist Mennonites” in *The Golden Years*, 30.

There are several excellent presentations of traditional Mennonite beliefs and theology, beneficial for those to read who are interested in further study. Harold Bender, “The Anabaptist Vision,” is widely regarded as a brilliant exposition of the topic and is published in its entirety in *The Golden Years*, pages 31-41. Robert Friedmann is another writer whose writings would meet with the approval of most conservative and/or orthodox Mennonites. His book, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries* (Sugar creek, Ohio, 1980), 287 pages, traces the theological history of the movement and expounds on many teachings which impacted it. Another work, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Herald Press, 1973), 183 pages, deals with Mennonite theology although on an academic level. J. C. Wenger was another writer whose interpretations would be acceptable to modern-day conservative and orthodox Mennonites. His books, *Separated unto God* (Herald Press, 1979), 350 pages, and *Introduction to Theology* (Herald Press, 1975), 418 pages, are sound expositions of scripture in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Another helpful book to explain differences between Protestant and Mennonite/Anabaptist theology is Paul Lederach, *A Third Way* (Herald Press, 1980), 148 pages.

Those interested in more general writings regarding the entire Mennonite religious movement and its various branches in Europe and the Americas since Reformation times are referred to the following: C. J. Dyck, *Mennonite History* (Herald Press, 1993), 451 pages; C. Krahn, *Smith's Story of the Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas, 1981), 589 pages. Readers from conservative Mennonite backgrounds should be aware that these works are written to some extent from the perspective of reformed Mennonites (including those adopting the religious culture and language of Separatist Pietism in Russia and/or American Revivalism and Fundamentalism later in Canada and U.S.A.). Because the writers either do not understand the spiritual ethos of conservative Mennonites and/or are not sympathetic to same, references to these denominations sometimes seem insensitive--occasionally they are not mentioned at all. Nevertheless these works do contain valuable background information and are helpful if read with discernment.

Also available recently is a general history designed for teaching young people: Harry Loewen and Steven Nolt, *Through fire & water: An Overview of Mennonite History* (Herald Press, 1996), 350 pages. This work reflects a more sensitive and tolerant spirit. Coincidentally, Dr. Harry Loewen, the initiator of the work, is himself a direct descendant of the KG.

The Mennonite Encyclopedia is an excellent source of general information and invaluable reference material which should be found in every church library. Obviously the forgoing is only a small sampling of the available writings.

Chapter Two: Mennonites in Prussia.

Section 2.01: Prussia and Danzig.

Prussia was the territory along and near the coast at the southeast corner of the Baltic Sea. The City of Danzig was founded in the year 996 along the Danziger branch of the Weichsel River (Vistula). Culturally the area was largely German having been conquered by the Teutonic Knights in the 12th century. The Knights had been invited to subjugate the local population, who spoke a mixture of Slavic and German known as Kashubisch. German people had settled in the Danzig area and along the Vistula River in the 12th century establishing villages and draining areas which were beneath sea level.

By 1264 the Knights finished the castle at Marienberg on the Nogat River, which served as their headquarters. It fell to the Poles in 1460. At this time Danzig voluntarily came under the Protectorate of Poland. The Reformation was at least partially accepted in Poland and its government exercised uncommon tolerance towards minorities such as the Mennonites.

In 1391 Danzig joined the Hanseatic League, which dominated trade and commerce in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea from 1200 to 1600. Under the Polish regime it was to all intents an independent Free City. Danzig prospered as is evidenced by two large cathedrals built there in the 13th century, which rival for size those built in Western Europe in the 16th century. Commercial shipping and trade between Amsterdam and Danzig had already been active since the 14th and 15th centuries. A 1000 Dutch ships arrived in Danzig annually. Many Mennonites and others, escaping persecution in Holland, fled to Danzig since they were already familiar with the region, it being relatively simple to get there.

By the 16th century Danzig and the Danzig and Marienberg Deltas to the east were part of Poland. During the entire Polish period the Mennonites in Prussia suffered almost continually from hostility and arbitrary oppression and even open extortion by high ranking officials. Local clergy petitioned the government to restrict their privileges as did the competing city guilds envious of the Mennonite's ability and reputation as craftsmen and artisans. Because of their abilities the government took a favourable view towards the Mennonites. Sometimes they were defended from exploitation by the Danzig City Council. More often it was the Catholic Bishops outside Danzig who defended them.

In 1734 the city of Danzig was besieged for two months by the Russians and many Mennonites had to flee from the suburbs to find refuge in the city. The church and some private residences were destroyed. In 1806 the Frisian worship house was destroyed during the French seige. By the 1776 Konsignation or census there were 12,032 Mennonites in Prussia. This census, however, did not include those in the city of Danzig and the northern portions of the Danzig and Gross Werder. In the Partition of Poland of 1793 Danzig also fell under the jurisdiction of Prussia. By 1800 the Mennonites were given the rights of citizenship (ME,II, pages 7-14).

Section 2.02: Danzig and the Werders.

By 1530 Dutch Anabaptists had found their way to Danzig, West Prussia, also known as Royal Prussia. Many of the refugees settled in the Danzig Werder immediately to the east of the City and many more in the Marienberg Werders, consisting of the Gross Werder, which lay between the Vistula River to the west and Nogat to the east, and the Klein Werder, which lay between the Nogat River and the Drauschen Sea to the east. A Werder was an island like area at least partially below sea level physically separated from the surrounding countryside by rivers or channels.

One of the attractions of Danzig and the Werders was that the area physically resembled the homeland for those fleeing from Friesland. The land was flat and large sections were below sea level. The Grosswerder was a triangular island created by the Vistula River on the west side, and a tributary, the Nogat River, on the east side. The north side of the triangle was defined by bluffs of pine forest and sandy beaches stretching along the Baltic Sea and the northeast side abutted the Frisches Haff. Each side of the triangle was approximately 30 kilometers. The triangular area which became the home of many Mennonites was physically defined by the City of Danzig at the northwest corner, the city of Elbing at the northeast corner, and Marienberg with its giant castle towards the southern tip. Past Elbing to the east was an escarpment about 140 meters high.

Although the Grosswerder had been settled by German settlers in the 13th century, the area deteriorated and much of it was overtaken by marsh, after the Knights were defeated in the Battle of Tannenberg in 1466. In 1526 the Vistula River broke through its dike near Schöneberg flooding the area for many years and forcing the inhabitants to flee.

Beginning in 1562 Mennonites were invited to settle this area and over a 100 year period successfully drained it. Local nobles invited the Hollanders to settle on their lands to reclaim and drain marshes with which they had gained considerable expertise in their homeland. They commenced to settle in the Danzig and Grosswerder Werders usually by way of long term leases.

The settlement in Prussia was not homogeneous and Mennonites lived in various villages with Protestant (Lutheran and Reformed) as well as Catholic neighbours. Their farming abilities and knowledge of draining marsh land soon proved itself: "Although the Dutch had the lowest, least valuable land, they improved the soil so consistently that their villages in a short time not only equalled but surpassed the more elevated villages of the Teutonic Knights."

There were additional Mennonite settlements further south along the Vistula River, in the Vistula Lowlands, near Marienwerder, Grudenz, Schwetz and Kulm. These settlements were generally less prosperous than the earlier settlements referred to above. The Mennonites in these areas were typically more Germanized and quicker to adopt the teachings of pietism than the older more established Hollander settlements in the Werders of the Vistula Delta.

Section 2.03: Church and Cultural Life.

Organized Mennonite church and cultural life in Prussia had commenced by the 1540s. Menno Simons wrote a letter to the Mennonites there as early as 1549. The Flemish Gemeinde at Danzig was officially organized in 1569. According to tradition Dirk Philips became its first Aeltester.

After 1566 there was both a Frisian as well as a Flemish Gemeinde in Danzig, a division dating back to the Netherlands. The Frisian denomination originated in Holland in 1566 in opposition to the Flemish group and was transplanted to Prussia. "After a number of Mennonites had moved from Belgium to the Netherlands, differences arose....between the newly arrived Belgian (Flemish) brethren and the Frisian Mennonites (ME,II,page 337-9). The Frisians took offense at the dress and manners of the Flemish, which they thought were too worldly and too sumptuous, whereas to the mind of the Flemish the Frisians were not sober enough as to the furnishings of their houses" (ME,II, 413). In time the names lost their geographical significance, becoming the names of two Mennonite branches.

The Flemish/Frisian division was transferred to West Prussia where they existed side by side in most areas. Variant differences in the observance of communion, baptism, preaching, were noticeable until the end of the 19th century. There was segregation between the Flemish and Frisian Mennonites and those wishing to transfer membership had to be rebaptised. The Flemish Congregations were also referred to as the "clear" "Klarichen" or "Klärischen", or the "Reine". The Frisians were sometimes referred to as the "Grobe" or "Bekümmerte".

There was considerable interaction with the Dutch Mennonites during the early years. The Danzig Gemeinde "... kept in live communication with the strictest wing of the Old Flemish in Holland, especially in Amsterdam, Haarlem, and Rotterdam." On numerous occasions the Dutch Mennonites assisted those in the Danzig region with material aid in times of disaster. The Dutch language was used until the 1750s when High German became the language of worship, and Low German (the local Plaut-Dietsch), the everyday vernacular speech.

Until the end of 17th century the Prussian Gemeinden, particularly the Flemish Danzig Gemeinde, practised strict discipleship and community of sharing, and caring for its poor.

The Flemish in the Grosswerder initially belonged to the Danzig Gemeinde. The village of Tiegenhagen was the Mennonite centre of the area. As the population continued to grow a separate Tiegenhagen Gemeinde was established in 1630 when Hans Siemens was chosen as the Aeltester. In 1735 the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde was divided into four quarters Elbing (Rosenort Gemeinde), Tiegenhagen, Orloff (Ladekopp Gemeinde), and Bärwalde (Fürstenwerder Gemeinde). For a time all four shared one Aeltester but by the middle of the 19th century each congregation had its own Aeltester (ME,IV, 721). It was from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde that over half of the KG "core" families originated.

The Flemish Mennonites in the southern part of the Grosswerder around Marienburg belonged to the Heuboden Gemeinde. Those in the eastern part around Elbing belonged to the Ellerwald-Elbing Gemeinde.

Section 2.04: Leaders.

Dirk Philips (1504-68), the first Bishop of the Danzig Gemeinde founded in 1569, had a good education and was fluent in Latin and Greek. He joined the peaceful Anabaptists in 1533. By 1550 he was present in Danzig. He became the leading theologian among the Dutch and North German Mennonites. He placed great emphasis upon the visible church which was to be without spot or wrinkle. Those who had separated themselves from God by their disobedience and sin were to be separated by the church by the evangelical ordinance of excommunication.

Dirk Philips spread his views through numerous writings and published several major works toward the end of his life. These included the *Enchiridion* or *Handbook of Christian Doctrine*. Dirk Philips was a sound theologian and evangelical expositor whose doctrinal writings gave vivid voice to the teachings of nonresistant Christianity. His treatise "The Church of God" is a brilliant exposition of the progressive unfolding of God's plan for mankind. In the same work he outlined the seven evangelical ordinances.

Another prominent leader arose in the Danzig Gemeinde almost a century after Dirk, namely, **George Hansen** (1636-1703). Hansen became a minister of the Gemeinde in 1655 and its Aeltester in 1690. George Hansen was a cobbler by trade and did not have the benefit of an extensive education.

As has already been stated the Prussian Mennonites suffered from continual hostility and arbitrary oppression. They were also subjected to legal restrictions on citizenship, additional landownership, the types of businesses they could own, and subjected to additional tax levies, etc. The time of George Hansen's leadership coincided with one of these pogroms. In 1676 an inquisition was implemented against the Mennonites and Hansen was cross examined by Archbishop Sarnowski and defended himself ably against the charge that the Mennonites condemned other confessions. George Hansen also wrote a number of books including a popular confession of faith and several important theological works. His writings were invested with great authority by conservative Mennonites.

Hans von Steen (1705-81) was another very significant leader of the Danzig Gemeinde. In his youth he was sent to Amsterdam for business training. Although a Frisian he joined the Flemish Gemeinde on his return. He was elected a minister in 1743 and as Aeltester in 1754. The survival of the church during the difficult years 1748-60 was due mostly to his devoted efforts. His sermons were popular and attended by non-Mennonites. He preached in Dutch and carried on an extensive correspondence in Dutch and German. The transition to the German language was completed by 1777 under his leadership. Hans von Steen spent much time in writing and travelling to various churches exhorting and encouraging them. One of his most notable accomplishments was the compilation of a German *Gesangbuch* first published in 1780 and still in use by thousands of conservative Mennonites in Latin America to the present day. Hans von Steen also compiled a Confession of Faith considered authoritative by the KG.

Thus by 1780 a two centuries-old tradition of conservative religious literature was firmly established and the canon of KG devotional writings was essen-

tially completed.

Peter Epp (1725-89) was born in Petershagen, near Tiegenhof in the Grosswerder. He lived on a farm (Wirtschaft) in Neunhuben, in the Danzig Werder. He was elected as a minister in 1758 and replaced Steen as Aeltester in 1779. He was the last of the Danzig ministers to preach in Dutch and started to preach in German mixed with Dutch in 1777. He actively promoted the emigration to Russia, and encouraged his children to join the emigration. Peter Epp died in the midst of preparations to move to Russia himself. Son-in-law Klaas Reimer later recalled that Aeltester Peter Epp, had often said on his death bed, "Children you must go to Russia as it is finished here with the Mennonites." He zealously promoted the interests of his church and continued in the conservative faith tradition of his predecessors.

Through his granddaughter, Katharina Epp Regier (1800-66), who married Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872), Rückenau, Molotschna, Peter Epp left thousands of direct descendants in the KG. Peter Epp also exerted a direct influence on the Molotschna Colony through granddaughter Aganetha Regier (1793-1863) who married Johann Klassen (1785-1841), Tiegerweide, Molotschna Oberschulz from 1827 to 33, and grandson Johann Regier (1802-42), Oberschulz from 1833 to 41 (see Section 3.4).

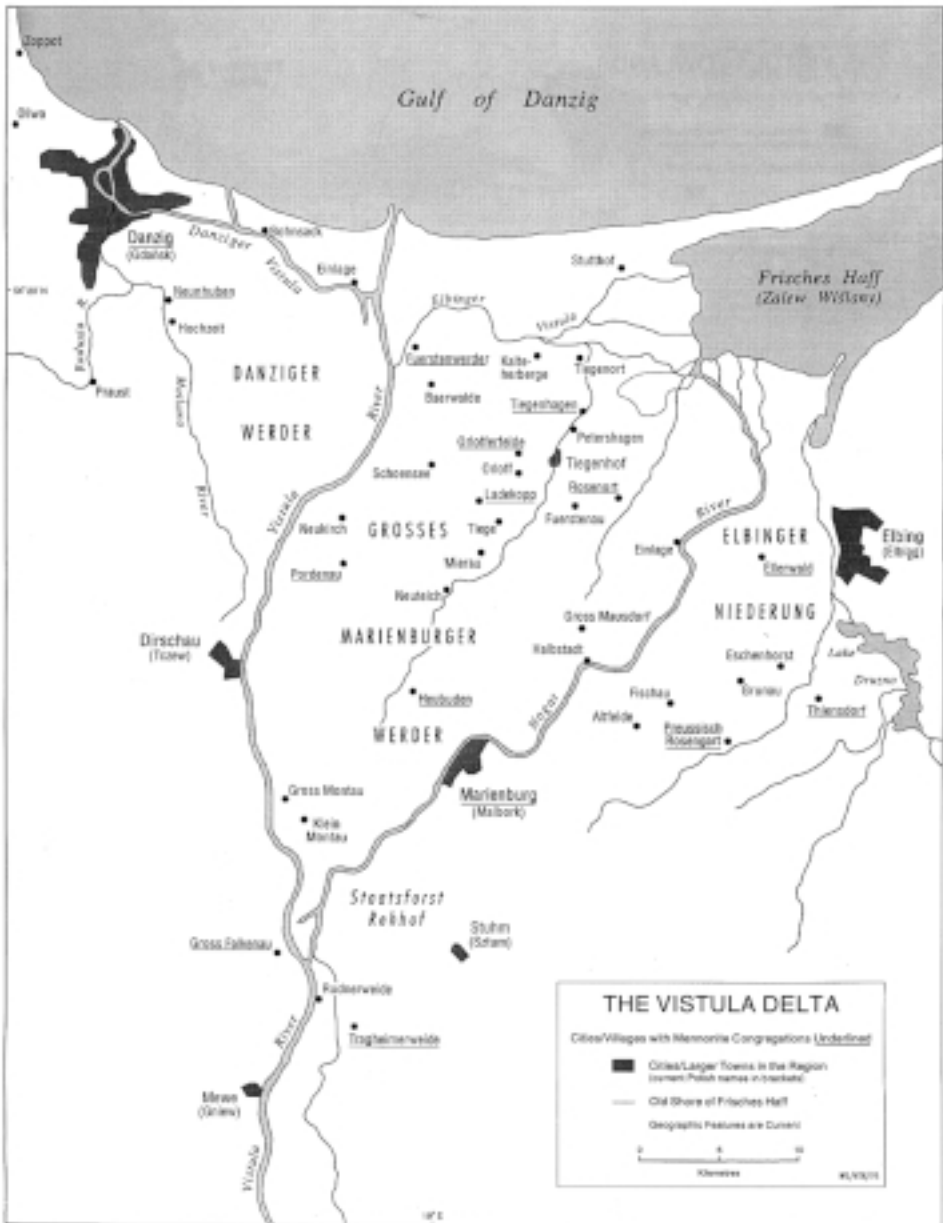
Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), was the Aeltester of the Elbing-Ellerwald Gemeinde, Prussia. Wiebe maintained a journal and composed a twenty article Confession of Faith viewed with great authority by the KG. Gerhard Wiebe had a brother Johann whose son Johann Wiebe (1766-23) served as the first Aeltester of the Chortitza Flemish Gemeinde. Another son, Gerhard, was the father of Johann Wiebe (1804-40), a minister in the Bergthal Colony.

Cornelius Regier (1743-94), succeeded his father-in-law Gerhard van Bergen (1704-71) as Aeltester of the Heuboden Gemeinde. Regier maintained close relations with the Danzig Gemeinde and ordained Peter Epp in 1780. In 1794 Cornelius Regier and minister Cornelius Warkentin (1740-1809) of the Rosenort Gemeinde, were sent to Russia to establish peace among the newly immigrated pioneers in Chortitza. He succeeded in establishing peace but fell fatally ill of typhus and died before he was able to return to Prussia. Before he died he ordained Cornelius Warkentin as Aeltester.

Cornelius Warkentin (1740-1809) accompanied Aeltester Cornelius Regier to Russia to establish peace among the quarrelling factions in the newly established Chortitza settlement. Warkentin maintained a journal about his trip to Russia. He received a gold medal from the Czar for his services to his people. Cornelius Warkentin served as Aeltester of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde from 1795 to 1809, the period covering the original Molotschna immigration which took place in 1803 to 1804.

Isaak von Duhren (1725-1800) was a Frisian minister in Danzig who compiled and edited an abridged version of the *Martyrs' Mirror* known as *Das Kleine Martyrer Buch*, reducing the 1500 pages to 236. The book was published in 1786 only two years before the emigration to Russia.

A listing of the Aeltesten of the various West Prussian Gemeinden is provided in the *Mennonitische Lexikon*, Volume Four, pages 518-519.



The Vistula Delta, Prussia (modern-day Poland) by William Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (Winnipeg, 1996 (2d), page 11. Mennonites found a home in Prussia for over 400 years.

Section 2.05: Pietism

Any history of the West Prussian Mennonites needs to deal with the religious movement known as Pietism. "Pietism" was a 17th century renewal movement which came into being in the midst of Reformed and Lutheran Orthodoxy, which had become rigid and formalistic. Pietism emphasized a more spiritualized, inward and emotional religion. Philip Spener (1635-1705), August Franke (1663-1727) and Count Zinzendorf (1700-60), were some of the early leaders of the pietist movement. Early adherents met in small groups or conventicles for fellowship, Bible study, prayer and mutual edification within the existing church.

Some aspects of early pietism were comparable to the warm and spiritually embracing faith of the Waterländer Mennonite denomination in 16th century Holland, whose writers such as Pieter Pieters and Pieter J. Twisk were much loved and frequently published among the KG. But with the latter, inward or emotional edification came as a result of "Nachfolge" or discipleship, whereas with Pietism, the inward emotional life became the end in itself, with a whole set of religious programs and legalistic rituals developed to foster and promote inward spiritualization of religion, particularly with later more radical types such as Separatist-Pietism, Württemberg pietism, etc. (Robert Friedman, *Mennonite Piety*, page 85-86).

In time the more radical pietists came to regard the Lutheran Church as fallen and of the Beast. They separated to form their own churches, conventicles of worship not socio-economic communities--Tönnie's "Gesellschaft" versus "Gemeinschaft" typology. They regarded themselves as the one and only true church. The term "Separatist" or "Separatism" came from the notion that the "old" church was of the devil and beyond redemption; a new start had to be made by separation from the old.

Separatist-Pietism developed its own religious language and culture. Admission required rigid entrance rituals including a legalistic conversion experience and mode of immersion baptism before a believer could be "saved." This meant that an individual was now chosen by God and one of the elect. The particulars of each group's requirements for salvation varied, a member of one denomination frequently could not fellowship with another nor accept as valid their "salvation."

The teachings of some Separatist-Pietists included premillennialism which held that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in the East, that Russia would be a haven for the "true" church during the tribulation, that Napoleon was the Anti-Christ, and that the Russian Czar would be the Saviour of the Church in the end times. The movement was profoundly influenced by Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), a Professor in Württemberg, and by his disciple, Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), who proclaimed that "the thousand year kingdom of peace would appear in the east either in 1833 or 36" (Stumpp, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia*, (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1978), page 27-28).

This date was later revised to 1881. As a result of Pietist-Separatist beliefs thousands of Germans emigrated to Imperial Russia at the beginning of the 19th century. *Heimweh*, a novel by Jung-Stilling, was eventually read as a second Bible among many Russian Mennonites.



The Mennonite worship house in Bärwalde. After 1840 the congregation was renamed Fürstenwerder. The structure built in 1768 became a tragedy of heritage preservation, being burned to the ground by children playing with fire in the 1990s. Photo courtesy of Horst Gerlag, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 42. Kleine Gemeinde families such as Johann Plett (c.1730-91), Fürstenwerder, and Peter Isaac (1732-1807), Bärwalde, both well established farmers, would have belonged to the Fürstenwerder Gemeinde.



The interior of the Bärwalde Mennonite worship house. Photo courtesy of Gerlag, page 42. Johann Cornies (1789-1846), the great Russian Mennonite social reformer was also born in Bärwalde.



The Marienburg castle built by the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century, was a landmark of everyday Mennonite life in the Vistula Delta. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 9, Part Two, page 29. The Heuboden worship house was located only six kilometres northwest of the castle. In 1776 Heuboden was the home of Jakob Matthies whose granddaughter Margaretha Matthies (1792-1843), first wife of Obm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Altona, was the mother of Blumenort, Manitoba, farmer and mayor Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908).



A Mennonite Vorlaubhaus or arcaded house in Ladekopp. A beautiful example of this type of structure. Photo by Ron and Wendy Dueck / Preservings, No. 9, Part Two, page 59. In 1766 Ladekopp was the home of Cornelius Toews (1735-1800), a wealthy farmer, whose great-grandson Peter Toews (1841-1922) served as the sixth Aeltester or Bishop of the Kleine Gemeinde.

Section 2.06: Education.

Professor John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba, has stated that very little has been written about Mennonite schools in Prussia during the 18th century and earlier. The concept of universal education was not developed at the time and there was no system of universal education in Prussia.

Elementary education, if available at all, was provided by confessional or denominational schools. The Catholic children in a particular village would have attended a Catholic school, and Lutheran children would have attended a Lutheran school, if there was one. Mennonites likely had their own schools during the Polish era (that is, the years prior to 1770) although few details are known.

In 1722 Frederick the Great promised the Mennonites various freedoms including the right to conduct their own schools. "Schools, however, had already existed in the 17th century in Montau and Gross-Lubin in the Weichselthal and by 1694 in Dragass and Gruppe." These schools were established by Mennonites in a particular village or cluster of villages.

The textbooks used in the schools were the *Fibel: ABC, Bible, Catechism, Die Wandelnde Seele* and *The Martyrs' Mirror*. Although little is written on the topic, a number of sources establish that the Mennonites brought their schools with them to Russia, in the sense of a school tradition. By this means the educational philosophy and teaching technique in West Prussia can be extrapolated from the later schools. It seems clear that the curriculum was the same as that of the pioneer schools in Russia, with the Bible, Catechism and *Fibel* as the main textbooks.



Dirk Philips (1504-68), first Aeltester or Bishop of the Flemish Mennoniten Gemeinde at Danzig. Photo courtesy of Horst Gerlag, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 16.



Hans von Steen (1705-81), Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde from 1754-81. He translated the Dutch Gesangbuch into German, firmly establishing it as part of the canon of Mennonite devotional literature still used by some conservative congregations in the present-day. Photo courtesy of Jakob Mannhardt, Die Danziger Mennoniten Gemeinde (Danzig, 1919), page 102.

Section 2.07: The Danzig Werder Gemeinde.

From the beginning the Mennonite settlers living in the Danzig Werder, to the east of the city, were included in Flemish Danzig Gemeinde. "In 1768 this minority finding the roads to the city church to be impassable, requested that occasional services be held among them; this was feasible, for two of the ministers lived in the Werder. In 1791 this group became independent of the city church except that the elder of the city congregation had oversight over them" (ME,II,10).

Both Aeltester Peter Epp and minister brother Cornelius Epp (1728-1805) were born at Petershagen in the Gross Werder but at some point relocated to Neunhuben where they belonged to Danzig Werder sub-Gemeinde. The rural group had about 100 baptised members, four ministers, including Ohm Cornelius Epp, and a deacon.

In 1777 Peter Epp was chosen as the Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde reflecting the considerable influence of the rural members. He lead the Danzig Gemeinde in the tradition of the conservative faith, preaching and admonishing, but also counselling the flock to do good, and prayerfully exercising the evangelical ordinance of discipline in cases of wanton and open sin.

After his death in 1789, Peter Epp was replaced as Aeltester by Jakob Defehr from the city. Defehr lead the church in a new direction, reflecting that the city membership had become more assimilated, secularized and influenced by pietism. Cornelius Epp became the Vice-Aeltester of the Danzig Gemeinde and leader of the rural group. But he was already in his late 60s and no longer able to counter these influences.

The Danzig rural Gemeinde was independent to the extent that ministerial elections were held from among its members. It was within this congregation that Klaas Reimer was elected as a minister on February 1, 1801, first as deacon, from among nine candidates: Gerhard Dueck 25 votes, Klaas Reimer 24, Julius Wiens 3, Klaas Enns 2, Heinrich Wiebe 5, Jakob Enns 1, Isaak Reger 2, Gerhard Doerksen 3 and Peter Wiens 1. On the same date a minister was elected from among the two deacons: Gerhard Dueck 10 votes, Klaas Reimer 21. This election was carefully documented in many KG ministerial journals, and considered the direct link to the authority of the Danzig Gemeinde as the senior congregation in West Prussia.

The Danzig Werder Gemeinde--the "rural" Gemeinde, as Klaas Reimer called it--was a proto-type of the Kleine Gemeinde. One might say that while the Danzig Gemeinde was the spiritual mother of the KG, and Tiegenhagen its genetic fountain, the Danzig Werder Gemeinde was the actual experiential embryo, the womb which gave it birth. These attempts to work within the larger mother church, though unsuccessful, provided the model for the KG reformers only a decade later in Russia.

Section 2.08: Klaas Reimer (1770-1837).

Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the KG, was born in Petershagen to Heinrich Reimer and Agatha Epp (b. 1745). Heinrich died while son Klaas was still a young lad. Simon Reimer listed in Petershagen in the “Zinsbuch” for 1727, may have been an ancestor or otherwise related to Heinrich Reimer.

Agatha was the daughter of Klaas Epp listed in Petershagen in 1776. Given the intermarriage patterns of Prussian Mennonites it was possible that her family was related somehow to that of Danzig Aeltester Peter Epp (1725-89) who originated from the same village. Agatha Epp married for the second time to Abraham Janzen (1747-1822), Petershagen, a wealthy farmer.

Klaas Reimer, as he himself has written, lived a frivolous youth. But he also had a thirst for the teachings of the faith and read the *Martyrs' Mirror* and other confessional books. He showed respect for his elders and spoke often to the old people about the past and their faith. He was an intelligent young man and a quick learner. Klaas Reimer was a skilled wood carver, as can be seen from a walking cane and pencil box which he carved as a young man of 22 herding cattle in the Werder.

Klaas Reimer himself modestly wrote that he did not receive much education. If this was so, it was not evident from his writings which demonstrate a sound knowledge of theological concepts, history and, of course, the Bible. He was fluent enough in Dutch to translate various writings of the faith into German.

In 1790, at the age of 20, Klaas Reimer married Maria Epp, 10 years his senior, daughter of Aeltester Peter Epp. Since Epp was already deceased by this time, it appears Maria would have been the medium whereby Epp's teachings and philosophy were passed on. Klaas and Maria were able to purchase a half share in the farm of her uncle Cornelius Epp in Neunhuben, something to which only one in four Prussian Mennonites could aspire.

When Klaas Reimer was elected as a minister of the Danzig Gemeinde in 1801, he noted that he felt “totally unsuited” for the calling. After spiritual struggles he did take up the office. He soon experienced the difficulties of practising the teachings of the faith, and exercising discipline, in the face of an unsupportive leadership. The Werder Gemeinde felt alienated from the city group who seemingly wanted to take whatever freedoms they were allowed by law.

Many agreed with the view of the deceased Aeltester Peter Epp that the conservative Mennonite faith in Prussia was “finished” and that a regrouping and fresh start in Russia was the only way to preserve what they regarded as evangelical truth. Finally on August 23, 1804, Klaas Reimer led a group of “... some 30 adults from our Kleine Gemeinde on the land departed for Russia.”

The main source of information about the Werder or “Land” Gemeinde is Klaas Reimer's autobiography, “Ein Kleines Aufsatz”, published in its entirety and annotated in *Leaders*, pages 113-147.

Section 2.09: Emigration, 1788-1804.

In the second and third partitions of Poland in 1793 and 1795, Danzig and the northern portion of the Gross Werder became part of Prussia. Royal Prussia became the Province of West Prussia and the nonresistant Mennonites became the subjects of a militaristic regime. Prussia maintained a large standing army and needed recruits.

Although the established privileges of the Mennonites had been recognized, more and more restrictions were applied after the accession to the throne of Frederick William II in 1786 “challenging Mennonite religious principles... but [which] also threatened the continuance of Mennonite communities and their preferred way of life. The restrictions on land purchases were particularly odious” (Urry, page 48). This meant that Mennonites would be restricted to the land already owned by members of their confession.

At the same time that more restrictions were applied in Prussia, Catherine the Great (1729-96), Empress of Russia, extended an invitation to Mennonites and other foreigners to settle its newly acquired lands near Ekatherinoslav, north of the Crimean peninsula. There was immediate interest in this proposal and support from respected church leaders such as Peter Epp. Delegates were chosen who went to inspect the land being offered.

Some proponents viewed Russia simply as a useful place to settle growing numbers of Mennonites. There, at least, many would be able to acquire their own farms, something which was difficult in Prussia.

These events coincided with what many in the conservative tradition regarded as a religious and moral decline, coupled with doctrinal apostasy as leaders such as Jakob Defehr drifted towards assimilation and adoption of Pietist religious culture. Some leaders such as Peter Epp came to the conclusion that Prussia should be abandoned as a home for the faithful and that a regrouping in a new land such as Russia would provide an opportunity to reestablish the movement upon better footing.

But at the very time that conservative Mennonites were moving to Russia in search of a new beginning, Separatist-Pietists were also moving in great numbers. Under their millennial teachings, Russia was to be the haven of the church in the end times, which inspired many to emigrate. In this way the growing alienation between the two factions in Prussia was exported to Russia, where the inherent incompatibility between the two religious cultures often flared into open conflict.

Section 2.10: End of the Paradigm.

After the immigration of many conservative Mennonites to Russia at the end of the 18th century, the move to assimilation into German society quickened. Secularization progressed rapidly in Prussia as reflected in a paid and professional ministry, and adoption of contemporary lifestyles. There was little sympathy towards conservative Mennonite views, at least, among the leadership.

During the 1870s the Prussian Mennonite church abandoned the teaching of nonresistance. As a result military service in World War I and World War II was not an issue. It appears that Prussian Mennonites were highly integrated into German society and like all other Germans, many were drawn towards Nazi culture in World War II. It was a devastating experience for me during a trip in 1998 to see Mennonite names such as Enns and Loewen listed among the names of the camp guards in Stutthof, a Nazi concentration camp on the Baltic Sea only 10 kilometres from Tiegenhagen, the heartland of the KG in the 18th century. There were also Mennonite names among the prisoners of the camp.

The Prussian Mennonite experience ended in 1945 when the Soviet Armies invaded the area destroying and killing everything in their path. Only those evacuated survived and many found their way to new homes in Canada. Others were able to flee to West Germany. After the war, Prussia was ceded to Poland. The city of Danzig, was renamed Gdansk, and continues to be an important seaport and shipyard.

The legacy of the Prussian Mennonite experience is still significant today. Many aspects of its cultural tradition were passed on for generations. This was evident in the Mennonite furniture tradition originating in Prussia in Renaissance times, examples of which, in the forms of chests, cabinets, benches and chairs are treasured antiques in many modern homes.

Likewise the theological genius of the Prussian church was a model for many in Russia as well as Canada and the United States well into the 20th century. To this day, there are 150,000 Mennonites in Latin America practising many of its teachings. The theological and devotional books written in Prussia during the 17th and 18th centuries, such as confessions of faith, and the ever enduring *Gesangbuch* are still in regular use among some conservative denominations.

The 1776 Konsignation or census of Mennonites in Prussia provides a focus for the study of the genealogical information contained in the "Gemeindebücher" (parish registers) of the Prussian churches which contain valuable data being accessed by thousands of descendants as they research their family trees.

The Mennonite triangle between Danzig, Elbing and Marienberg was the cradle of civilization and culture for the Dutch/German/Russian Mennonites who now live in the United States, Canada, and many countries of Latin America, including Mexico, Belize, Paraguay and Bolivia.

The story of the Prussian Mennonite church is intimately intertwined with that of the KG founded only seven years after the emigration of 1804/5. Many of the reasons for separation had their roots in Prussia, and knowledge of these dynamics will facilitate an understanding of the KG story.



1998 Kleine Gemeinde Heritage Tour, worship service in the Tiegenbagen cemetery Sunday morning, May 17, 1998. This village dates back to the 14th century. It was an eerie feeling to stand on the spot where possibly hundreds of our ancestors were buried. L.-r: Martha Penner, Ridgewood, Manitoba; Walter F. Reimer; Steinbach, Manitoba; Walter and Lydda Regebr, Swalwell, Alberta; Milton Toews, Neilberg, Saskatchewan; Ernie Harder, Steinbach, Manitoba; Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak, Stare Pole (Altfelde), Poland; Gerald Wright, Cambridge, Ontario; and John Bergen, Winnipeg, Canada.



The placid waters of the Tiege River, flowing north towards the Baltic Sea, view towards the northeast from the site of the Tiegenbagen cemetery, on the west bank. The cemetery is located immediately behind the photographer. The village of Tiegenbagen, founded in the 1300s, was located just to the north of this spot. Tiegenbagen and the villages in the immediate area, was the heartland of the KG, ancestral home to a number of KG families including Abraham Klassen (1737-1817), Hans Kornelsen (1746-1828), Isaak Loewen (1737-97); Gerth Schellenberg (1725-1802), Abr. von Riesen (1756-1810), and others.

Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 12, page 47.

For Further Reading:

We are still lacking an analytical introductory history of the Prussian Mennonites. Much of the foregoing is based on articles found in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, under “Danzig Gemeinde”, “Marienberg Werder”, “Tiegenbagen”, and others, and cited as ME, II, IV, as the case may be. The work by Horst Penner, *Die Ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihrem kulturellen and wirtschaftlichen Leistungen* (Weierhof, 1978), 500 pages, is the most complete work presently available, but only published in German. H. G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* (Danzig, 1919), 211 pages, is a sound historical survey of the Danzig Gemeinde, written within the conservative tradition, but unfortunately is out of print.

A small book by Peter J. Klassen, *A Homeland For Strangers* (Fresno, California, 1989), 95 pages, provides a brief introduction to the Prussian/Polish Mennonite experience and also serves double purpose as a guide book for those wishing to tour their former homelands.

Chapter Three: Mennonites in Russia

Section 3.01: New Russia.

During the 18th century Russia became a modern European power. Since the time of Peter the Great (1672-1725) her leaders had conducted various strategic wars resulting in conquest of vast blocks of land. This was especially so in southern Russia, where the boundaries were advanced by imposing control over its inhabitants, particularly the Cossacks, as well as by conquest of additional lands from Turkey.

Great advances were made during the reign of Catherine the Great (1729-96), a strong Czarina of German descent, who ascended the throne in 1762. In 1762 and again in 1763, Catherine issued an edict inviting foreigners to settle in these lands known as "New Russia". Many Mennonites accepted this invitation.

After a gruelling journey of about 1200 kilometres, the new immigrants found the land in Russia very different from what they had left. The Werders near Danzig were level, almost completely flat, the monotony of the horizon broken mainly by rivers such as the Nogai and Vistula and numerous canals. The land in the Chortitza area along the Dnieper River was rolling, covered with wild grasses higher than a man. Many wooded ravines interspersed the steppe, and some river flats and stream beds were suitable for market gardening.

The land in the Molotschna area was more level. It was bounded on the west by the Molochnaya or "Milk" River, so named because the silt made it cloudy or dirty. The Molotschna land mass was segregated by several shallow laterals draining the land towards the west. The soil was sandy chestnut in colour and easy to work. It was fertile when it received enough rain which was problematic as rainfall was sometimes scarce.

Although Catherine had invited foreign colonists to occupy these lands, they were not really vacant. Prehistoric Scythian burial mounds scattered across the steppe pointed to previous occupants from prehistoric times. The Cossacks and Tartars had roamed freely for centuries. Mediterranean cultures, Italians, Greeks and Turks were found along the Black Sea coast. Other settlers such as Romanians, Bulgarians and Russians from the north were settled in these areas. Jews from the Pale of Settlement moved eastward. Gypsy bands frequently traversed the land. Dukhobors lived near the Molotschna. In the 1820s Swabian Germans were settled on the west bank of the Molochnaya River.

This set the stage for a rich combination of cultures and ethnic groups, but was also the cause of problems. The area which became Chortitza had been cleared of Cossacks but small bands continued to operate. The Molotschna had long been occupied by the Nogaier, or Tartars, a nomadic people. They continued to live in the area developing a fondness for the Mennonite horses which sometimes disappeared from their barns at night.

Section 3.02: Chortitza Colony.

The area designated for the first Mennonite settlers was named “Chortitza” after the famous island in the Dnieper River. In ancient times, Vikings from the north travelled south along the Dnieper to trade with the Greeks and other Mediterranean cultures. After passing the dangerous rapids they stopped on the island to give thanks to God for safe passage. God was called “Hortz” in the ancient tongue, hence the name Chortitza--literally ‘thanks be to God’ or even ‘Godlike’.

The first 220 families left Prussia for Russia in 1788 and arrived at the site of their new homes the following spring. The Chortitza Colony consisted of 89,000 acres along the west bank of the Dnieper River where nineteen villages were established. Within a decade they had been joined by additional families so that a total of about 400 families became the base of the Chortitza settlement.

The first immigrants were Flemish and Frisian. They were organized into a congregation in 1790 with Berend Penner elected as Aeltester, although only after serious disputation. Penner died the following year, and after considerable debate, was replaced by Johann Wiebe (1766-1823). In 1794 Aeltester Cornelius Regier, Heuboden, and minister Cornelius Warkentin, Rosenort, Prussia, were sent to Russia where they succeeded in establishing peace and reorganizing the Chortitza Gemeinde.

In 1794 a smaller group of 118 Frisian families immigrated and settled separately in the Chortitza villages of Schönwiese, on the east bank of the Dnieper, and Kronsgarten, located 40 kilometers to the north. By 1800 the Frisians were organized as a Gemeinde under Aeltester Heinrich Janzen (1752-1824). It was the Frisians who stood by the KG during its first years when it literally battled for survival. They also had a direct influence through four prominent families who moved to the Molotschna and associated with the KG.

The early history of the Chortitza Colony was marked by disputation and strife. The failure to ensure that ministers and deacons were included among the first settlers contributed to the lack of spiritual leadership. By 1800 the situation became more settled. The later history of the Chortitza settlement in religious, social and economic matters was marked by greater balance than that of the Molotschna.

The Chortitzer settlers included numerous artisans and craftsmen. This contributed to its preeminence later as a centre of manufacturing, particularly agricultural implements.

Since Chortitza was the oldest Mennonite settlement in Russia its inhabitants were referred to as “Alt-Kolonier” or “Old Coloniers” a name retained by its descendants in Mexico, Paraguay and Bolivia. In 1819 the total population of the Chortitza settlement was 2,888 consisting of 560 families.

In 1833 the Chortitza Colony founded another settlement called Bergthal, near Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. Bergthal was the first daughter colony among the Russian Mennonites. It consisted of five villages and 133 families, mainly of Flemish background.

Section 3.03: Molotschna Colony.

In 1804 another 365 families from West Prussia arrived on the banks of the Molotschnaya River, 100 kilometers southeast of Chortitz and established the Molotschna Colony with 320,000 acres. It became the most successful and prosperous of all the Mennonite settlements in Russia. The original immigrants were from the Flemish branch of the Mennonite church, possibly to avoid the disputation which marked the early period in the Old Colony.

The 1804-5 Molotschna immigrants were more well-to-do than the Chortitz immigrants. A higher percentage of the Molotschna group had belonged to the propertied class in West Prussia and consequently possessed more skills and abilities necessary to the establishment of a new settlement. The Molotschna settlers were able to over winter with relatives in the old Colony which they used as a base, making the beginning immeasurably easier.

The new immigrants were organized as a Gemeinde in 1805 when Jacob Enns (1763-1818) was elected as Aeltester. It was from this large Flemish Gemeinde that Klaas Reimer was excommunicated because of his loving and persistent reform efforts. The small flock of Klaas Reimer started to worship separately in 1812, recognized as the founding date of the KG. This was followed in 1816 by the ordination of Reimer as first Aeltester. His group of 18 families was derisively referred to as the "Kleine Gemeinde", or small community. The remaining part of the large Flemish Gemeinde was referred to as the "Grosze" Gemeinde (GG).

Between 1817 and 1824 another 260 families left Prussia and settled in the Molotschna Colony. These new immigrants brought two new Gemeinden into the Molotschna. In 1819 about 100 families of Frisians under Aeltester Franz Goertz (1779-1834) settled in the southeastern portion of the Molotschna in seven villages centred around Rudnerweide, hence they were known by that name. In 1821 a small group of 30 families of Old Flemish (originally of a more pure Anabaptist-Mennonite orientation) under their Aeltester Peter Wedel (1792-1874) founded and settled the village of Alexanderwohl.

By 1821 there were four Mennonite Gemeinden in the Molotschna with a population of roughly 700 families of which 80 per cent belonged to the Grosze Flemish Gemeinde, 14 per cent to the Rudnerweide, and about 3 per cent each to the KG and the Alexanderwohler. Counting the Flemish and Frisian Gemeinden in the Chortitz Colony, there were a total of six Mennonite Gemeinden in Russia by 1821, about 1300 families. Two more Old Flemish Gemeinden emigrated to the Molotschna. In 1833, 40 families under Aeltester Wilhelm Lange (1774-1840) arrived and founded the village of Gnadenfeld. Another group of 68 families under Aeltester Cornelius Wedel arrived in 1836 and founded the village of Waldheim. The latter two groups as well as the Rudnerweide Gemeinde, had already adopted Pietist religious culture in Prussia.

Important to a study of the Molotschna Colony is the detailed and comprehensive Revision or census of 1808 as well as a list of 1803-4 immigrants. The recent discovery of the 1835 census, now makes it possible to trace most KG families back to the 1776 Konsignation and beyond in Prussia.

Section 3.04: Government Administration.

The various groups of foreign settlers invited to colonize the lands of “New” Russia have already been referred to. The government department established to regulate their affairs was called the “Guardianship Council for Foreigners”. It operated through a “Kontor” established in 1766 in Saratov on the Volga River. The Imperial Government also issued an “Instruktion” setting out the rules and regulations governing the “Colonists”.

After being abolished in 1782 the Kontor was reconstituted in 1797. In 1800 a Kontor was established in Ekatherinoslav for the specific purpose of governing the foreign colonists in the area north of the Black Sea which included over 100 German Colonies by 1818. The Kontor was abolished and a new body created, the “Fürsorgekommite” or Guardians Committee. In 1833 the administrative offices were located in Odessa. The Guardians Committee had jurisdiction over foreign colonists in four “Governements” or Provinces, namely, Bessarabia, Kherson, Ekatharinoslaw and Taurida. The Molotschna Colony as well as the Crimea were in Taurida. The Old Colony was in Ekatherinoslav.

A number of the Administrators of these government offices took an interest in the Mennonite colonies and played significant roles in their development. Many were of German background which assisted greatly in their work.

The first head of the Ekatherinoslav Kontor in 1800 was Samuel Contentius (1749-1830). His sympathetic administration contributed greatly to the success of the Mennonite colonies. He was credited with arranging the fruit culture and the silk and wine industries. He established the Agricultural Society under Johann Cornies with its emphasis on tree planting and improving agriculture. Another important administrator was General Ivan Insov, first president of the Supervisory Committee. He was known as the “eternal” Insov although he grew neglectful in his later years. Eugene von Hahn became acting president in 1841 and replaced Insov in 1846. He revitalized local government, promoted better farming practices, and initiated improvements in the school system. He acted firmly in removing three Aeltesten from office in the Molotschna-Warkentin, Schmidt and Wiens.

For the purposes of local government administration each Colony was organized as a Vollost although the German term Gebietsamt was used. The Molotschna villages were known as the Halbstadt Vollost, with administrative offices in the village of Halbstadt. In 1870 the eastern portion was separated to form a second Vollost called Gnadenfeld. Each village was organized as a separate entity with a Schulz (mayor), two Beisitzer (assistants), with landowners only entitled to vote.



Mennonite settlements in Imperial Russia (today Ukraine), circa 1870s. Map courtesy of William Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (Winnipeg, 1996), page 15.

The KG did not originally participate in the village and Gebietsamt governments. Later a number of KG-ers served as mayors; they included Jakob W. Friesen (1808-89) in Blumstein and brothers Barkman--Martin J. (1796-1872) and Jakob J. (1794-1875) in Rückenau during the 1840s, and Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) during the 1860s in Kleefeld. Martin J. Barkman (1806-72), Rückenau, was honoured by a visit from the Imperial Czar, who ate a meal in his home. This may have been Alexander I who visited the Molotschna Colony in 1825. Barkman served as village Schulz for a time which may have been the reason for the honour. Barkman was married to Katharina Epp Regier (1800-66), granddaughter of Aeltester Peter Epp, Danzig.

Peter Jost (1828-91), who emigrated to Rosenort, Manitoba, with the KG in 1874, served as Schulz in the village of Prangenau, Molotschna. In 1875 he together with a number of others, moved to Kansas, settling in Alexanderfeld, two miles southwest of Hillsboro.

KG-associated individuals such as Johann Klassen and Johann Regier, already mentioned, served as Oberschulz of the entire Colony from 1827 to 1841. David A. Friesen (1807-93), Halbstadt, serving as Oberschulz from 1848 to 1865, was married to Helena Klassen (1812-92), daughter of Johann.

When the KG established the Markuslandt and Borosenko settlements, they conducted their own village governments.

Section 3.05: Johann Cornies, 1789-1848, Social Reformer.

It is not possible to understand Russian Mennonite history without some consideration of the exceptional influence of Johann Cornies (1789-1848). He played a dynamic role as a social innovator, reformer, and “Prophet of Progress”, particularly, in the Molotschna Colony, which came to be seen as a model farming settlement for all of Imperial Russia.

Johann Cornies was born in 1789 in the heart of the Gross Werder, in the village of Bärwalde, West Prussia. He emigrated to Russia with his parents in 1804 and settled in the village of Ohrloff, Molotschna. Here he was a neighbour and contemporary of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), the second KG Aeltester, explaining their close association in later years.

Cornies laid the groundwork for his financial empire by marketing farm produce and then began raising cattle, renting large tracts of land outside the colony. In 1830 he founded his estate “Yushanlee” consisting of 9,000 acres. By 1847 he owned 500 horses, 8,000 sheep, 200 cattle and farmed 25,000 acres of land.

But this pales in comparison to the significance of his public life. By 1817 the government took note of Johann Cornies’ exceptional energy and appointed him chairman of the Agricultural Society, newly established to promote the advancement of agriculture. He was tireless in opening new agricultural possibilities for his community. He promoted and improved the silk worm industry which was important in the early years. He sought out better farming methods and introduced them to the local farmers.

In 1835 he began the practice of summer fallow with a three-crop rotation which KG farmers followed well into the 20th century. He brought in better breeding stock for sheep, cattle and horses. He promoted the damming of streams to pond water thus improving pasture land. He initiated a tree planting program requiring each Wirtschaft or village farm to plant a number every year, Within six years over five million trees had been planted. This resulted in the tree plantations which gave the Molotschna a distinctly prosperous and pastoral appearance.

Cornies also worked to improve other communities such as providing training for Russians, Dukhobors and Hutterites. He was instrumental in resettling 17,000 Nogaier, although they later moved to Turkey. He was responsible for placing model Mennonite farmers among the newly established Jewish settlements in the province of Kherson. He frequently hosted government officials and administrators who sought his advice. In 1825 he was visited by Czar Alexander I and in 1837 was received by Nicholas I in Simferopol. He refused honours and medals accepting only a simple gold medallion.

The work of Johann Cornies was not above criticism. In 1821 Cornies established the Ohrloff Verein Schule, a teacher training facility. But he staffed it with Tobias Voth, a fanatical advocate of the religious culture of Separatist Pietism, which was in direct conflict with the beliefs of the community. Cornies promoted many reforms ruthlessly and without regard to the sensitivities of his constituents, causing social strife which in some cases outweighed the value of his work.

Section 3.06: Agriculture.

Mennonite farmers in the Molotschna lived in sixty villages consisting of Vollwirten (full farmers) with 175 acres or 65 desjation of land and half farmers. Each village usually had from twenty to forty full farms (Wirtschaften), some half farms, and the landless (Anwohner), including the elderly, children of the Vollwirten and/or their workers. The KG families lived scattered about, a few in one village and a few in another, although certain villages developed strong KG communities such as Ohrloff, Tiede, Blumstein, Rosenort, and Kleefeld to name a few.

The Molotschna Vollwirt was a mixed farmer whose market production consisted chiefly of sheep and horned cattle. Merino sheep were introduced through the efforts of Contenius and the wool found ready market in Ekatherinoslav. The hides were used for coats and caps and even pants and jackets in the early years. Community flocks were established to improve the herds. By 1825 there were 108,000 sheep in the Molotschna or 125 per Vollwirt.

The Molotschna settlers brought large numbers of East Frisian cattle with them from West Prussia. Through cross breeding a new breed was developed, the "Red German" cow. Dairy products were purchased by merchants from nearby cities such as Berdjansk and Simperopol.

Flax was commonly raised during the early years and the fibres used to make linen. Women spent much time in winter spinning the fibres and weaving them into cloth which was used to make shirts and even Sunday dresses. The silk industry was significant and thousands of mulberry trees were planted for raising silk worms. But locally produced silk and linen soon became uneconomical and declined. During the 1870s the KG in Nebraska attempted to establish silk-worm farming and by 1882 50 acres of mulberry trees were planted, but these efforts were not successful.

The opening of the seaport of Berdjansk on the Sea of Azov in 1830 made the Molotschna accessible to world grain markets, revolutionizing agricultural production. Suddenly the Molotschna farmers were able to sell all the grain they could produce into the world grain markets. Winter wheat became the main crop. Acreage increased annually as grain was exported to England and other European countries. Farming became specialized and highly commercial.

By the 1850s New Russia had become one of Russia's most economically advanced regions. This revolution also created a demand for farm implements and more mechanization which fed a small but rapidly growing manufacturing sector. The practice of hiring Russian servants for harvesting and other farmwork, and maids to help with the household duties, became common place. Land values had increased exponentially since 1808 and by the 1860s a good Wirtschaft sold for 6000 rubles. By this time the Molotschna farmer was a specialized grain grower operating in a sophisticated commercial market place.

Section 3.07: Education.

For the first half of the 19th century the Russian government took little interest in educating its population. The Mennonites arriving in the Chortitza Colony in 1789 and the Molotschna in 1804 came with the conviction that it was the duty of the parents and the church to provide for the education of their children and immediately set about to fulfil that obligation.

Schools were established in each village during the first years. Each village was responsible for setting up its own school, hiring a teacher and obtaining the necessary teaching materials. As can be expected under pioneer conditions some of these schools were quite primitive with teachers who were not only unqualified but devoid of any vision for teaching. Sometimes they were individuals who were incapable of doing anything else, hopeless invalids not even of the Mennonite faith, or craftsmen who conducted school in their shops to raised some extra income. In his effort to gather support for his reform of the school system Johann Cornies wrote and publicized a portrayal of the early school which focused on the deficiencies of the system. Although undoubtedly an exaggeration his sketch, "The school at X," provided a shocking focus on the worst case scenario.

In reality many villages were blessed with gifted teachers dedicated to providing a sound elementary education. Of course, the focus of conservative Mennonite teachers was not advanced proficiency in the three-Rs, but first and foremost, to instill the values and teachings of the Gospel (see Section 8.10). Teacher training consisted chiefly of a system of apprenticeships.

Jakob Brauel (1803-66) from the Old Colony was an excellent teacher of the old school. He taught in Rudnerweide for forty years having the distinction of teaching the grandchildren of his first students. He did not have any special education or training for teaching. Nevertheless his exceptional abilities were recognized and in 1830 his village school was elevated to equal status with the Ohrloff Society (Verein) school as a teacher training facility.

A number of KG-associated families were involved with the pre-Cornies educational system. Johann Harms (1798-1887), Blumstein, received a sound elementary education and served as village teacher. He was an intelligent man who could "...discuss matters in a masterful way, speaking in a suspenseful and persuasive tone of voice" and later served as Schulz in Margenau. Johann was the grandfather of John F. Harms, publisher in Hillsboro. The families of Peter (1780-1857) and brother Franz Isaak (1784-1863) included a number of teachers and school inspectors. Franz Isaak (1816-99), son of Peter, was a highly regarded historian, minister and teacher in Tiede. Teachers Dietrich and Cornelius Warkentin were the sons of Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), a wealthy KG associated farmer in Blumenort; son Peter served as Gebietsamt secretary. A grandson Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), later served as a teacher in Manitoba in both East and West Reserves. These examples indicate that the early school system did function and included many competent and conscientious people.

The Mennonite church was responsible for educating the children, but the energy of the church leadership was already absorbed by a multitude of other obligations. The lack of central direction and leadership in the Molotschna

was remedied in 1843 when jurisdiction for schools was placed with the Agricultural Society under Johann Cornies.

Cornies instituted a series of educational reforms which revolutionized the school system in the Molotschna. He implemented the replacement of all the old decrepit schools with new modern facilities. Each village continued to hire its own teacher, but now the teacher also had to be approved by the Society. The Molotschna was divided into six districts, with two representative teachers elected for each who served as inspectors and reported to Cornies. He also implemented a system of teachers conferences, and cross attendance at each others "Prüfungen" or examinations.

Another area of reform was the provision of secondary schools and teacher training facilities. The system of apprentice teachers had worked but was seen as too inefficient and that broader measures were required. Cornies had already founded the Ohrloff Verein school in 1821 with Tobias Voth as teacher for the first 17 years, followed by Heinrich Heese. In 1835 the Halbstadt secondary school was established at the request of the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. In 1837 the Steinbach private school was established by estate owner Peter Schmidt, serving as a high school. A secondary school was established in Chortitz in 1842. In 1857 a secondary school was founded in Gnadenfeld by the so-called Wuest Brethren but was closed because of disputation between Pietist factions in 1863. These schools were later referred to as "Zentralschulen".

Although the period of direct oversight of Johann Cornies for education was only five years, he did achieve significant improvements with universal standards established. The bulk of his reforms were sound and beneficial. But Cornies was as dictatorial in education matters as he had been in agriculture. He outlawed the art of *Fraktur*, taught by most pioneer teachers. Although the traditional North German art form was continued by a number of KG associated teachers such as Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), later Blumenort, Manitoba, and Jakob Isaak (1815-66), of the Tiege Isaaks, it was lost to the majority of Russian Mennonites. Since education was so foundational to the heart and soul of the community, Cornies' strong-arm tactics were particularly offensive to the members of the Lichtenau-Petershagen "Grosse" Gemeinde, still the overwhelming majority.



*Johann Cornies (1789-1848),
Ohrloff, Molotschna. Photo
courtesy of David H. Epp. Johann
Cornies (Winnipeg, 1995), page
xxii. Cornies was a contemporary
and next door neighbour to
Abraham von Riesen/Friesen
(1782-1849), second Aeltester or
Bishop of the Kleine Gemeinde.*



The Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872) Wirtschaft in Rückenau, Molotschna, Imperial Russia. By the time this photo was taken, the hay barn ("Querschene") built across the rear of the premises had already been torn away. It was here the the Russian Czar visited the Barkman home in 1825 and ate a meal. Martin J. Barkman's son Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75) was the spiritual leader of the pioneers of Steinbach in 1874. Jakob M. Barkman drowned in the Red River the following spring while on a mission of mercy to obtain supplies for his community. Photo courtesy of M. B. Fast, Reisebericht, page 68/John Friesen, Menn. Through the Centuries, page unpaginated. Courtesy of Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 1.

For Further Reading:

James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg, 1989), 328 pages, is an exceptionally fine reference work and must reading for anyone interested in the subject. Dr. Urry is a brilliant anthropologist from Wellington, New Zealand, who has provided the Russian Mennonites and their descendants with a balanced scholarly history. In a round-a-bout-way, the KG in Belize are responsible for getting Professor Urry, originally from London, England, interested in Russian Mennonite historiography. A British army friend was posted to Belize.

Through this connection Professor Urry came into contact for the first time with Mennonites, including the KG. His interest as an anthropologist was raised and this was the start of the research which led to publication of his ground breaking work, *None but Saints*, which has become the standard reference work on the Russian Mennonites.

Another valuable work, John Friesen, editor, *Mennonites in Russia: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lobrenz* (Winnipeg, 1989), 386 pages, supplements Urry's book covering topics such as church development, education and print culture, which Urry does not treat in detail. Friesen's book also takes the Mennonite story beyond the first century.

Chapter Four: Religious Life 1804-50.

Section 4.01: The Pioneer Gemeinde, 1805.

In 1803 and 1804 individual families from various Prussian villages sold their belongings and joined *ad hoc* groups of immigrants on the 1200 mile trek to their new homes in Russia. Most families had relatives among the earlier settlers in Chortitz with whom they were able to stay the first winter. With the coming of spring in 1804 they formed village groups, drew lots, and set about building crude abodes in the freshly surveyed villages along the Molotschnaya River.

The first group of 193 immigrant families met in the church at Chortitz on April 10, 1804, to elect ministers. They chose Jakob Enns (1768-1818), David Hiebert (1775-1852) and Abraham Wiebe (b. 1764), all from Amt Marienburg. They originated in the Heuboden Gemeinde in the southern portion of the Vistula Delta. David Hiebert settled in Lindenau and Abraham Wiebe in Münsterberg. They became the first resident ministers in the Molotschna.

Another election was held in the spring of 1805 and five more ministers were elected: Johann Friesen (1763-1830), Schönau (later Rosenort), Cornelius Janzen (b. 1780), Petershagen, Jakob Vogt, Heinrich Ensz, and Johann Penner. Friesen, originating in Reinland, West Prussia, was to become the brother-in-law of Klaas Reimer. Cornelius Janzen (b. 1780) originated from Schönsee, West Prussia, five kilometres west of Tiegenghagen. Cornelius was the nephew of Abraham Janzen (1747-1822), Klaas Reimer's step-father.

Two Heinrich Enns' are listed in the 1808 census, one from Heubuden, and one from Einlage, Amt Elbing. Two Johann Penners are listed in the 1808 census, one from Amt Marienburg and one from Amt Elbing. No Jakob Vogt is listed in the 1808 census. Thus of the nine ministers elected in 1804 and 1805 only two, Friesen and Janzen, were from the Tiegenghagen Gemeinde.

The ingredients of religious strife were inherent in the Molotschna colony from the start. Although the settlers were all from the Flemish denomination, families from different Gemeinden in the Vistula delta and varying traditions became part of the same colony. The 1808 census, already mentioned earlier, provides a great deal of information regarding the first 365 families who settled in the Molotschna in 1804/5, enabling the development of a profile of the pioneer Gemeinde in terms of origins, socio-economic data, and kinship connections.

Also present in the pioneer Gemeinde in the Molotschna from the beginning was a potential struggle between progressives and conservatives. One of the progressive settlers was Klaas Wiens (b. 1767), a man highly regarded by the authorities and well versed in the history and faith of the Mennonites. Wiens settled in Altona in 1805 and served as first Oberschulz of the Molotschna. He was one of the wealthiest men in the Molotschna in the early years and a forerunner of Johann Cornies. Wiens founded the estate Steinbach near the Molotschna, initiating a tree planting program which inspired Czar Alexander I to establish the Agricultural Society after his visit there in 1818.

When Klaas Reimer and his group arrived in Chortitza in fall of 1804, they were not inclined to settle in the Molotschna. Reimer and two wealthy associates, Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort, and Jakob Schellenberg (b.1772), Tiegenhagen, negotiated for the purchase of the 1,000,000 ruble Volenko estate. In December they travelled to Ekatherinoslav, the provincial capital, with respect to the transaction. They gave up this venture when they were informed that the serfs on the estate would come with the purchase which would make them slave owners, something repugnant to their faith.

Reluctantly Reimer gave up his plan of a separate settlement. In his "Ein Kleines Aufsatz", he wrote "... they did not wish to go to the Molotschna..." They only went there after they were "...informed [by] ...the Kontor...that we [were to] settle [there]." On June 5, 1805, Klaas Reimer settled in Petershagen, together with his mother, step-father Abraham Janzen (1747-1822), and the extended Epp and Janzen families, including Ohm Cornelius Epp (1728-1805), the uncle of Klaas Reimer's wife.

In the meantime, Jacob Enns (1768-1818), who settled in Tiegenhagen in 1805, was elected as the first Aeltester of the Molotschna Gemeinde. The brethren already in the Molotschna voted in Lindenau on February 25, and those still in Chortitza on March 5 (Ens, page 32). Klaas Reimer and his associates were negotiating for the purchase of a large estate where they planned to settle, making it is doubtful that he was a candidate in this election as some have claimed.

Jakob Enns was a man with a violent temper. He did not provide leadership in the sense of pursuing the Anabaptist vision, the way Peter Epp, former Aeltester in Danzig had envisioned. Enns provided little leadership, often trying to play both factions in a disagreement, and mainly reacting to situations that arose. He was doctrinally indifferent, and spiritually insensitive. Enns can be seen as a forerunner of David A. Friesen (1807-93), later Oberschulz and leader of the reactionary forces. Nevertheless Enns was a capable administrator, building a strong congregation.

Added to the problems of leadership were all the usual rigours and privations of a pioneer settlement, adding stress and strain to a prodigious undertaking. Moral indifference, drunkenness and riotous behaviour were openly tolerated. The brethren settled disputes using physical violence.

Problems arose almost immediately in the newly organized Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde. When a report came in of people coming to blows and fighting with each other in Muntau in 1806, Klaas Reimer spoke out at a brotherhood meeting. Although Enns did convene several ministerial meetings to discuss these issues it was painfully clear that the "Lehrdienst" was divided. Reimer responded by seeking guidance from Scripture.

A dispute was brewing between Reimer and Enns centring on whether the church or the civil government (Gebietsamt and village Schulzen) had supreme authority. Instead of counselling transgressors, Enns simply transferred them into the authority of the Gebietsamt, where they were punished. This led to another undesirable situation in that Mennonites in the Molotschna were required to take turns standing watch over these prisoners, something in which the reformers refused to take part.

A more serious issue arose in 1807 when the Imperial Government solicited financial support for its war against Napoleon. Initially Enns seemingly supported a church stand against such support and then quietly approved the passing around of the “Schwurbuch” or record book so that individuals could pledge to contribute what they wished. When the ministers Reimer and Janzen in Petershagen discovered what was going on, they protested to Enns. The Aeltester called a meeting the outcome of which was the Enns revoked his approval regarding the circulation of the “Schwurbuch.”

It was common practice at the time that employers would mistreat their servants and punish them physically if their work was deficient or if they failed to meet certain behavioral standards. Klaas Reimer, Cornelius Janzen and their co-reformers found this practice distasteful and contrary to the teachings of the faith. When they complained to Enns, his response was to call his servant from the barn to testify that he “had just received a good cudgelling and that he had richly deserved it too.”

A few more episodes of violence occurred where Enns failed to deal with the transgressors. Finally Enns took his authority to the point that he ordered Klaas Wiens to be arrested during which he was physically manhandled, and became injured. A general brotherhood meeting resulted during which Enns threatened to take an axe, if necessary, to force Wiens to leave the meeting.

In 1812 Klaas Reimer, Cornelius Janzen and their supporters commenced their own worship services in Petershagen. A group of likeminded individuals from Münsterberg, at the other end of the Colony, came and requested they hold worship services there also. The reformers agreed, rotating the services every two weeks between the two villages. Presumably Reimer compared the situation to that of the Werder Gemeinde in Prussia, where a small conventicle

functioned reasonably well within a larger body, following its own agenda to some degree. Although 1812 is considered to be the founding date of the KG, it is clear that up to this point Klaas Reimer and his fellow reformers had no separatist inclinations. It is clear also that Reimer and Janzen represented a constituency originating in the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde in Prussia whose voice was being stifled in the new settlement.



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

Section 4.02: The Kleine Gemeinde 1812-16.

The central figure in these events was Aeltester Jakob Enns. He responded by trying to trick Reimer and Janzen. Through an intermediary Enns offered to surrender his office thereby inducing them to attend a meeting. But at the meeting he flew into a terrible rage, hammering his fist on the table and giving them a scorching tongue lashing.

In 1813 Enns had a serious dispute with another minister David Hiebert (1775-1852), Lindenau, a man sympathetic to the reform movement. Enns grievously offended Hiebert. It was tradition that all in the Gemeinde were to be united in spirit, in fact, communion was referred to as "Einigkeit" or "unity". In direct breach of this principle, Enns proceeded to hold a communion service without being reconciled with Hiebert. When Reimer and Janzen heard about this, they went to visit Hiebert who told them how Enns had offended him.

The reformers now decided to refrain from attending communion and other services within the Gemeinde. This was the first time that the reformers considered the actions of the Aeltester as possibly warranting more serious action. Reimer wrote, "Menno Simons writes that there is nothing more unfortunate for the devil than when people leave a church, and then earnestly discipline themselves with the ban in accordance with the Scripture and profess the Word of God to the world. I know what it cost me,What other choice is there for a teacher (minister) who seeks to save his soul from eternal punishment?"

Enns now invited Aeltester Johann Wiebe and the ministerial from the Old Colony to come to the Molotschna for a meeting in the hope that they could persuade Reimer to submit. During the meeting Johann Wiebe acknowledged that the reformers were correct. At the same time they were clearly told that if they did not concede it could also happen that they would be deported to Siberia.

When the reformers did not budge, Enns called another brotherhood meeting where Reimer and Janzen were denounced and excommunicated. Enns also tried to use the authority of the Gebietsamt against them. Reimer replied, "Ohm Jakob, do think of what you are doing before you have us all carried away into chains and bondage." Enns now filed a severe charge against the small group with the Supervisory Committee in Odessa. Klaas Wiens was summoned and explained the situation, whereupon the Kontor sent Enns "a humiliating reply."

Around this time Peter Hildebrandt, a Frisian minister from the Chortitza Colony was visiting in the Molotschna and talked to Reimer and Janzen. He was sympathetic to their plight. The result was that Reimer, Janzen, and another reformer, Jakob Friesen (b. 1775), Muensterberg, travelled to the Old Colony to meet with Heinrich Janzen, the Frisian Aeltester, arriving at the home of Peter Penner (1770-1820), Schönweise on October 14, 1814, where they also met Johann Wiebe, the Flemish Aeltester in the Old Colony who happened to be staying there for night as well.

According to the family records of Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), his father Johann Toews (1793-1873) joined the reform group in 1814 indicating he was probably baptised in the GG. January 28, 1815, the Gebietsamt "sent forth a

notice and thereby decreed that the dancers and the drinkers should be penalized with a fine or work the way Aeltester Enns had taught." This was the same year a jail ("Profunck") was constructed attached to the Gebietsamt offices in Halbstadt.

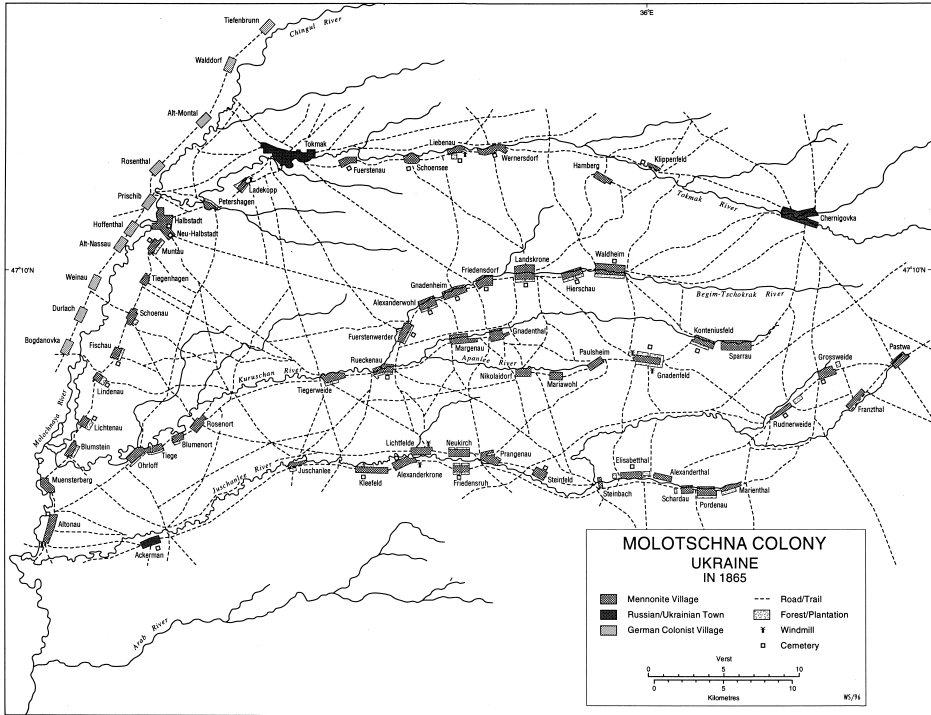
Heinrich Janzen was also sympathetic but because travelling was difficult in winter, the matter lay dormant until the next spring, 1815. By this time there were a number of young people among the reform group who wanted to be baptised. Through their correspondence and discussions, it had been decided that the candidates would be instructed and examined. In spring the ministers drove to the Old Colony together with the baptismal candidates where they were baptised together with the Frisian candidates. According to the "Nammenverzeichnis" of Cornelius Hildebrandt, the first three baptismal candidates of the KG in Schönwiese were Heinrich Dyck, Paul Wittenberg and Anna Kroeker, the latter two from Muensterberg.

After a while Heinrich Janzen came to the Molotschna and conducted communion for the reform group according to the Flemish custom and they again prevailed upon him regarding the ordination of an Aeltester. Janzen declined stating he was planning to return shortly. When he returned to the Molotschna soon thereafter, he conducted an Aeltester election between Cornelius Janzen and Klass Reimer, by drawing lots. The lot fell upon Reimer as the first Aeltester. Because of strong opposition from Aeltester Jakob Enns, Heinrich Janzen refused to ordain Reimer.

The only other avenue was for the reformers to appeal to the Gemeinden in Prussia. But Enns had forbidden all communications and in desperation they solicited the assistance of Klaas Wiens who helped them get a letter to Prussia. A reply signed by four Aeltesten and many ministers advised Enns and the reformers that his position was contrary to the confession of faith. Abraham Wiebe, ordained as Aeltester of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, Prussia, in 1814, the position previously held by Cornelius Warkentin (1740-1809), wrote a separate letter to Reimer counselling "that he who has the most love...[will] be able to be patient." Consequently Reimer waited until 1816 to be ordained by his fellow minister Cornelius Janzen. In a letter of 1819 Reimer stated that Abraham Wiebe had "...handled the oil and comforted us regarding the future" which they took as his blessing of their endeavours.

On March 21, 1816, Heinrich Janzen returned again and conducted a communion service in Petershagen with 33 participants. The KG was always grateful for the early support and assistance from the Frisian Gemeinde in Kronsgarten and Schönwiese. Over the following years four Frisian families moved to the Molotschna and joined the KG including that of Johann Regehr, Klaas Reimer's one-time brother-in-law.

Jakob Enns responded by deciding to "forbid" Reimer "...the regulation in his Gemeinde", but his proposal was defeated by his own brotherhood. During these difficult years many KG charter members abandoned their vision and returned to the GG. In his 1832 "Sermon of the Wheat and the Tares" Reimer stated that "...from our small group only one-third remain of those who first went out, and who have not yet lost heart or who have not yet been swept out." These



The Molotschna Colony, Imperial Russia, founded in 1804, the birthplace of the Kleine Gemeinde. Photo courtesy of William Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas, page 34. The first worship services of the KG were held in Petershagen, home of founder Klaas Reimer, and in Münsterberg, at the southern end of the colony. Most of the original villages along the Molotschna River had several families that belonged to the KG, and thus all members were reasonably close to the worship services.

losses were largely offset by other families who joined the KG and its cause. In 1818 Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, Klaas Reimer's brother-in-law, joined the KG. This was an important event as Friesen soon became a leading minister and supporter. Friesen was a popular member of the progressive Ohrloff community where he had been elected as a deacon the preceding year.

Shortly thereafter the KG experienced a serious crisis. The wife of co-minister Cornelius Janzen had died. After he remarried in 1822, Janzen's second wife dressed in the latest fashions, apparently with his approval. Reimer and Friesen did not want this but Janzen became proud and defiant and left the KG together with Jakob Friesen, Münsterberg.

Sometime later Reimer's neighbour in Petershagen informed him that Janzen had impregnated a young woman during the harvest. Fortunately for Reimer, his brother-in-law Johann Friesen (1763-1830), Rosenort, a senior minister of the GG elected in 1805, was sympathetic to the KG and worked closely with him. Reimer hardly knew what to do, but finally confided to Friesen what his neighbour had told him. As a result Janzen was removed from his office as minister by the GG.

Section 4.03: Pietist Emigration, 1817-19.

The religious and cultural tension in the Molotschna was heightened by the growing influence of pietism. When Jakob Enns died in 1817 he was replaced by Jakob Fast from Halbstadt who had already shown his leanings when he signed in favour of providing financial support for the war against Napoleon. Fast was a good hearted man, but when he became Aeltester he no longer considered it necessary to talk to Reimer and his supporters. He was accommodating to whatever proposal came up. When a solicitation came around to order a Pietist book, *Glaubens und Hoffnungs Blick*, supporting the millennial teachings already referred to and which was completely contrary to scripture, Fast endorsed the same.

The situation was further aggravated with the arrival of Aeltester Franz Goertz and 100 Frisian families from Stuhm, Prussia, in the Vistula Lowlands, in 1817. The group known as the Rudnerweider settled in seven villages in the southeastern part of the Molotschna, around a main village called Rudnerweide (Urry, pages 99, 100). Unlike the Frisians in the Old Colony, Goertz and his congregation had already adopted Pietist religious culture in Prussia. When Goertz arrived in Russia in 1817, Klaas Reimer and his associates went to meet him, perhaps in the naive assumption that he would be like the Frisians in the Old Colony. Goertz responded by attempting to persuade them to adopt the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism.

In 1819 another group of 30 Old Flemish families under Aeltester Peter Wedel arrived in the Molotschna and established the village of Alexanderwohl. Wedel was billeted at Klaas Reimer's home evidently in the hope that he could persuade Reimer to join the pietist cause. One Sunday when Reimer returned from worship services he found Wedel, Goertz and others gathered in his own home, and a vigorous debate ensued. Reimer was a skilled debater and not easily intimidated. He in turn tried to turn his guests away from their terrible error and apostasy. Finally they pressed him if he would condemn other confessions.

Reimer replied that in his opinion, "... all those who believed in child baptism, the swearing of the oath and war were not right thinking Christians even though they were as pious as could be in other respects."

This filled Goertz and Wedel with abhorrence. Wedel jumped up from his chair and exclaimed, "Man! You have made a terrible statement which cannot stand." The two sensitive souls were so amazed and horror struck at Reimer's statement that no further presentation of scripture had any effect.

Although initially in the pietist camp, the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde evolved in a more moderate direction as will become evident. The immigration to the Molotschna of the Pietist Gemeinden added another component to the mix of factions and different religious traditions. The culturally progressive faction seemingly pursued a natural alliance with the pietists in a struggle against the conservative or traditional Mennonites. Klaas Reimer and a small number of intellectual conservatives continued a valiant struggle for the restitutional vision of the faith.

Goertz and Wedel worked zealously to bring others to adopt pietist religious culture. They even taught against the strictness of the Gebietsamt and evidently persuaded enough people that the “profunck” or jail was dismantled. In their view “everything was marching forward with great might to usher in the thousand year reign on earth.” Everyone was encouraged to send their donations to the Bible Society to assist in distributing books propagating their millennialist teachings which were proven totally false by the passage of time.

In 1820 a great unity was achieved at the home of Jakob Dueck (b. 1766) (Abraham Friesen’s step-father), Ohrloff, where all the Aeltesten and ministers were present. Wedel and Goertz again tried to persuade Reimer to adopt the religious culture of pietism. Reimer countered by quoting Scripture and debated them vigorously. Finally he told Franz Goertz, “the apostles teach so-and-so” to which Goertz merely responded “that if the Apostles were alive today and here today they would teach differently.”



In 1819 the Aeltester Goertz and Wedel came to Russia. These pious gentlemen had gone so far in adopting Separatist-Pietist religious culture and language that when Klaas Reimer told them "... all those who believed in child baptism, the swearing of the oath and war were not right thinking Christians even though they were as pious as could be..." they were filled with abhorrence. Bishop Wedel jumped from his chair. "Man!" he exclaimed, "you have made a terrible statement which cannot stand!" It was evident that these Bishops who were to lead their people were themselves far down the false road.

Drawing by Ron Kroeker, Box 17, R.R. 1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0.

Section 4.04: The Ohrloff Gemeinde, 1823.

In 1821 Bernhard Fast (1783-1860), Halbstadt, was elected as Aeltester of the GG. He was closely connected to the KG being a brother to Peter Fast (1780-1852), Tiegenhagen, father of one-time KG minister and school teacher Bernhard Fast (1809-78), Rosenort. So often in Mennonite history, the inroads of alien religious cultures divided families in this manner. Sadly this usually occurred when the young people had not properly been taught their history and the teachings of the faith.

It quickly became evident that Fast was a strong supporter of the adoption of pietist religious culture and not afraid to use the power of his office to that end. He undertook a number of measures which were directly contrary to the faith of the vast majority of his parishioners: 1) he was ordained by a Flemish Aeltester who had adopted pietist religious culture; 2) he admitted a pietist missionary, Moritz, to communion; 3) he promoted the Russian Bible Society which was promoting the teachings of Pietism as already seen; and 4) he supported the Ohrloff Verein Schule, staffed by a teacher who was openly undermining the faith of the parents (MEII, page 315). Although these matters sound innocent, it must be remembered that under Separatist-Pietist theology conservative Mennonites were condemned as unsaved heathen, a disposition not generally conducive to enthusiastic spiritual fellowship.

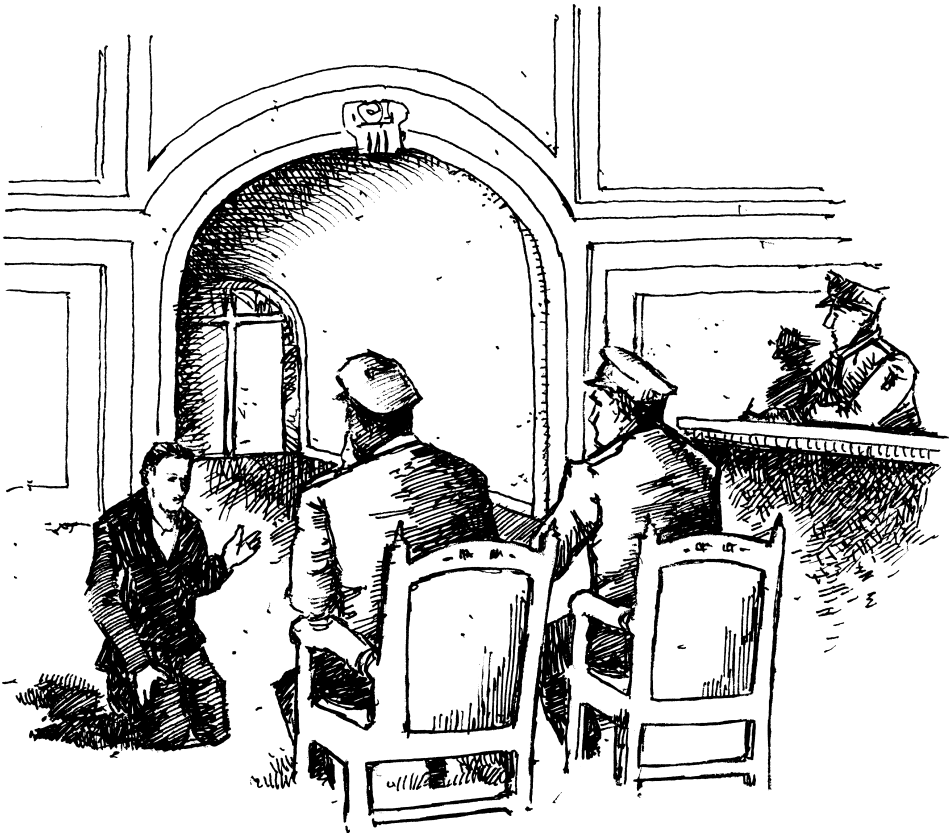
Notwithstanding his dereliction of duty by working against the professed interests of his parishioners, Fast has been lauded in many history books as a great progressive leader of the Mennonites in Russia. The situation of Anna Thiessen in 1820 provided an example of his leadership. Franz Thiessen and his daughter Anna had committed incest. The response of Bernhard Fast was to have Thiessen and his daughter imprisoned in Orechov where the father died on account of the horrible conditions in prison.

Evidently Fast and his colleagues took the position that Anna had no rights because of the sin she had committed. The KG attempted to support Anna as best they could, visiting her in prison and corresponding with her. In "A letter regarding my secession" of June, 1820, Abraham Friesen already referred to the incident "...of the fallen Franz Thiessen on Schönsee[who was] bound in chains [as] ... through all the punishment and threats the fallen brother might come into doubts and shorten his own life" (*Golden Years*, page 252). Although the "little" KG was itself in danger of exile to Siberia, Abraham Friesen interceded on behalf of Anna by writing a moving appeal for her release to the GG ministerial on June 23, 1821. When this failed, he wrote another appeal on December 21, 1821, to the Gebietsamt. This too failed and in 1824 Anna was exiled to Siberia. From the modern perspective, Bernhard Fast's indifference and insensitivity to the suffering of a fellow human being is incomprehensible.

In 1823 the simmering dissatisfaction in the GG came to a head. Four ministers, Jakob Warkentin, Altona, David Hiebert, Lindenau, Franz Wiens, Petershagen, and Johann Friesen, Rosenort, with about 400 families withdrew from Fast's Gemeinde and reconstituted themselves as the pure "Reine" Flemish Gemeinde under Aeltester Jakob Warkentin.

The 142 families remaining with Aeltester Bernhard Fast became known as the Halbstadt-Ohrloff Gemeinde. The pietist leanings of Aeltester Bernhard Fast developed along moderate lines and the Halbstadt-Ohrloff Gemeinde with prominent members such as Johann Cornies and Philip Wiebe provided cultural and economic leadership for the Molotschna Colony for the next several decades.

The unfolding story is full of bizarre twists and unexpected turns. In his "Ein Kleines Aufsatz," Reimer related how the proponents of the pietist Bible Society came to his brother-in-law Johann Friesen during the night, bursting into his home and invading his bedroom where he and his wife were already sleeping. They addressed Friesen in such an "extreme way ... to remain steadfast with them....[that] Friesen fell very ill and also became very dizzy, which condition remained permanent..." It seems probable that Johann Friesen suffered a stroke due to the harassment and extreme pressure placed on him by the pietists.



In 1825 severe charges were laid against the Kleine Gemeinde with the higher authorities in Odessa because they refused to take part in arresting thieves and guarding prisoners. Klaas Reimer was summoned to answer to these charges which might well have resulted in exile to Siberia. "I have covenanted on bended knees before God and the Gemeinde that I would not exercise revenge against anyone and before I will do so, I prefer to be satisfied with that which God and the Czar would do with me," Reimer replied. The authorities agreed that his position was correct and he was released.

Drawing by Ron Kroeker; Box 17, R.R. 1, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0.

Section 4.05: The Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde, 1826-50.

Not surprisingly the concerted efforts of Fast, Wedel and Goertz to usher in a post millennial earthly reign of Christ had resulted in a powerful backlash by the conservative majority. Jakob Warkentin, Aeltester of the reconstituted GG, immediately served notice that Aeltester Fast and his group were not allowed to use the worship houses in Halbstadt and Petershagen. The issue was finally referred to the Supervisory Committee in Odessa and resulted in a severe reprimand against Warkentin.

The GG built another worship house in Lichtenau in 1826 followed by the construction of a new meeting house in Petershagen in 1831. As a result it was often referred to as the Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde. The first worship house in the Molotschna was built in Ohrloff in 1809 and the original Petershagen church in 1810.

Having failed in his attempt to suppress the Ohrloff group, Warkentin turned his attention to Klaas Reimer. A severe charge against the KG was lodged with General Insov in Odessa. The charge was that the members of the KG refused to take part in arresting thieves and guarding prisoners. Klaas Reimer was summoned to appear in the Gebietsamt to answer these charges. His defense was that "I have covenanted on my bended knees before God and the Gemeinde that I would not exercise revenge against anyone and before I will do so, I prefer to be satisfied with that which God and the Czar would do with me." Evidently all charges were dismissed.

When Aeltester Warkentin realized that these tactics were unsuccessful he adopted more subtle measures. He refused to acknowledge the discipline of the KG, and accepted members into his church who were being disciplined. At his instigation the normal exemption from statute labour ("Scharwerk") enjoyed by all other ministers in the Molotschna was not extended to the ministers of the KG. The members of KG were also prohibited from purchasing additional land.

In 1827 an incident arose regarding Michael Makowski, a Catholic man, who together with his family had been rebaptised by Reimer and joined the KG. Makowski was detained under arrest in Ekatherinoslav, but not physically imprisoned. A petition by Makowski and the entire KG ministerial was filed with the Gebietsamt, this time with some success. The petition stated that the Makowski family would wish to live in the Molotschna and gave the undertaking of the KG to look after all their financial needs.

The petition also requested the Gebietsamt lift the prohibition of purchasing additional land, and pointed to the similar restriction formerly faced by all Mennonites in Prussia. No exact date is available at this time, but the restriction on land purchases was lifted after a time.

Warkentin was also ill disposed to the KG-ers because of the three volume edition of the Menno Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine" which they published in 1833 and were attempting to distribute in Russia. At a meeting at Reimer's home in Petershagen, Warkentin declared that "he had never yet had a copy in his hand and he would also see to it that he would never take one."

At this time Warkentin "...became very ill disposed towards Reimer and made a trip to the Old Colony and discussed with Aeltester Jakob Dueck (1779-1854) the idea of forbidding Reimer "...the regulation" in his Gemeinde. When Warkentin returned to the Molotschna he called all the Aeltesten together to obtain their approval to the proposal. But at the meeting, deacon Gerhard Enns spoke out, stating "You will not be able to achieve anything against them, nor will I consent to this." As a result the proposal was not approved.

Mention should be made of two more pietist groups that emigrated to Molotschna. In 1833 another Gemeinde of Old Flemish under Aeltester Wilhelm Lange arrived in the Molotschna and established the village of Gnadenfeld. This was followed in 1836 by 68 families of Old Flemish under Aeltester Cornelius Wedel who established the village of Waldheim. Together with the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde, the Molotschna now had three congregations all tracing their roots to the Groningen Old Flemish. But because each had developed independently during the preceding decades, they all maintained their independence. The Gnadenfeld congregation, in particular, was to become the hot-bed of Separatist-Pietism in the years to come.

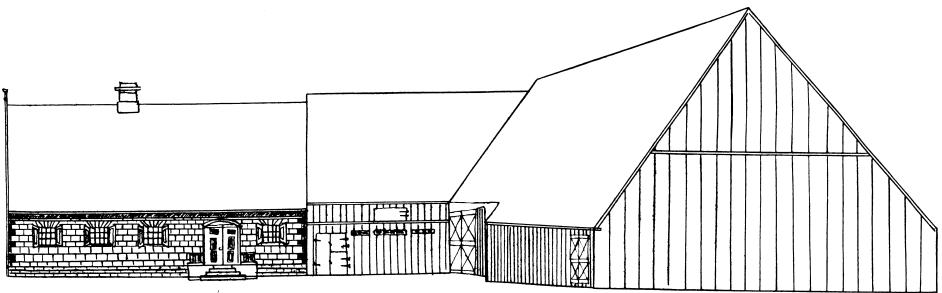
The trickle of immigrants arriving in the Molotschna included a number who were inclined to join the KG, particularly those from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde in the Vistula delta area (see Section 5.01). Various references in the writings of Klaas Reimer indicated that the early reformers had a good relationship with the rural Gemeinden in Prussia, and particularly the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, the KG heartland.

But even the rural Gemeinden in Prussia were changing and more and more falling under the influences of Pietism. In 1835 Rev. David Epp (1779-1863), a minister in the Heuboden Gemeinde, wrote a letter to minister Heinrich Balzer, Tiege, upbraiding the KG for not adopting Separatist-Pietist religious culture which he regarded as the ultimate truth (see Section 5.08).

Abraham Wiebe who died in 1833 was the last Aeltester who served all four quarters of the Grosswerder Gemeinde. His successor as Aeltester of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde was Peter Regier (1798-1856). Regier and his fellow Aeltesten of the rural Gemeinden were largely of one mind with the Danzig City Gemeinde and in 1836 the "Aeltesten in Prussia became united in preparing and publishing another Confession of Faith which was very foreign to ...[the KG]." Klaas Reimer stated that he "read this publication and that a great freedom was manifested therein as well as a deterioration of nonresistant Christianity." The revised and watered down Confession of Faith seemed to mark the end of the special relationship between the KG and the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde.



An old housebarn in Blumenort, Molotschna, built of bricks with thatched roof and attached barn as in Prussia. The house is reminiscent of the traditional longhouse or housebarn once common in the Lower Saxon /Friesland area from which many of the Mennonites had originated in medieval times. Blumenort was the home of a number of KG families in the early years, including the wealthy Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), who chose the name of the village, his son-in-law Heinrich Friesen (1786-1842), Peter Brandt (1770-1819), and Gerhard Goossen (b. 1778).



A Molotschna Mennonite house in the “new style” approved by the Agricultural Union, built of brick with a tiled roof, circa 1850. From Wiebe, Einrichtung des Hofraumes, courtesy of Urry, page 159. Although the KG cooperated enthusiastically with most of Cornies’ reforms, they required some special accomodation regarding the new house style. KG-ers were allowed to build with only the most simple exterior decoration, without a projecting decorated gable, for example. They were permitted to paint their buildings tasteful colours such as blue.

Section 4.06: The Cornies Regime, 1842-48.

While the KG sought to live peacefully amongst its neighbours a battle raged between Johann Cornies and the Gebietsamt, and Jakob Warkentin and the majority Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde. To the majority in the GG, Cornies seemed at best a tyrant, and at worst, the anti-Christ and a demigod, forcing pietism and various school and agricultural reforms on an unappreciative and openly defiant population.

Cornies' tree planting program provided an example of his methodology. Strict regulations were implemented requiring each village to plant a certain number of trees. It happened that in one village the trees were planted but with the bone dry roots sticking in the air. Cornies reacted violently to this open opposition. Upon orders from Cornies the mayor of the village was excommunicated, presumably for allowing the defiance, whereupon he was physically punished. Urry has written that "Cornies was eventually to alienate all but his most enthusiastic supporters" (page 127).

The battle between Warkentin and Cornies carried over into local politics. In 1827 Johann Klassen, Tiegerweide, was elected as Oberschulz. Klassen was closely associated with the KG and presumably a supporter of moderate reform. In 1831 Klassen was replaced by his brother-in-law Johann Regier (1802-42), Schönsee. Regier was also closely related to the KG, and an ardent supporter of Cornies. But Regier had a serious problem, he drank to excess. Warkentin objected to this and sought the assistance of the other Aeltesten to petition the Supervisory Committee for Regier's removal. The other Aeltesten refused, fearing that Warkentin was trying to trick them.

In 1838 Regier was reelected to a third term in office. Again Regier worked hard in support of Cornies' reforms. When the election of 1841 came around, Warkentin decided to beat Cornies at his own game and put up his own candidate Peter Toews, Tiede, for office. Given that his congregation was by far the majority his candidate won easily. However, Cornies refused to recognize the election, and Regier continued to serve. Warkentin decided to take the matter to the Guardians Committee in Odessa with the result that a new election was ordered. But Regier died in 1842 before it was held. When the election was finally held, Toews won handily with 800 votes.

Warkentin and his Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde appeared to be on the threshold of a great victory. But Hahn, Insov's newly appointed assistant, realized that this would mean the defeat of the government's plans for reform. He decided instead to crush the power of Warkentin by breaking the large GG into three smaller Gemeinden--Lichtenau-Petershagen, Margenau, and Pordenau. Warkentin was relieved of his office as Aeltester by Insov on the grounds that he had meddled in government affairs and made false accusations.

Peter Toews never did take office. Hahn simply appointed Cornies' candidate, Abraham Toews. Having broken his most powerful opponent, jurisdiction over schools was now added to Cornies' portfolio.

In 1846 Hahn interfered again in what was traditionally the sovereign jurisdiction of each Gemeinde in its internal affairs by removing Peter Schmidt from office as Aeltester of the Waldheim congregation. Schmidt's offense was the baptism of a Lutheran youth without the approval of the authorities.

In 1846 a fight arose in Blumenort between a Mennonite farmer and his worker, a Hutterite youth. The village mayor was ordered by Cornies to discipline the youth. Among the men implementing the punishment were several members of the former Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde who were placed under the ban since such physical punishment contravened their most fundamental principles. Heinrich Wiens (1800-72), Margenau, Aeltester of the newly created Margenau Gemeinde, presided over this decision. When Hahn heard of the matter he interviewed Wiens resulting in a confrontation. Wiens objected to Hahn's interference in what he saw as a purely internal matter. Hahn, on the other hand, saw the excommunication as a direct affront to government authority. He ordered Wiens removed from his office. A group of leaders went over the head of Hahn and appealed the decision to St. Petersburg.

In 1847 Hahn reacted by issuing an edict banning Wiens from Russia. Although Wiens had much sympathy and support he had no choice but to obey and accept his banishment. He became a martyr figure to the conservative majority and wrote a small booklet setting forth his views. The KG viewpoint regarding these matters is found in several letters written by Aeltester Abraham Friesen to his sister Regina (1795-1852) and her husband, Heinrich Neufeld (1791-1865), Rosenort, a GG minister, and a declaration of 1847 regarding Heinrich Wiens and his claim to martyrdom.

The removal of Wiens shocked many in the Molotschna Colony. Many saw it as the ultimate victory of Cornies over his opponents. James Urry has written that "in later years Mennonites would recall the period after Warkentin's fall as the time when Cornies `ruled'" (pages 134-135). When Cornies died in 1848 news of his death was greeted with barely concealed rejoicing. "To some, his death was seen as just retribution for his sins, while it was rumoured that he had died in a wild frenzy..." Later the memory of Cornies was rehabilitated and he was held forth as a great visionary. Peter M. Friesen, for example, held him as the equal to Menno Simons.

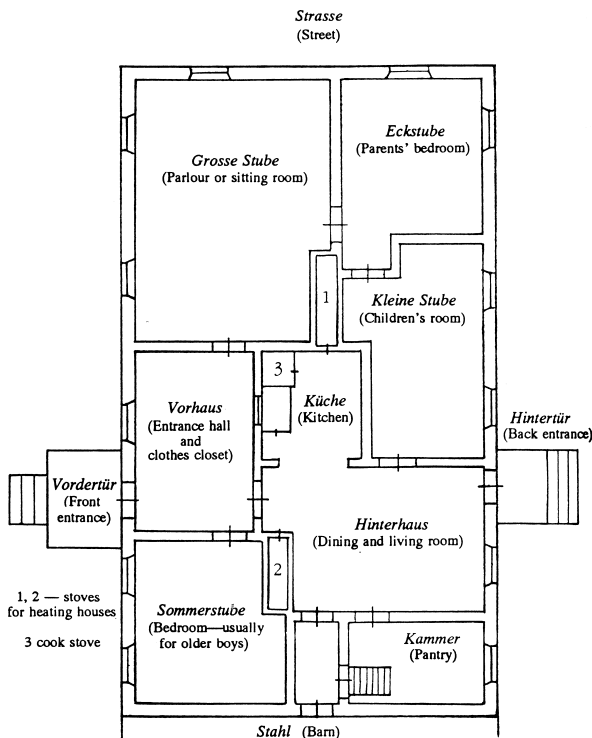
The death of Cornies also marked the end of an era. There was a changing of the guard. In the election of 1848, David A. Friesen (1807-93) was elected as Oberschulz with the support of those who had opposed Cornies. In 1849 Hahn in Odessa was replaced with Baron von Rosen.

Within the KG the death of Abraham Friesen in 1849 also marked the end of an era. The KG tried to stay out of the power struggles between Cornies and Warkentin, and between the Ohrloff Gemeinde and the GG, and for the most part they were successful. At the same time they were known as progressive farmers and as Cornies' darlings. The KG accepted most of his reforms enthusiastically, with the result that they continued to incur the wrath of the GG.

The KG were intellectual conservatives whose conservatism was based on a strategy for group survival with their own plan for community life and social ethos which articulated a consciousness of the need to maintain social and religious boundaries. Professor Urry has written that the KG "...had a clearly articulated set of ideas associated with the maintenance of well established ways." The KG were "philosopher farmers" and their value system was not an uninformed clinging to the past, or mere bullheaded opposition to change, but a proactive and philosophically grounded conservatism which sought to apply the proven ideas of the past to the modern day. These ideas were informed by a vision for the restitution of the Apostolic Church, a vision which regarded the seminal writers of the faith in Reformation times as normative. Professors Al Koop and David Flynn have characterized the KG for their "elite conservatism" compared to the "conservatism" of the "rural poor" found in many 19th century communities.

For Further Reading:

Franz Isaak, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Halbstadt, Taurien, 1908), 354 pages; Heinrich Goertz, *The Molotschna Settlement* (Winnipeg, 1993), 252 pages; and Adolf Ens, "The founding of the Molotschna Mennonite church and its development up to the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde," in *Leaders*, pages 31-40.



The floor plan of the traditional Russian Mennonite house barn. Goertz, Johann Cornies, page 120.

Chapter Five: The Kleine Gemeinde 1812-50

Section 5.01: Prussian Roots

The roots of the KG reform movement go back to Tiegenhagen, West Prussia, founded by the Teutonic Knights in 1350. The village had become the centre of Mennonite life in the Grosswerder becoming the seat of the Mennonite mutual fire insurance (“Brandordnung”) in 1623 and place of worship of the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde. The village itself consisted of twenty farms, or Hufen, most of which were owned by members of the congregation, a conservative and sober lot--hard working and devout for the most part.

On a sunny Sunday morning in May, 1788, we can imagine well, a group of blue-eyed blond-haired children playing on the banks of the Tiede River, cutting like an arrow through the middle of the KG heartland, its waters gurgling gently as it flowed northward towards the Frisches Haff and the Baltic Sea. In the plain wooden worship house at the end of the village, Aeltester Dirk Thiessen, from the neighbouring village of Petershagen, talked to his congregation about the proposal for emigration to Russia. Among the children playing by the river were six year-old Abraham von Riesen, his sister Margaretha age five, three year-old Johann Klassen, nine year-old Helena Reimer and 10 year-old Agatha Schellenberg.

Although fictionalized, the scenario is illustrative of the events preceding the emigration and the point that half of the core group of KG reformers in Russia in 1812 came from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde. Young Abraham became the second Aeltester of the KG; his sister Margaretha was the mother of Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, its third Aeltester; Johann Klassen served as Molotschna Oberschulz and was the father of KG minister Abraham (1828-1906), Prangenau; Helena Reimer was the older sister to Ohm Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau; and Agatha Schellenberg was the mother of KG pedagogue Gerhard S. Kornelsen, Lichtenau.

In a study of the Prussian roots of the KG published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 41-82), I attempted to develop a profile of the Prussian parents and grandparents of its early membership in Russia. The founding of the KG in 1812 came only four years after the 1808 Revision or census, an extremely accurate listing of the 371 families living in the Molotschna--108 of these families were identified as having some KG association, or descendants; 32 families were listed twice meaning there were matrilineal connections; 25 families were identified as the “core group”, being “those families whose history from 1812 to 1874 was integrally entwined with the KG.”

Of the 108 families in the 1808 Revision, 82 were also identified in the 1776 Konsignation or census in Prussia, which however did not cover the northern part of the Gross Werder and Danzig. 90 per cent came from the northern half of the Marienberg Werder--the most common villages being Tiegenhagen 7, Tiegenhoff 5, Reinland 4 and Petershagen 4. Of the 19 families in the four villages listed, 12 belonged to the “core group”. 20 families came from the Heuboden Gemeinde covering the southern part of the Marienburg Werder, and 25 from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde. 14 of 25 core group families originated from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde.

The most surprising results were in the socio-economic category. Of the 82 families identified in the 1776 Konsignation, 12 were of medium wealth “mm” (“mittel maeszig”) compared to 25 % for Prussian non-emigrants and 8% for emigrants. However, among the core group of 25 families, eight were “mm” or of medium wealth, a percentage even higher than that of those remaining in Prussia. The status of “mm” indicated considerable wealth, likely the ownership of a “Vorlaubhaus” and appurtenant lands, with servants, etc.

The 25 core group families had 42 sets of children listed in the 1808 Revision. Of these 7 were listed twice--demonstrating intermarriage between core group families, a fairly typical pattern. The 35 KG families referred to had an average wealth of 21.5 compared to an average wealth of 15.4 for six of the more well-to-do Molotschna villages. Petershagen and Muensterberg, the birth places of the KG, were two of the wealthiest villages, with averages of 23.2 and 20.3 respectively (*The Golden Years*, page 156).

Emigrants from the later immigrations also joined the KG, an indication that not all immigrants after 1818 were under pietist influence--17 families were identified in this category. These included individuals and families from the KG heartland such as David Klassen, Jakob A. Wiebe, Johann Dueck, Peter Baerg and Johann Plett, whose families became prominent in the KG. Of these immigrants, only two had ancestors listed in 1776 as “mm”.

Later immigrants included four Frisian families from Krongarten--the Johann Regiers, Peter Warkentin, Heinrich von Bergens, and Jakob Bartels; and also the Peter Penner family from Schönwiese. Surprisingly six families came from the Frisian Tragheimersweide Gemeinde and one from the Prezchowka Gemeinde, generally considered heavily influenced by Pietist ideology and religious culture.

The study of the Prussian roots of the KG established that the preponderance of its core membership came from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde, the KG heartland. The Tiegenhagen Gemeinde was the repository of ancient customs and traditions of which the KG became a faithful guardian and steward. The study also demonstrated the varied theological influences and cultural traditions which found their way into the KG through immigration and transfers from other congregations, all of whom were attracted by the pursuit of a common vision for the restitution of the New Testament church.



*A new style farmstead in Obrloff, Molotschna. The family is getting ready to go visiting in their "Vordeckwagon", an enclosed carriage still commonly used among Mennonites in Mexico and Bolivia. Six KG-associated families have been identified in Obrloff in the 1835 census. Photo courtesy of Gerlach, *Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten*, page 75.*

children will have a different attitude than you. For man does not live by bread alone. I repeat, if these books are staying here, I will remain here as well."

Ohm Cornelius was somewhat agitated and put not only this book, but also a copy of Menno Simon's writings and "Die Wandelnde Seele" into the chest. The latter was a book which Klaas Reimer had warmly recommended to him.

Cornelius Jr. was very angry at Reimer. "Why was he always finding fault," he often asked? "Why did Ohm Klaas always find something to expound upon regarding the ancient and venerable ways of the Mennonites?" It also disturbed him that his parents were being influenced by him; he wanted to be rid of this disturber who could remain in Prussia to preach his new tidings.

Ohm Warkentin found it sad that his son Cornelius gave no regard to the sermons of spiritual renewal preached by Klaas Reimer (1770-1837). No--for his part--he would certainly never allow himself to go to a new country without these precious teachings. But grandfather Warkentin never commenced on this long awaited journey; he died in the spring of 1803.

Nevertheless, grandmother Warkentin remained equally inflexible regarding the books--just as her husband had been. Whether he wanted to or not, Cornelius Jr. was forced to take these books along when he immigrated to Prussia in 1818. In Russia Cornelius settled in Blumstein, a village with a large KG community including Martin Warkentin (1764-1853), Johann Harms (b. 1771), Johann Harder (1764-1826), Cornelius Loepf (b. 1783), brothers Gerhard (1759-1813) and Aron Schellenberg (1773-1853), and Johann Fast (b. 1770) married to Catharina Harms (b. 1769), sister to Johann.

Cornelius Warkentin was a successful farmer and assisted by his substantial inheritance soon had one of the finest farms and sets of buildings in the village. However, Cornelius was very opposed to the ways of the KG, and when his daughter Elisabeth joined them, he disinherited her. Shortly before his death, he apologized to Elisabeth and included her in his will. After his death she married Gerhard Schellenberg, who became a KG minister in 1869. In 1874 the family moved to Manitoba, settling in Rosenfeld, East Reserve.

The story of Cornelius Warkentin Sr. illustrated the reasons of many families for leaving the homeland in Prussia and their vision for a renewal of the Mennonite church in the Russian steppes.

Section 5.02: Ohm Cornelius Warkentin, Halbstadt, Prussia.

The study of the founding of the KG in 1812 and its subsequent evolution until the mid-century, typically revolves around the “big three”, a troika of early leaders--Klaas Reimer, the founder; Heinrich Balzer, the theologian; and Abraham Friesen, consolidator and missionary. But the KG reform movement was a grass roots movement made up of many conservative intellectuals, individuals with their own faith journeys and spiritual struggles which led them in their decision at some point to join the reform movement. These individual faith stories are important to an understanding of the cultural and family dynamics of the early period of the KG.

The fictionalized account of one of these families, Cornelius Warkentin, speaks for the experiences of many like-minded emigrants. Warkentin was a wealthy farmer in Halbstadt, Prussia, in 1776. Like many conservative and wealthy Mennonite farmers living in the Grosswerder along the banks of the Nogat, Tiede and Weichsel Rivers, Ohm Cornelius had made the decision to emigrate to Russia.

It was still winter time as the preparations were made for the journey to Russia. Goods were packed and items which would not be taken along were offered for sale. Ohm Cornelius was busy packing his treasured library of Mennonite devotional writings when he was confronted by his son Cornelius (1770-1847) who had no use for such ideas.

Son Cornelius, stared in disbelief at the chest full of books, and he stated with emphasis, “Vodakjy,” he cried. “Surely you do not plan to take all those ancient books along to Russia, do you?”

“Indeed, I wish to do so,” father replied calmly.

“But you can easily fill a chest with them, and in addition, they are heavy. Surely there are many other things which we must take along to Russia and which would be much more useful.”

“Which we would use?” replied father. “Do you mean to say that we will not use the venerable family Bible, the Gesangbücher, and the Catechism? And the *Martyrs’ Mirror* in which we find preserved the reports of the suffering and the glorious victories of our forefathers; surely we would wish to read them for our spiritual strengthening? Who knows what difficulties lie before us there. It is most beneficial for us--especially in difficult times--if we have edifying reading material at hand,” added father in an earnest tone.

“Ah,” chided Cornelius. “That big book could be sold for a lot of money here in Prussia; and money--and lots of it--is what we need in Russia where everything will have to be built from scratch. By comparison, hardly anyone will want to read those ancient fables.”

Father Warkentin was a pious man, still, of a strong nature. The attitude of his son caused him great sorrow; he replied somewhat heatedly, “You have no regard for these books which is a bad sign of our spiritual situation here in Prussia. That is why I want to leave here. Over there, hopefully, we can start anew spiritually. But if we will start in Russia with an attitude the way you have demonstrated I do not want to move there at all. I hope that your children and grand-

Section 5.03: Klaas Reimer 1770-1837, Courageous Reformer.

Klaas Reimer was a man of action whose irrepressible energy, unshakable conviction, and valiant faith, breathed life into the infant reform movement and imbued it with his vision for the restoration of the Apostolic church.

As already mentioned earlier, Klaas Reimer was born in Petershagen, West Prussia, in 1770. In 1790 he married Maria Epp (1760-1806), daughter of Peter Epp, Neunhuben, deceased, Aeltester of the Flemish Gemeinde at Danzig, already mentioned.

In 1804 Klaas Reimer together with some 30 souls from the congregation in Neunhuben immigrated to Russia. Klaas and Maria are listed in the 1804 immigration records: "Reimer, Claas, Neunhuben, born 16.10.1770 Petershagen, Landwirt, married February 2, 1798, Epp, Maria, Neunhuben, born 16.10.1760, Stadtgebiet, to Petershagen, children Agnetha born 21.8.1801. (Became minister in 1804)" (Unruh, 351). Intriguing to this part of Klaas Reimer's life was the close relationship which developed between the young minister and Ohm Cornelius Epp, who chose to emigrate to Russia together with the Reimers and lived with them at least part of the time. Possibly he did not have his own children?

Klaas and Maria settled on Wirtschaft 4 in Petershagen, Molotschna on June 5, 1805. Her uncle, the aged minister Cornelius Epp died in Russia on October 19, 1806, at the age of 78 years and 2 months. On November 6, 1806, Klaas Reimer's wife, Maria, died at the age of 46 years, 6 months and 13 days. Daughter Agnetha died as a child sometime after 1808.

Petershagen was an old world village dominated by the Janzen and Epp clans from Petershagen in the KG heartland in Prussia. Klaas Reimer was connected to both through his mother who was an Epp and married to Abraham Janzen, as well as through his wife, Maria Epp, daughter of Aeltester Peter Epp, Danzig.

Together with Muensterberg at the other end of the colony, Petershagen was the birth place of the KG. The village was an example of clusters of KG members found in various villages during the early period. Many of the Petershagen Janzen-Epp group as well as the Muensterberg group of KG charter members returned to the GG. Fortunately they were replaced by new adherents drawn by the living testimony of the infant reform movement.

On Saturday, January 9, 1807, Klaas Reimer married Helena Friesen, 17 years his junior. With this marriage Reimer acquired a whole new set of strategic alliances as Helena was the daughter of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) and Margaretha Wiebe (1752-1810) of Kalteherberge, Prussia, and more recently Ohrloff, Molotschna, a prominent and wealthy family. Helena was the sister of Margaretha, wife of GG minister Johann Friesen, Schönau and later Rosenort, and brothers Peter, Abraham and Klaas frequently referred to in the KG story.

Klaas Reimer and his bride lived on a successful Wirtschaft in Petershagen where they are listed on the 1808 Revisions-Listen:

Claasz Reimer 38, from Neunhuben, Amt Danzig, landowning farmer, wife Helena, 21, children, Anganetha 7, Abraham 1/2.

Property, 2 wagons, 1/2 plow, 1 harrow, 5 horses, 10 cattle, 9 sheep.
(Unruh, 321).

The domestic life of the Klaas and Helena's family appears to have been peaceful and harmonious. They also tried to do what they could to help their family and friends. When Helena's parents both died in 1810, they took in her youngest brother Klaas, and treated him like a son (Klaas Friesen to Peter von Riesen 1838). In a letter to Krongarten of 1831, Abraham Friesen mentions that his brother-in-law Klaas Reimer "has been very sick but has become well again and would, it was hoped, again be able to serve his congregation with communion the following Sunday."

The incident of the pedal-powered wagon is described by Klaas Reimer himself. One of his sons, believed by many to have been Klaas Jr., invented what Reimer described as "a new wagon... powered by the motion of the driver" considered by John C. Reimer, Steinbach, to have been an early form of bicycle, something designed for poor people to travel with. Reimer confessed that he himself was too interested in such matters. The incident of the wagon caused some consternation within the brotherhood who felt perhaps that the family of their Bishop could find better applications for their time.

The Klaas Reimer family is listed in the 1835 census as the owner of Wirtschaft 4: "Klaas Heinrich Reimer, age 64, wife Helena 47, Children Abraham 27, Klaas 22, Heinrich age 1 in 1816 - died in 1816, Helena 18 and Margaretha 16." Their oldest son Abraham got married on February 16, 1835, and the next May they moved away from home settling in the village of Rosenort. Son Klaas and daughter Helena were married on Thursday, September 24, 1836. By this time the Klaas Reimers were ready to retire and on February 18, 1837 they held an auction sale on their farm in Petershagen (Abraham F. Reimer, Journal).

The events of Klaas Reimer's courageous ministry and service as founder and first Aeltester of the KG are well known. In his autobiography, entitled "Ein Kleines Aufsatz," he described the challenges which he encountered as he struggled to establish his beloved Gemeinde on the foundations of evangelical faith. "Ein Kleines Aufsatz" as well as two letters of 1819 and 1830 were published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 121-221). An 1825 "Admonition to the Brotherhood" is also extant (Heinrich F. Loewen, Journal).

Although Klaas Reimer suffered disdain from Separatist-Pietist ministers and was twice threatened with exile to Siberia, undoubtedly the most difficult crisis of his life was the false-humility movement in his own church of 1828-29. (See Section 5.6).

Three of Ohm Klaas's sermons have been translated and published. They reveal a man with a keen sense of mission and compassion to teach the love of Jesus. Dr. Al Reimer, Winnipeg, Manitoba, has written that "he [Klaas Reimer] has not received the credit he deserves as a preacher." His 1829 "Sermon for Communion" is based on a "deep, confident spirituality [and] the love and *Gelassenheit*" and is "studded with rich jewels of biblical imagery." The 1832 sermon on the "Parable of the Wheat and the Tares" had a "fine clarity of exposi-

tion” and “is replete with a spirit of humble authority and compassion for his flock.” The third sermon on love and brotherhood preached in 1830 is described as “a deeply felt and luminously expressed sermon on love, humility, repentance and forgiveness ...[and] is void of any spirit of self-justification . . . and is suffused . . . with a spirit of mature and comforting *Gelassenheit*.” In the view of Dr. Al Reimer “it captures in the purest form I know of, what is to my mind the essence of the traditional KG message of following Christ through a meek, loving and sanctified way of life.”

Klaas Reimer’s ministry focused on the restitutional vision of the KG reformers, which was nothing less than to call all believers back to the ethos of the New Testament church and to a new world order where all human relationships were governed by the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. For this reason Klaas Reimer’s teachings are as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

Klaas Reimer was a man of many talents. He read extensively in the seminal writings of the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and was involved in translating these works from Dutch to German. A sample of his translation work--an extract from Menno Simons’ *Fundamentbuch* or “Foundation of Christian Doctrine” dealing with the practice of shunning--was preserved by Rev. Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908) of Ohrloff, later Rosenfeld, Manitoba. Ohm Klaas appreciated books of good quality; his Bible--which has recently been placed on exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, Manitoba--was printed in 1664 and had an expensive leather binding. Also at the museum are two wood carvings, a cane and a pencil box, carved by Klaas Reimer as a young man; both of these pieces reveal a keen artistic touch and a firm hand (Plett, “Klaas Reimer’s Cane,” in *Preservings*, No. 7, December, 1995, page 46).

It was perhaps fitting that Klaas Reimer’s death was to occur while he was travelling horseback on a journey of spiritual visitation. He was overtaken with an illness and died underway. On Monday, December 28, 1837, the last evening of his life, he stayed at the home of Peter Kroekers’ in Lindenau (Wirtschaft 15), speaking until 11 o’clock in the evening. After the brethren had parted and gone their separate ways Klaas Reimer laid himself down to sleep in peaceful repose. He had rested for only a short while when he experienced sharp chest pains which impressed upon his heart. The clock had barely struck 4 o’clock in the morning when his soul departed and went home to be with his beloved Lord whom he had served so faithfully for many years. The story is told that after his death “they are to have sent a message to his home informing them that he was seriously ill even though he was already dead. This was done in order to protect them from receiving such drastic news so suddenly and unexpectedly. Shortly after that a message was brought informing them that he had actually died” (David P. Reimer, in *Familienregister Reimer*, 19).

Klaas Reimer was buried on Tuesday, January 4, 1838, presumably in the Petershagen cemetery. He had reached the age of 67 years, 2 months and 13 days.

Historians have not always been kind to Klaas Reimer. Peter M. Friesen considered him unchristian and “devoid of any joyous knowledge of God’s grace” (page 93). Anyone who has read Ohm Klaas’ sermons can only conclude that Friesen was a fanatical pietist who disparaged anyone who did not fit into his

legalistic salvation plans, separatist agenda and endtimes fantasies. Nor has Reimer received the credit he deserved as historical chronicler, his journals and writings being among the very few dealing with the pioneer era of the Molotschna Colony.

Other writers, fortunately, have been kinder and more fair in their assessments. In his epic poem about the death of Klaas Reimer, Heinrich Balzer has recorded that the Spirit led Ohm Klaas powerfully in his ministry especially during the last four years. Reimer spoke to the brotherhood no less than 80 times, admonishing them and directing the way to Christ (Heinrich Balzer, *Ein lied ueber das Absterben Aeltester Klaas Reimer*, *The Golden Years*, pages 210-212).

In 1838, Klaas Friesen, brother-in-law and foster son, paid Reimer the following tribute in a letter to brother Peter in Prussia:

Indeed, during the time of his sojourn here, our beloved Aeltester has gone before us in the way of truth as a father. He was not afraid of the wearisome travel and other difficult matters, if only the Gemeinde could be bettered thereby. Oh, that we might heed and be mindful of the urgent admonitions founded on the Word of God which he presented to us in his sermons as well as at brotherhood meetings and other suitable opportunities. For in so far as I know, he sought to bring before all people a good teaching and remembrance which came from the depth of his heart (Klaas Friesen, letter to Peter von Riesen 1838).

Klaas Reimer was a conservative intellectual whose voice speaks with singular clarity over the centuries, through a time when traditional teachings and thought were often disparaged and when chiliastic fantasies and fanatical separatism were in vogue. Ohm Klaas becomes the central character in any study of the KG and the conservative faith tradition which it represented. He becomes the flash point in the agenda of Separatist-Pietists to eradicate the traditional Mennonite faith in Russia. If Ohm Klaas could be successfully disparaged and brought into ridicule, then the KG, and indeed, the entire conservative wing of the Mennonite faith could easily be alienated and marginalized as irrelevant and cantankerous reactionaries.

A biography of Klaas Reimer, written by great-great-grandson, Professor Al Reimer, Winnipeg, Manitoba was published in 1993 (Al Reimer, "Klaas Reimer: Practical Visionary and Spiritual Leader," in *Leaders*, page 117).

Section 5.04: Heinrich Balzer 1800-46, Defender of the Faith.

Heinrich Balzer (1800-46) was the son of Heinrich Balzer (1773-1842). Heinrich Balzer Sr. "... apparently came from Muntau, West Prussia, and moved to the Stuhm area following his first marriage." He was elected as a minister of the Tragsheimersweide Frisian Gemeinde in 1810. In 1819 the family moved to Russia together with other members of the Gemeinde led by Aeltester Franz Goertz. The family settled in the village of Grossweide, Molotschna.

Heinrich Balzer Jr. lived in Tiege, a village with a substantial KG associated community, particularly in the early years: the Isaak brothers--Philip, Franz and Peter, already mentioned, prominent in education; Johann Klassen, father of Johann later Oberschulz; Abraham Fast, whose daughter married KG Ohm Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Heinrich's half-brother Jakob Reimer; Johann Wiens, grandfather to Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88). Three of the children of Klaas Reimer later lived in Tiege--Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), brother Peter (1826-54); and daughter Helena married to Peter W. Friesen (1815-92). Other residents included Abraham Rempel (1798-1878) and Peter Brandt (1780-1819). Minister Heinrich Wiebe (1794-1838), Tiege, who "...joined the Gemeinde as a minister" died in 1838. For a time during the 1830s the term "Tiegeische Ohms" in the KG would have referred to four members of the "Lehrdienst" or ministerial.

KG-related people who lived in Tiege during later years included; Abraham R. Schellenberg (1839-1924); Wilhelm Fehdrau; village Schulz Heinrich Willms (1815-87); Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917).

The 1835 census sheds a little light on Balzer's personal life. In 1820 he moved from Grossweide to Tiege where he settled on Wirtschaft 5. It appears that he had married Helena (b. 1802), the widow of its previous owner Franz Martin Klassen who died in 1820. Balzer's step-sons Bernhard, Jakob age 27, Franz age 24 and Peter age 19, all married and moved to Alexanderthal in 1829. The ages of the step-sons indicated that the Klassen children must have been from a previous marriage and that Helena was their step-mother. In his *Sammlung...zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten* Peter P. Toews wrote that "...it appears that this good man [Heinrich Balzer] had left no descendants in the Kleine Gemeinde." Apparently Balzer had no children of his own and his step-children all belonged to a different Gemeinde.

In 1827 Heinrich Balzer was a minister of the Ohrloff Gemeinde. Frequent mention has already been made of the inroads of pietism and how many Mennonite young people were thereby turned against the faith of their fathers. But in Balzer's case, the reverse happened. He rejected the militant pietism of his parental Rudnerweide Gemeinde as well as the more moderate pietism in Ohrloff. In 1833 Balzer joined the KG for reasons which he explained in a lengthy letter written to Aeltester Bernhard Fast of the Ohrloff Gemeinde.

In 1833 Balzer wrote his famous treatise entitled *Verstand und Vernunft* or *Faith and Reason*. Balzer was of the view that "under the rubble" of many centuries of error, Menno Simons had "rediscovered the simple teachings of the Lord." Balzer exalted the first century church as the classic model of Christianity. The early Christians had been convicted by the Holy Spirit, "that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity of

Christ. ... Brotherly love made them like a great family and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another.”

“When in a reborn heart the Holy Spirit exclaims the `Abba, our Father,” wrote Balzer, “divine gifts effuse into the believer and enter his *understanding*. They fill him with a new wisdom and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more and freer the heart of man is opened to the Spirit the more knowledge will he gain, the greater riches of divine gifts will he receive, and the more his heart will be prepared as the abode of the Triune God.”

Balzer dealt at length with the dichotomy between “faith”, a subconscious, existential state of being in Christ, and what he called “reason”, whereby logic and self-avarice took hold of one’s heart and directed one’s actions. He felt that Christians “should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after great wealth or a position of high distinction in this world ... certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Matt 16:26.”

Heinrich Balzer was also a gifted poet, who used dynamic verse of the meter and rhythm tradition modelled after the *Gesangbuch* to convey his message of a renewed and revitalized church. It is difficult to translate this poetry as the meter and rhythm is critical to the composition. The following verses from his 1833 epic “A Poem in Farewell”, expressing his feelings at the time of leaving the Ohrloff Gemeinde, serve as example:

1 Inn’rer Drang und heft’ges Treiben
 Angst, Beklommenheit und Noth
 Hart und fest einander reiben
 Tiefe Dehmut, inn’res Leid
 Pressen, drücken allezeit
 Heiszt es: fliehe von den Sünden

2 Adventstage zweiter Woche
 Ihr ward mir ein harter Stand;
 In euch ward im Jesu Joche
 Und um Eitelkeit und Tand
 Streit und Kampft mit Ernst geführt,
 Jesus selber triumphirt.
 Gott sein Dank, als Überwinder,
 Und in ihm, auch ich mich minder.

With his brilliant mind, Heinrich Balzer became the most articulate defender of the faith in Russia. He was an exceptionally gifted thinker and theologian who attempted in his writings to develop a theology of Mennonitism. Balzer’s success in articulating his vision was recognized by Dr. Robert Friedmann who wrote “that ‘Faith and Reason’ was one of the most stimulating statements in Mennonite literature” (Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 259).

The church-related writings of Heinrich Balzer were gathered together by Bishop Peter P. Toews and included in his *Sammlung . . . zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde der Mennoniten* ("Collection . . . regarding the History of the Kleine Gemeinde of the Mennonites"; unpublished manuscript, Blumenhoff, South Russia, 1874), 475 pages. These documents have been translated into English and republished in Plett, ed., *The Golden Years*, 210-47. Aeltester Peter P. Toews also refers to a certain record book maintained by Ohm Heinrich in which he had recorded the proceedings at brotherhood meetings and other occurrences in the Gemeinde, and that, regrettably, he had been unable to locate this journal.

See the biography of Heinrich Balzer by Dr. James Urry, "Heinrich Balzer (1800-46): Kleine Gemeinde minister and conservative Mennonite philosopher," two sermons and an epic poem by Balzer published in *Leaders*, pages 295-304.

The story has a postscript in that Heinrich Balzer's half-brother Peter (1827-1902) emigrated to America with the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde in 1874. Peter Balzer settled in McPherson County, near Inman, Kansas, and belonged to the Hoffnungsau Gemeinde where Peter served as a senior minister. In 1913 his son Johann (1851-1930) went on an extended trip back to Russia.



First marriage - Peter Balzer and Anna Evert. Married February 27, 1851. Photo taken in Tokmak by K.A. Evanov.

Peter Balzer (1827-1902) emigrated to America in 1874 as part of the Alexanderwohl Gemeinde. He was the younger brother of Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Tiede, famous KG theologian and writer.

Photo courtesy of great-grandson Harold Balzer, Box 59, Buhler, Kansas, 67522.

Section 5.05: Abraham Friesen 1782-1849, Evangelical Missioner.

Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was the son of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) and Margaretha Wiebe (1754-1810). Young Abraham grew up in Tiegenhagen, West Prussia, where his older brother Peter was born in 1779. By 1796 the family had relocated to Kalteherberge, where Abraham von Riesen Sr. was a farmer and grist miller.

In 1804 Abraham Friesen Jr. accompanied by his parents and siblings, except for older brother Peter, moved to Russia where they settled on Wirtschaft 10 on Ohrloff, Molotschna Colony the following spring. The descendants of Margaretha Wiebe and Abraham von Riesen Sr. constituted the most significant extended family clan in the KG.

On June 15, 1805, Abraham Jr. settled on Wirtschaft 11 next door to his parents, and sister Anna and brother-in-law Cornelius Sawatzky on Wirtschaft 3. Johann Cornies was a neighbour in the village, resident on Wirtschaft 7. Other KG-ers connected to Ohrloff at various times included Peter Penner (1813-84), Gerhard Fast (b. 1789) and brothers Abraham (1798-1878) and Peter Rempel (1792-1837). Ohrloff was considered an important village often at the forefront of cultural and religious innovation.

After farming as a single man for two years, Abraham married Catharina Wiebe on October 10, 1807. She was the daughter of Heinrich Wiebe and Katharina Schierling, originally of Neiteicherwald, Prussia. Wiebe died in Prussia and his widow married for the second time to Jakob Dueck, a wealthy farmer who moved to Russia settling on Wirtschaft 13 and 14 in Ohrloff on June 5, 1805. Many of the early meetings of the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde were held at Dueck's home in Ohrloff.

Abraham Friesen Jr. and his family are listed on Wirtschaft 11 in Ohrloff in the 1808 Revisions-Listen:

Abraham Friesen 26, from Kalteherberg, Amt Danzig, merchant,
wife Catarina 26, Property: 1 horse, 2 cattle, 41 tschwert
unthreshed grain and 13 loads of hay (Unruh, 324).

Abraham Friesen was elected as the deacon in the GG in Ohrloff in 1817, indicating that he was well regarded. The next year he made a difficult decision to leave his friends and popularity to join the KG where he continued his service as a deacon. In 1820 Abraham wrote a lengthy epistle in which he explained the reasons for this decision, stating his "most ardent longing and desire, that we might live and walk in such a way that the Lord and His Spirit might be amongst us, with us and in us, for as long as we live."

On October 12, 1823, he was elected minister. One year later, brother-in-law, Heinrich Wiebe (born 1773), Ohrloff, Wirtschaft 15, was also elected as a minister. Wiebe became the leader of the "false-humility" movement causing a great deal of grief to Friesen and Klaas Reimer during the mid-1820s.

Abraham became responsible for much of the official correspondence of the congregation. In 1820 Abraham interceded forcefully on behalf of Anna Thiessen and her father Franz Thiessen who had been imprisoned at the behest of the Grosse Gemeinde, for having committed the sin of incest. Notwithstanding that the "little" KG was itself in danger of exile to Siberia, Abraham Friesen wrote a moving appeal the GG ministerial and another to the Gebietsamt (Municipal Office). Unfortunately, his appeals were not heeded and Franz died in prison in Orechov and Anna was exiled to Siberia in 1824. But the incident illustrates the courage with which Abraham challenged injustice in his own community and spoke out bravely on behalf of the voiceless and unempowered.

Abraham was a gifted writer and expositor of orthodox Mennonite theology and wrote extensively on a variety of topics relevant to the Molotschna Colony, frequently at the request of his friend and neighbour in Ohrloff, Johann Cornies, head of the Agricultural Society. During the 1820s Abraham wrote a short article justifying the protocol of the conservative Mennonites whereby women were granted equal inheritance rights, an unusual provision in early 19th century Europe. He justified this position citing 1 Peter 3:7, that if women were fully heir to the spiritual blessing, they must also be fully heir to the material (Plett, "Women's Rights 1820s," *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1996, Pt. Two, pages 49-50).

Abraham also carried on an active correspondence with his brother Peter in Prussia; two of these letters dated 1824 and 1833 and a poem dated 1828, have been published. Most of his official church correspondence has been published in Plett, ed., *The Golden Years*, 248-341; and Plett, ed., *Leaders*, 237-93.

One of Abraham's significant contributions was the publication of the first books among all the Russian Mennonites. By 1827 Abraham had translated and published the Dutch Aeltester Pieter Pieter's *Spiegel der Gierigheid* ("Mirror of Greed"), evidently in response to conditions which were developing in the Molotschna Colony. In 1833, Abraham, together with brothers Peter and Klaas published the 3-volume, 3/4 leather-bound edition of Menno Simon's "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," making these writings available in a German edition for the first time.

Abraham Friesen is listed in the 1835 census as the owner of Wirtschaft 12 in Ohrloff: "Abraham Abraham Friesen, age 52, wife Katerina 52, children, Jakob 26--moved to Blumstein 1833, Heinrich 20--moved 1846, Peter 18, Katerina 17, Elisabeth 14, son Abraham 22, wife Elisabeth 21, son Abraham 1/2" (1835 Census). Five other KG families owned Wirtschaften in Ohrloff in 1835.

On April 3, 1838 Abraham was elected as Aeltester to replace brother-in-law Klaas Reimer who died the previous year. In the 10 years of his Aeltestership the KG experienced significant growth, from 61 families at the time of his election as Bishop in 1838, to 91 families when his successor was elected in 1847.

Abraham always enjoyed collecting the seminal writings of the faith. On February 5, 1841, he translated an old Dutch song consisting of nine stanzas. At this time he was still living in Ohrloff. By 1843 his letters were datelined Schönau, and shortly thereafter in Blumstein. Accordingly it appears that he may have retired from his Wirtschaft in Ohrloff sometime around 1842.

In a letter to his sister Regina of July 4, 1843, Abraham mentioned that he and his wife had frequently been ill, but that they are feeling better (A. Friesen to Heinrich Neufeld July 4, 1843). In a letter of August 23, 1843, brother Klaas wrote that Abraham “had been sickly for a time but is well as is also his wife.” In 1845 Abraham wrote and published, “Eine Einfache Erklärung (“A Simple Declaration”) in which he explained certain aspects of KG theology and defended the reform movement from various unfounded accusations being circulated by its enemies.

Even in his sixties, Abraham was keenly interested in the Word of God and the teachings of the faith. He produced some of his best writing during this period. In 1844 Abraham completed one of his most important works, “A Preparatory Sermon for Baptism” which articulated in a moving way, the essence of the KG teaching of humble discipleship and existential faith. The sermon was composed to be presented for a baptism and had the traditional 20 article confession of faith incorporated into the text (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 73-89). The origin of this confession of faith is still unclear although Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, Ellerswald, considered a mentor by early KG leaders, is known to have composed a 20 article confession of faith.

During their last years Abraham and Catherina Friesen moved from place to place living with various of their children; his letters of 1845 and 1846, for example, are datelined Rückenau and also Blumstein. Aeltester Peter P. Toews wrote of a time during the mid-1840s when he went along with his parents to visit Ohm Abraham in the summer kitchen at the home of son Abraham in Rückenau (*Rundschau* May 22, 1918).

In 1846 Abraham Friesen wrote another sermon entitled, “A simple exposition for a ministerial election gathered from the Holy Scriptures” which is still extant. In the same year, on February 1, he wrote a twelve stanza poem entitled “Ein Lied über den Geistlichen Streit des Glaubens für Junge Streiter Jesus.” In 1848 Abraham was called upon to counsel the Hutterian Brethren who were in a dispute regarding the practice of community of property.

Perhaps nothing summarizes better the KG view of spiritual love, and humble discipleship preached by Abraham Friesen than his farewell address to his beloved Gemeinde in 1847 shortly before his death: “I will then for this time make a short presentation for my listeners by way of closing with the purpose of Godly salvation. And not in this alone--rather everything which you have heard from me in the twenty-three years of my service has been done toward that end. It has laid a good foundation in me for my hope--looking forward in grace to my eminent departure to receive eternal life; for which I am longing with all my heart....I must go the way of all flesh, just like my fathers before me. Therefore do receive earnestly to your hearts the good which I have taught you. At all times see to it that you live in such a way as you would wish to have lived when you draw your last breath; so that you might also enter there with all the blessed, where there will be fullness of joy and beautiful love at His right hand eternally and for evermore. Amen.”

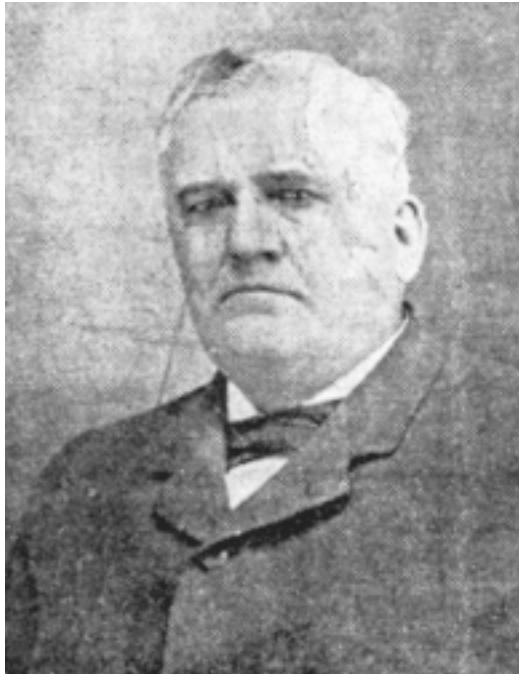
Abraham Friesen, devoted shepherd of his flock and minister of the faith died July 1, 1849. Johann Dueck (1808-66) reported that Abraham Friesen was

buried in Rückenau on July 3, 1849. He went to pay his last respects to “our beloved Aeltester Abraham Friesen before his burial in the cemetery.”

Abraham Friesen had a profound gift for dealing with people. He was a devoted shepherd of his flock. He was one of the great church statesmen of the Russian Mennonites in his time. His memory as a Christian leader of genuine spirituality was revered for generations. If Klaas Reimer was the founder of the KG, and Heinrich Balzer the thinker and theologian, then Abraham Friesen was the great organizer and evangelical missionary, consolidating its practice and building on a period of early growth. Under his balanced and statesmanlike leadership the KG experienced a period of unheralded stability and prosperity.

A documentary history of Abraham Friesen’s ministry, including many of his writings, was published in 1985 in *The Golden Years*. A biographical sketch of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) as well as translations of some additional writings were published in 1993 (*Leaders*, 223-36). These letters and epistles constitute one of the finest collections of Christian literature found among the Russian Mennonites. Abraham’s time of leadership has been characterized as “the golden years” of the KG.

Great-nephew Heinrich D. Friesen of Inman has written that the “Blumsteiner” Friesens were descended from Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), likely referring to the children of son Jakob who lived in Blumstein (Heinrich D. Friesen, *Familien-Register*, 10).



Johann P. Thiessen (1839-1926), grandson of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Obrloff. Johann P. Thiessen was a prosperous farmer and businessman in Jansen, Nebraska, who served two terms in the Nebraska State Senate. Photo courtesy of M. B. Fast, Mitteilungen, page 41.

Section 5.06: The False Humility Movement 1829.

Although Klaas Reimer suffered disdain from Separatist-Pietist ministers and was twice threatened with exile to Siberia, undoubtedly the most difficult crisis of his life was the false-humility movement, a threat from within his own congregation which took place in 1828-29. As Reimer himself described it, when “Satan realized that he was unable to lead us to others by erring ministers and also that he could not turn us completely from God through the confusion of Babel. Satan now came in amongst us as an angel of light, as a false spirit, and presented himself as a true brother” (*Leaders*, page 139).

The false-humility movement took place in 1829 and not 1819 as previously speculated. We may characterize it as a form of reverse pietism. Separatist-Pietism developed various rituals and formulae to stimulate and promote a feeling of inward spiritual well-being. The false-humility proponents also emphasized inward feeling but went to the other extreme by focusing on fear and humility with “ostentatious displays of devotion to God.”

Klaas Reimer has identified the four leaders of this movement: Bernhard Rempel (b. 1794), Muntau, whose followers composed lengthy prayers and lay poorly clad in ditches; if they could not cry during prayers for a meal they would not eat. They ate poor food and often went hungry. Through all of this self-deprivation, Rempel’s brother Johann (1799-1831) died. Klaas Friesen (1774-1839), Lindenau, believed in a simple life and clothes which would distinguish them from others and that they should have no association with others such as serving in public offices. He also believed that they should sell all their property and own it in common. Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1783), Ohrloff, agreed with Rempel and Friesen on certain points. As already mentioned, Wiebe was a brother-in-law to the minister Abraham Friesen who was married to his sister. Martin Warkentin (1806-ca.36), Blumstein, who had recovered from a severe illness, predicted that the world would end that summer and talked about “how it would burn, crack and sizzle.”

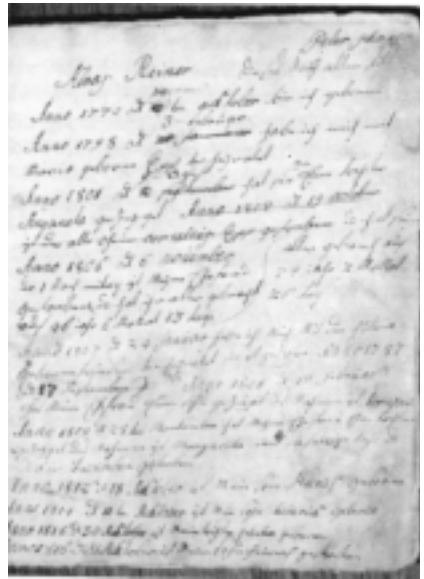
The false-humility pietists obviously did not agree on all the details among themselves but were able to influence the majority of the KG members. Wiebe together with many brethren came to see Reimer but when he refuted their prophecies as he had earlier done with Wedel and Goertz, they became disheartened. Shortly thereafter many gathered at the home of Abraham Friesen, where Warkentin again spoke of the last days.

By this time, Klaas Reimer had become alarmed and preached a sermon on John 13, verse 35, stressing the importance of love. The sermon resulted in a “lamentable dissatisfaction.” Reimer now called a brotherhood meeting preparing a sermon based on Menno Simons, Pieter Pieters, and the *Martyrs’ Mirror*, expounding on the life and walk of a true Christian. While he was still speaking, Heinrich Wiebe walked out and most of the audience with him.

Wiebe now seized control of the congregation calling a brotherhood meeting. Reimer had to wait outside, until Wiebe had discussed the matter “according to his wishes”. When Reimer was called into the meeting he was asked to poll each one as to whether they wanted him to continue. Reimer did so and the majority answered “yes”. Reimer then returned to his former position and made



Title page of Klaas Reimer's Bible printed in 1664. Photo courtesy of Henry Fast, Steinbach/Harvey Plett, Seeking to be Faithful, page 19.



Klaas Reimer compiled his family records in his Bible. Photo courtesy of Henry Fast, Steinbach/Harvey Plett, Seeking to be Faithful, page 16.

a moving presentation, “whereupon God performed mighty wonders amongst us. [and] The foolish hearts were smitten so mightily that they were compelled to confess their great shame.”

Klaas Reimer wrote that his brother-in-law Abraham Friesen now “became aware of the false holiness” and supported him. This was a great help and the two of them travelled around together to “persuade them.” When the rebels found out that Friesen had joined Reimer, they “departed from us in their misguided faith” and the battle was won. When they came to Blumstein and “Martin Warkentin heard that Friesen was with ...[Reimer], he bowed his head between his hands and sorrowfully went away.” Klaas Reimer wrote that Heinrich Wiebe “...was too fond of women and was removed from his ministerial office” whereupon he rejoined the GG.

Characteristically Reimer blamed “himself for not having opposed these various forms of spiritual excess strongly enough.”

Section 5.07: The Evangelical Ordinances, 1829.

Klaas Reimer frequently quoted the article written by Menno Simons, “that there is nothing more unfortunate for the devil ...[then when a congregation] earnestly discipline[s] themselves with the ban in accordance with the Scripture and profess[es] the Word of God before the world” (*Leaders*, page 131). In light of the serious crisis engendered by the false-humility pietists, Reimer renewed his study of the Bible and the canon of devotional literature. He took much of the blame upon himself for not having opposed the rebels more forcefully from the outset instead of allowing the revolt to fester and finally break into the open.

From his study of the Bible and seminal writers of the faith, Reimer concluded there were two areas where KG teaching had not been faithful enough: footwashing and evangelical discipline as taught by Scripture.

With respect to footwashing, Klaas Reimer referred particularly to Dirk Philips who emphasized the practice in his *Enchiridion*. The practice was also included in the 33 article Confession of Faith of Twisck, the George Hansen Confession of 1678, and the Confession of Gerhard Wiebe, Ellerwald, 1792 (ME,II, pages 347-51) all of which were part of the KG canon of devotional writing. Footwashing had been discontinued and was no longer practised by the Flemish Gemeinde in the Molotschna.

There seems to have been broad consensus in the KG regarding footwashing. The false-humility crisis was interpreted as directing them towards evangelical humility (as opposed to the false pietist-type humility) and that “one after another” they came to the conclusion that they were omitting “one important law and commandment of Christ”, namely, footwashing, which was instituted in 1829.

The second ordinance, that of evangelical discipline, was a more difficult issue. There was little consensus on the matter. Reimer’s problem lay with his brothers-in-law Peter von Riesen in Prussia and Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, by now a leading minister. In his memoirs, Reimer referred to Peter von Riesen’s first visit to Russia in 1816 when he seemingly encouraged his brethren toward greater freedom and adoption of worldly practices. Peter returned to Russia for another visit in 1832 exactly at the time when Heinrich Warkentin, Martin’s brother, had been excommunicated because of disobedience. Notwithstanding the ban, Warkentin was accepted into the GG without even an inquiry. At this time, Abraham Friesen had made the comment that Warkentin should be banned for life.

Reimer was very concerned about such views which he did not regard as evangelical. In his view “the exercise of the ban was to serve both the world and the punished one to the best” (*Leaders*, pages 142-5). If another Gemeinde accepted a disciplined member, he/she became their responsibility and Reimer could not shun them as by so doing, “the ban would only serve as a great mockery and it is not the will of God that this be the case...Menno Simons writes that we must see spiritually to understand the Scripture.” In Reimer’s view, Abraham Friesen was interpreting “...the Scripture too literally.”

Reimer also mentioned that it was important not to anger the others. He considered carefully the purpose of evangelical discipline, which was “to withhold fellowship in order that they might be ashamed and thereby directed penitently back toward God and the Gemeinde.” Evangelical discipline was an

ordinance of love and was to be exercised only in love. It “only seldom has any application for those who have left to join another Gemeinde.”

Seemingly Peter von Riesen had changed his views since his last visit to Russia and now favoured the harsher interpretation of the ban and had convinced brother Abraham likewise. The two called for a meeting with Reimer presumably as prelude to implementing such a view in the brotherhood. Reimer correctly anticipated their plan and replied that the entire ministerial needed to be present for such a meeting and further that only the Ohms could be present. He had sensed that Abraham was being influenced by brother Peter and did not want him at the meeting. A consensus was achieved at the subsequent ministerial meeting, with the adoption of Reimer’s view.

In his memoirs, Reimer wrote: “If we do not have clear Scriptural grounds for our practice it is better to leave the matter alone.” He quoted Pieter Pieters, “that together with Job we should shun all sin from our hearts and that we should have a loathing for wickedness and backsliding. Then the Spirit will instruct us how we are to conduct ourselves in our affairs. Since love is the foremost commandment, I am obliged to prove everything carefully and to institute what is best.”

Reimer thereby articulated a clear guideline for his congregation regarding the adoption of protocol on matters which were to be regulated within the Gemeinde.



Katharina R. Reimer (1850-1912) was a granddaughter of Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Petersbagen, Molotschna. Katharina married her second cousin Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916), and together they became one of the most prosperous families in southeastern Manitoba. Her son Jakob R. Friesen, Steinbach, founded the first rural Ford dealership in Western Canada in 1914. Photo courtesy of Ralph Friesen, Historical Sketches, page 268.



1861. Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-190) and wife Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911) and children Helena and Heinrich. Heinrich was born in Rückenau, grandson of Aeltester Abramam Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff. The Heinrich B. Friesen family lived in Rosenfeld, Borosenko, where he evidently served for some time as a school teacher. To my knowledge this is the oldest KG photograph in existence. It shows the styles and apparel worn at the time. The 1874 the Heinrich B. Friesen family emigrated to Rosenort, Manitoba, but in February 1875 they relocated to Heuboden, Jansen, Nebraska, where Helena's parents lived. She was the daughter of Ohm Abramam F. Friesen, Neukirch, a senior minister of the KG. Helena later married for the second time to KG Aeltester Abramam L. Friesen, Jansen, Nebraska, over to protests of some of her children who had adopted American Revivalist religious culture. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Loius E. Reimer/Pres., No. 12, page 67.

Section 5.08: The Golden Years 1832-49.

The second quarter of the 19th century for the KG were comparable to the golden years of the Dutch Mennonite “Doopsgezindte” from 1550 to 1650, which witnessed an unheralded flowering of the faith expressed both in terms of writing as well as the application of that faith in daily life. At the same time, the church continued to suffer a significant degree of persecution which was also true of the KG.

The golden years of the KG were heralded by the institution of evangelical discipline in 1832. This event signalled the completion of a certain degree of organization and establishment of doctrinal stability. Although somewhat arbitrary the year 1832 signified the commencement date of the golden years of the KG which ended with Abraham Friesen’s death in 1849.

It was difficult to decide what issues and events to feature to illustrate the golden years. The KG “Schrifttum” for the period was so incredibly rich in documentation that it was difficult to select certain events and issues at the expense of others. The year 1832 coincided with the advent of a tone in KG writings which was more proactive than defensive, more concerned about telling others about full gospel faith and no longer preoccupied with defending itself against attacks and harassment. Several aspects of the KG story during the golden years 1832-50 will be considered: 1832-35 correspondence regarding pietism; the 1838 Aeltester election; suppression of harassment against the KG in 1843; the issue of evangelical discipline in 1845; and Abraham Friesen’s letter to the Hutterian Brethren, 1848.

The period opens with Abraham Friesen’s 1832 letter to Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Tiege, a minister of the culturally progressive Ohrloff Gemeinde who was attracted to the KG by its restitutional vision. Balzer still had various concerns which he had addressed to Friesen. One of these was the false rumour that the KG denied the salvation of other confessions and considered itself to be the only “true” church. Friesen denied the charge, stating that he would regard such as a position as “spiritual pride”. He does “confess a visible church of the Lord” ascertainable by “the testimony of Holy Scripture.” He did not claim “that we are perfect in this...but [we] can well and truly say that we are pressing towards the mark...” Those among the KG who had an attitude that “they belong to the small remnant believing Gemeinde [which] strengthens them in their spiritual pride ... are not strengthened in this erroneous belief... [by us and we] have worked against this belief with all our might.”

Another issue raised in the letter of 1832, that of KG opposition to the chiliastic teachings being adopted by many Mennonites, will be dealt with later.

Friesen’s letter to Balzer successfully countered his misconceptions about the KG and by the following year, 1833, Balzer had joined the reform movement. In a letter of 1833 to the Aeltesten Fast, Wedel and Goertz, Balzer went on the offensive, explaining the reasons why he had forsaken their pietist beliefs and warned them of the “threatening danger”--being assimilation and adoption of Separatist Pietist religious culture, particularly the ideas of Hunziger. He wrote, “Compassion and sorrow overwhelms my heart when I feel and see our people hurrying onward to a great and general desolation with the speed of flight.”

In many cases conservative Mennonites retreated and retrenched in the face of Satan's onslaughts, as in the case of attack by Separatist-Pietist missionaries. But during periods when conservatives have been properly grounded in the faith, with adequate training and understanding of the issues and the ability to articulate their point of view, they have not only turned the tables but have successfully turned the tide against those who would pervert the true evangelical faith.

Such a mind set was integral to the KG paradigm during the golden years and was articulated in Balzer's 1835 letter to David Epp (1779-1863), Aeltester of the Heuboden Gemeinde in Prussia. Epp was an uncle to Claasz Epp (1838-1913), who adopted literally the novels of Jung-Stilling and led his band of chiliasts to Central Asia in 1880, where they expected to greet the second coming of the Lord. David Epp had apparently written Balzer and upbraided him for not adopting these teachings as well. Epp also condemned the KG and particularly Abraham Friesen as being unsaved according to Separatist-Pietist religious culture.

Balzer replied with a scorching letter in which he refuted Epps' pathetic religious ideas, "that [with] this Christendom of the world which you advance and pursue so zealously, as can be seen from your writings, you are falling into a veritable labyrinth or garden of errors." Balzer dissected the religious books which influenced Epp, including Hunziger, and explained that these writers justify war and the shedding of blood "as such who walk according to their own pursuit[s]...directly contrary to the meek and gentle-hearted example of the Good Shepherd and in direct opposition of the character and nature of Jesus the Little Lamb." He chastised Epp for being ignorant of the seminal writings of the Mennonite faith (*The Golden Years*, page 227-9).

In 1837 Klaas Reimer died and on April 3, 1838, Abraham Friesen was elected as Aeltester to replace him with 47 votes. The other candidates were Heinrich Balzer with 14 votes, and Peter Penner, Prangenau, a minister who had joined the KG in 1835, with two votes.

The KG now experienced the same dilemma as in 1814--tradition held that an Aeltester should be ordained only by another Aeltester. Consequently a formal request for ordination was made to Aeltester Bernhard Fast of the Ohrloff Gemeinde who replied on February 23, 1838, "...We have recently perceived from you that in your outlook you are not committed to helping us in the regulation of our Gemeinden and in the establishment of the same....we ourselves would have to take the blame, if we allowed ourselves to be vehicles to strengthen you in your outlook....Instead we wish and counsel you with total sincerity to abandon your party spirit and to join one of the official Gemeinden."

On March 12, 1838, Abraham Friesen and his ministerial responded as follows: "even though we should never become an official Gemeinde here on earth, it shall be sufficient for us to live in the grace of God and his fellowship, in order that through grace we might attain eternal salvation in the future." The result of this exchange was the Abraham Friesen was ordained by one of his fellow ministers.

The government authorities had recognized the KG from the outset, treating the multiplicity of Gemeinden in the Mennonite Colonies essentially as an internal matter. The KG, however, was the subject of continued small-minded harassment and persecution originating with other denominations, particularly the GG. As early as 1816 the GG had decided not to recognize their baptisms. Although this was never carried into force, they did refuse to recognize their church discipline. Reference has already been made to restrictions against land purchases, and refusal to extend exemption from statute labour to KG ministers which all other ministers received. Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), later Aeltester, wrote about more insidious harassment such as the teasing of school classmates who called him *Froamskotuks*, the godly or pious one, because he refused to carry on in mischief, use tobacco, play cards, etc.

In 1843 the enemies of the KG devised another avenue of harassment, by lobbying for the enforcement of Regulation 378 which would have prohibited the KG from meeting for worship services in private homes, a practice adopted by the KG from the start. Since their members were scattered all over the Molotschna it would have been pointless to construct a house of worship in a particular village. Worship services were rotated among villages where they had a substantial membership. In the beginning services were rotated between Petershagen and Muensterberg. As the KG increased in membership, gatherings were held in the hay barns of larger farmers which were cleaned for such events. By the 1840s worship services were held in two different villages every Sunday.

In 1843 the Gebietsvorsteher Toews sent an order to the ministerial of the KG with a copy of the regulation, directing them that "full compliance will be required of you." At the same time an investigation was instituted under Regulation 378 "against the mayor of Rückenau for permitting the arrest of Makowski in 1841 and 1842 pursuant to an unlawful instruction."

The enforcement of Regulation 378 would have been a serious blow for the KG and they turned to their friend and protector, Eugene von Hahn for help. In a petition of March 27, 1843, to Hahn, they explained their dilemma regarding the construction of a separate house of worship and pleaded for his help in obtaining an exemption.

The reply of Hahn was swift. In a letter to the Gebietsamt of April 7, 1843, Hahn advised that he had taken the matter up with the Lord Minister requesting an exemption to which he was expecting a favourable reply. Official approval followed confirmed by a letter of June 28, 1843, that the minister had commanded "That the Kleinen Gemeinde is not to be disturbed in the conducting of its worship services and that they are to be permitted to conduct their assemblies in private homes...."

This edict issued by the Supervisory Committee in Odessa was adopted as a regulation for the Molotschna Colony by the Agricultural Society on July 20, 1843, under the aegis of Johann Cornies. This Regulation No. 4501 stated that the "Kleine Gemeinde shall henceforth be part of the Kirchenkonvent, completely the equal of the other Gemeinde....[and] the Schulzenämter are hereby put on notice, that the Kleinen Gemeinde is to receive all privileges alsothe exemption from common duties [for ministers]." Through this interven-

tion by friend and benefactor Johann Cornies much of the small-minded harassment and persecution which the KG had endured with grace and dignity since the beginning was finally ended. It seemed that with Cornies' victory over Jakob Warkentin and the GG in 1842 he was finally able to rid the Molotschna Colony of this insidious factionalism, or at least its outward expression.

In a letter of August 23, 1843, the ministerial of the KG expressed its due thankfulness to the Gebietsamt at Halbstadt as well as the Supervisory Committee and particularly von Hahn for the exemption regarding a worship house. But in a unique display of bravado, almost bordering on arrogance, the KG ministerial also announced that it would be happy to decline the exemption from statute labour which they had not requested. Their reasoning was that there were no grounds in the Holy Scripture for such an exemption, which they saw as tantamount to the creation of an ecclesiastical order or priesthood and that "we thereby create a hindrance for the Gospel..." The matter might by different they allowed "If we were in poverty and indigence, or suffering tribulation and persecution....but we have our land and income like another, we live in good repose and freedom of conscience in such blessed times and we have our sufficiency so richly."

Friesen then referred to the pioneer years and how some ministers struggled in poverty, which might have been some justification for what amounted to a subsidy, "But which is not the case with us at the present time, and possibly there are a good number of Wirthen ... for whom the statute labour would be more difficult than for ours." Understandably this was one petition which Johann Cornies did not grant on behalf of the KG.

In the ensuing years, Abraham Friesen repaid the debt many times to Johann Cornies. It frequently occurred that Cornies required an opinion regarding a particular teaching of the Mennonite faith or some point of concern in the Molotschna Colony. Whenever such an issue arose, Cornies would ask his friend and neighbour Abraham Friesen for a written opinion. The result was a set of detailed declarations by Abraham Friesen regarding various matters.

On October 8, 1843, Friesen prepared a treatise regarding baptism, stating that "Baptism is an evangelical act and usage constituted by God. Mark 1,24....Jesus Christ is also the true baptism with the Holy Spirit and the fire of whom John the apostle has born witness....The teachings and commandments of Christ were not merely instituted for a certain time period but were constituted in order that they be kept until the appearance of Christ Jesus from heaven. 1 Timothy 6,14....But in the final end this outwardly baptism is not our entry into the Kingdom of God. Galatians 3,24....It is also impossible that any grace or salvation can emanate therefrom, just as neither the leprosy nor the blindness could be healed by the waters of Jordan or the pool at Siloam. 2 Kings 2,14 and John 5,9.....but it is only the evidence and a sign of the grace and blood of Christ in the washing away of our sins, Acts 22,16, which the sinner has received into his heart through faith and the rebirth and that through grace before baptism, Ephesians 2,8, by the putting away of the sinful man in the flesh which is publicised by baptism. John 1,12; Colossians 2,11. Without this inward baptism through the Holy Spirit and the fire, the outward and determinable water baptism is like unto the sealing

of an empty letter, void and in vain. Romans 2,18" (*Golden Years*, pages 294-5).

It followed that any infant baptism would be a foolish waste of time as was also a baptism of someone lacking faith. It was evident that the KG would have great difficulties with Separatist-Pietist religious culture where baptism was made into a legalistic requirement for salvation, with the development of elaborate rites and rituals such as a particular mode--immersion, and the implementation of various forms thereof, adopted by pietist factions who then disputed each other, categorically claiming to be correct, etc.

By comparison, Abraham Friesen's writing was remarkable not only in his logical thought development but also his extensive and consistent citation of Scripture. Of the ban Abraham Friesen wrote, "Christ has given his Gemeinde the keys to Heaven for its protection which is His Word. Matthew 18,18 and 16, 19.....The Gemeinde shall not knowingly suffer anyone to remain in its fellowship who has separated himself from God through sin. Isaiah 59,2." Regarding the regulations of the Agricultural Society and the accusation that the KG enforced its own aesthetic values amongst its members, Abraham Friesen wrote, "Our Gemeinde earnestly holds that all regulations of the authorities be strictly and fully complied with willingly and without murmur... unless we have an unequivocal and convincing ground in the Holy Scripture and the testimony of our venerable forefathers that such regulations are in conflict with our conscience."

The content of these writings as well as a host of other letters, are beyond the scope of this work. Most of these writings have been published in the "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series" which the readers are encouraged to read. These letters portray Abraham Friesen in his increasing role as a senior church statesman. Abraham Friesen was in the religious sphere what Johann Cornies was in the secular. It was natural that the two would form a loose alliance.

In Klaas Reimer's view, nothing displeased Satan more than when a Gemeinde governed itself according to the Word of God, and applied these teachings in daily life. The KG was no exception and by 1845 the Molotschna was rife with various false rumours about them. In 1845 Abraham Friesen wrote and published his *Einfache Erklärung* (A simple declaration), in which he defended the KG regarding six points. The booklet demonstrated Friesen's maturing writing prowess and his growing ability to integrate individual ideas and concepts into a cohesive and powerful presentation.

One of the issues which Friesen dealt with was evangelical discipline, a topic regarding which the KG was frequently the subject of attacks. He explained that "Separation is a great medium of love and very necessary to the salvation of the soul of man." He questioned whether those were more compassionate who sought in humility and gentleness of spirit to carry out the teachings of the Apostle Paul, or those who consciously decided not to practice them. Discipline was the corollary of discipleship and all members of the Gemeinde must be subject to the counsel and admonition of the community.

One of the most interesting roles of Abraham Friesen as senior church statesman in the Molotschna Colony was his intervention in 1848 with the Hutterian Brethren who were in dispute over the implementation of community

of property “written at the request of the authorities.” In his letter of September 4, 1848, Friesen reminded the Hutterians that they should look not only to the church at Jerusalem for a model “for the Apostle Paul was subsequently awakened by God, to be a chosen instrument for his Lord.....For this beloved Apostle....has not expressly directed towards the community of property, but rather to benevolence with respect to the poor....How we are obligated for the necessities of the saints....These are the following: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, be hospitable to your visitor, clothe the naked, visit the sick and so on.”

The letter to the Hutterian Brethren, written only a year before Friesen’s death in 1849, demonstrated his exceptional ability to deal with people and to expound the Scripture in a gentle but integrated way. With this writing Friesen developed further the conservative Mennonite teaching of “community of sharing”, to be referred to later. The letter also demonstrated that the KG was concerned not only for the furtherance of its own well-being but also that of the entire community of God’s saints. As such the letter to the Hutterian Brethren forms a fitting conclusion to the golden years of the KG.

Further Reading:

The Golden Years, page 165-355; *Leaders*, pages 113-354 and Harvey Plett, *Seeking to be Faithful*.



A steppe landscape, sketch by Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Volume One, page 466. The Chortitza “Old” Colony was quite rolling interspersed by river valleys and creeks. By comparison, the Molotschna was relatively level. Photo courtesy of East Reserve 125, page 7.

Chapter Six: Social and Religious Life 1850-75

Section 6.01: The Mennonite Commonwealth.

The establishment of the Mennonite colonies in Russia during the first half of the 19th century resulted in the formation of what many observers referred to as the “Mennonite Commonwealth”. The Mennonite world in Imperial Russia in 1850 was largely self-sufficient and semi-autonomous with its own government institutions, almost a State within a State. Outside observers frequently remarked on the prosperous villages, the cleanliness and orderliness of the farmsteads, apparently an idyllic life. The Molotschna Colony, in particular, was often held up as a model of a successful and highly productive farming community.

In reality the picture was not as rosy as it might appear. Economic inequality, social disfunction and religious strife lay barely submerged beneath the surface. The history of the Molotschna Colony from its founding in 1804 until mid-century, was marked by struggles between the progressive forces represented by Klaas Wiens and Johann Cornies, against the culturally conservative majority represented by Jakob Enns and Jakob Warkentin. The 1846 exile of Aeltester Heinrich Wiens marked the victory of the cultural and socio-economic ideas associated with the Ohrloff-Halbstadt forces, and all formal resistance to these innovations appeared to be overcome.

But only two years later the apparent hegemony of Cornies was shattered by his untimely death. In 1848 David A. Friesen (1807-93) was elected as Oberschulz, supported by many who were opposed to the innovations of Cornies and certainly his tactics. The ensuing power struggle between the Ohrloff group and the remnants of the former all-powerful GG, now regrouped under Friesen’s leadership, quickly spread to embroil every Gemeinde in the Molotschna. In truth it became a war, an ugly conflict of paper and ink, with deep hostilities involving most of the religious leaders of the day.

The evolution of these social and political dynamics was interrupted in 1853 by the Crimean War between Russia and a coalition of England, France and Turkey. The allied strategy centred on an attempt to seize the Russian naval base at Sevastopol, thus bringing the conflict to the doorstep of the Mennonite commonwealth in southern Russia. In addition to the contribution of supplies and financial resources, each farmer was required to provide wagon and horses which were used to haul supplies for the Russian armies in the Crimea, known as “podwodden”.

The war had a great impact on the colonies. Young Mennonite men drove the wagons to the war zone where they were exposed to the horrors and suffering of war. Soldiers marched through villages, and refugees flooded by. Wounded were brought back to the Mennonite colonies for nursing care. These interactions influenced many young people, exposed for the first time to a different social paradigm. A typhus epidemic spread by wounded soldiers resulted in many deaths. One of best descriptions of the “podwodden” experience is found in the journals of Heinrich B. Friesen (1837-1926), grandson of KG-associated Vollwirt Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort.

Professor James Urry has summarized the situation of the Mennonite commonwealth on the threshold of the second half of the 19th century: "During the 1850s the consequences of two decades of social and economic reform began to be felt. While commercial practices had brought prosperity and security to many, it had resulted in hardships for others. Social inequalities became more marked, and possession of land became a crucial factor in the ability of people to secure a future for their families. Established patterns of authority in the congregations had been shattered, political power had shifted to secular institutions, and a general spirit of reaction had set in. This threatened the sense of community. These reactional forces were concerned more with the preservation of power and privilege than with the maintenance of established patterns of faith. But new elites were emerging in the colonies. They did not look towards an idealized past but rather towards a new future for the colonists. These new elites had a very different concept of the person from their forefathers, and a different vision of the role of community in the development of faith" (Urry, page 152).



Threshing in Russia in 1815 using threshing stones.

The chaff was then forked into the air so that the heavier seeds would fall back to the ground.

Photo courtesy of David A. Wiebe, They Seek a Country, page 26.

Section 6.02: Ecclesiastical Strife.

The evolution of an ecclesiastical church governance in the Molotschna Colony was evident in the formation of the Kirchenkonvent or church council by government edict in 1850. The Kirchenkonvent was a council consisting of the Aeltesten of all the Gemeinden in the Colony. The formation of the church council recognized earlier informal associations of the church elders dating back to the 1820s. Only the KG did not participate.

The ecclesiastical struggles suspended by the intervention of the Crimean War were reignited by the so-called “barley dispute”. Historian Franz Isaak has written that the dispute represented nothing less than the coming to life of the residual hatred from the church divisions of the first half of the 19th century, particularly by Oberschulz David A. Friesen and his supporters who pursued every opportunity to embarrass Ohrloff and/or diminish its power.

In the spring of 1858 a dispute broke out between two Anwohner in Ohrloff over two desjation of land, both claiming the crop of barley which the first had seeded. When the village authorities and Gebietsamt could not work out a settlement, the Lichtenau-Petershagen Gemeinde became involved because the second renter was their member. The other party involved the Ohrloff Gemeinde, and the dispute flared back and forth for two years--members were excommunicated and petitions filed with the Supervisory Committee in Odessa, which finally ruled in favour of Ohrloff.

The position of the KG regarding these matters has been described as “neutral but friendly.” Since their members lived amongst the members of the other denominations with countless ties of kinship they could not but be affected by the disputation. Inevitably the KG was embroiled by the dispute as a peacemaker.

On June 26, 1860, the KG ministerial sent a letter to the Aeltesten of the other denominations, stating “we cannot neglect to share something with you and to counsel you regarding our viewpoint.” The letter referred to the dangers of such disputations which might result in the loss of the freedoms and privileges which the Mennonites enjoyed in Russia. The benevolent authorities have “exhorted and warned in a brotherly manner...” but “will not fail to apply the harshest measures in order to remove those who in any way have been the cause of the uproar.” They encouraged the Aeltesten to work in “love, peace and unity” to develop a consensus to resolve the matter and that the “Kirchenkonvent” should not impose an arbitrary decision on individuals or on a particular church. All concerned were encouraged to put aside “all division and strife.”

The position of the KG as a neutral party in these matters did not go unnoticed and Privy Councillor Lange ordered the KG to provide an opinion regarding the resolution of the dispute. Although he asked to be excused from such a role by letter dated June 28, 1860, Johann Friesen was repeatedly summoned to attend the peace negotiations of the Aeltesten. The long-time Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, Bernhard Fast died in 1860, seemingly without being able to resolve the dispute. He was replaced by Johann Harder (1811-76), who had many family and cultural ties to the KG, being a grandson to Johann Plett (1765-1833).

With this fortuitous change in leadership it became possible for Johann Friesen to negotiate a peace settlement at a meeting of the Aeltesten in Alexanderwohl on August 5, 1860. The peace resolution was signed by both Friesen and Harder. Unfortunately their work was marred by an attempt of the other four Aeltesten to revoke the resolution. Aeltesten Harder and Friesen replied by affirming their previous position resulting in a defeat of sorts for Oberschulz David A. Friesen. The Oberschulz subsequently visited Johann Friesen in an attempt to invalidate the resolution of peace. But this was not successful, and Friesen's brother-in-law historian Franz Isaak reported that "Aeltester Johann Friesen was not the man who would allow himself to be misled and used" (page 154).

Within a year the struggle flared up again over the so-called Ohrloff church building dispute. Johann Neufeld, Halbstadt, had offered to build a new church in Neu-Halbstadt, which was completed in 1858. In the meantime Neufeld had become involved in the "barley" dispute and left Ohrloff to join the Lichtenau Gemeinde, attempting to take ownership of the new church building with him. This resulted in another round of accusations and complaints to the Supervisory Committee in Odessa with the Ohrloff Gemeinde squared off against the Oberschulz and the majority of the Kirchenkonvent.

A conference of the parties was held in Alexanderwohl, May 3, 1861. Again the KG was asked to assume a peacemaker role. On August 15, 1861, Johann Friesen and his brother Abraham gave a written recommendation affirming the settlement offer made by Johann Harder of Ohrloff.

However, the Kirchenkonvent endeavoured to establish a different resolution at a meeting on January 2, 1862. Consequently the KG filed a petition with the Gebietsamt and the Agricultural Society on February 4, 1862, acknowledging that they had given "His Excellency [the Privy Councillor] our pledge to put forth all possible efforts...in order to restore a true peace." But they could not as a matter of conscience accept the revised resolution which was reached, and requested to be excused from further involvement in the affair.

Because the KG was the only party not directly involved, they were not excused. In fact, the Gebietsamt made a further request that it provide a definitive statement of its views as to the ownership of the church. On February 13, 1862, Aeltester Johann Friesen replied that "it should belong to the Halbstadt and Ohrloff Gemeinde for whom it was built." After further exchanges and disputation, the Supervisory Committee made a ruling on August 1, 1862, that the Halbstadt church would belong to the Ohrloff Gemeinde and that it must reimburse Neufeld for two-thirds of the cost, more or less following the recommendation originally made by the KG.

The barley dispute and the church building dispute were finally concluded. They reflected the growing power of reactionary forces in the Molotschna coupled with their desire to humiliate the Ohrloff Halbstadt Gemeinde for its earlier dominance under Cornies.

Section 6.03: The Religious Wars.

In reality the ecclesiastical and political machinations centred around the Kirchenkonvent were insignificant compared to the underlying religious, social and economic problems which were soon to burst forth and dominate the stage.

The religious movement known as pietism had significant impact on Mennonites in Prussia as well as in Russia. The inherent incompatibility between the traditional Mennonite faith and Separatist-Pietism had frequently flared into open conflict, as demonstrated by the 1823 division of the GG caused by Aeltester Bernhard Fast as well as numerous other situations.

But the milder forms of pietism impacting on the Molotschna Colony during its first decades were soon replaced by a more virulent variety known as Separatist-Pietism. Professor Jung-Stilling, Württemberg, became the guru of the movement which declared all other churches to be of the devil and that believers needed to adopt its religious culture in order to obtain "salvation." Although there were numerous denominations who frequently had vigorous disagreements among themselves, Separatist-Pietist religious culture typically included legalistic salvation plans, deferral of the reign of Christ to a future age (dispensationalism), fabled endtimes teachings (millennialism), and the belief that they were the only "true" Christians.

The movement was somewhat disrupted by the failure of Johann Bengel's prophecy of the millennium in 1836, but typically this did not engender any particular scepticism within the movement. Jung-Stilling merely reinterpreted the prophecy with the date for the eminent millennium reset for 1881. Jung-Stilling set forth many of his prophecies in fictional form in the novel *Heimweh*.

The Gnadenfeld Gemeinde, under Aeltester Wilhelm Lange, had immigrated to the Molotschna in 1833. It had already adopted the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism in Prussia. Its members were also more Germanized in their dress and culture, preferring to speak High German instead of Low German, and openly expressing their disdain for the faith of their new neighbours. Gnadenfeld became the hotbed of Separatist-Pietist religious culture with Bible studies, mission support, and later a school. Gnadenfeld suffered a setback due to the moral lapse of its Aeltester in 1849. A school founded in Gnadenfeld in 1857 to propagate its religious ideas was closed in 1863 because of disputation among various pietist factions.

The most important proponent of Separatist-Pietism in Russia was Eduard Wüst (1818-59), a fiery minister from Württemberg. In 1845 he travelled to Russia to serve as a pastor to the Swabian separatists living south of the Molotschna. He had a dynamic preaching style focusing on joyous repentance and free grace, and his services attracted people from the adjoining colonies. Members of the Gnadenfeld congregation participated in these activities. They were soon joined by others who came to be known as the "Wüst Brethren", although they remained in their own congregations. Typically part of Wüst's congregation later seceded in a dispute over appropriate levels of exuberance and other rites common to Separatist-Pietist religious culture. Wüst died in 1859 deeply concerned over the bitter divisions among his followers.

Many in the Molotschna were influenced by these religious ideas which had a particular attraction to the disenfranchised and landless as well as among many village school teachers who saw in the personal quest for salvation hope for moral improvement in the community. Many of the adherents of the new religious culture expressed openly their disdain for the faith of their neighbours and brethren and objected to associating in their congregations with those whom they regarded as unregenerate or heathen.

On January 6, 1860, a group of 18 believers met in Elisabeththal, Molotschna, and issued a letter of secession in which they noted the decadence of the other churches and that "they alone were the elect and capable of forming" a new pure church. Predictably the Kirchenkonvent in the Molotschna opposed the new movement and referred the matter to the Gebietsamt. Only the Ohrloff Aeltester Harder refused to sign the letter of reference. Johann Friesen the KG Aeltester did not participate. Oberschulz David A. Friesen issued an edict instructing all mayors to prevent its adherents from meeting. The Ohrloff congregation could perhaps afford to be more tolerant as only few of its members were involved with the secessionists and many in its ranks were somewhat sympathetic. The KG was in a similar situation as none of its members were involved with the Separatists ("Ausgetretenen").

Faced with considerable social unrest, the Inspector of the Supervisory Committee requested the opinions of the Aeltesten who made up the Kirchenkonvent. The KG did not take part in the Kirchenkonvent but their opinion was specifically requested. In a letter of March 24, 1860, Aeltester Johann Friesen recommended that "no political or secular measures be taken against the movement and that, if necessary, church discipline be exercised according to 2 Thessalonians 3:14." The Ohrloff Aeltester Johann Harder gave a more detailed opinion favouring a tolerant approach.

On May 30, 1860 the Molotschna congregation elected Heinrich Hübner as elder and Jakob Bekker as minister. Johann Classen (1820-76) was one of the early leaders of the brethren and travelled frequently to St. Petersburg and elsewhere in support of their bid for recognition. Although originally referred to as the secessionists ("Ausgetretenen") they adopted the name "Brüdergemeinde". Similar influences had also been at work in the Chortitza Colony where Johann Loewen was converted to Separatist-Pietist religious culture in 1853 through reading the works of Hofacker. A Brüdergemeinde congregation was founded in Einlage in 1860 with Abraham Unger as an important leader.

The early period of the new church was marked by an exuberance movement in public worship known as the "Fröhliche Richtung". Worship services included dancing, beating of drums. James Urry has written "It was almost as if the excesses of behaviour which they had so roundly condemned in secular areas of colony life had been appropriated by the Brethren to express their own joy in spiritual renewal" (page 183). Freedom in grace was emphasized, which resulted in some moral lapses. There was also a considerable period of spiritual despotism, involving extreme banning and counter-banning, putting previous practice of the ban among Mennonites to shame. Eventually calmer heads prevailed and by 1865 a more moderate church governance was established.

The original membership of the Brüdergemeinde consisted largely of landless people and many moved to a new settlement in Kuban where they were offered free land. Much disputation continued in other new congregations such as Friedensfeld and in the Caucasus.

In 1868 Helmut Huebert was ordained as first elder of the Brüdergemeinde. In 1867 it held its first mission festival. By 1872 the Molotschna congregation had 200 members, compared to about 180 families in the KG. In 1874 the Brüdergemeinde acquired its first church building in Rudnerweide.

The Brüdergemeinde was only one of a number of schismatic groups to come out of the Separatist-Pietist movement in the Molotschna during the 1860s. One of these was the Templar Gemeinde also known as the “Jerusalemsfreunde”, who believed in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. This group broke away from the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde. The history of the Templars was marked by bitter disputes with Gnadenfeld, the Brüdergemeinde, and other factions among Separatist-Pietists. In 1863 its leader Lange was imprisoned where he languished seemingly forgotten by his Pietist friends. Finally a minister of the KG hearing about his plight ministered to the poor man in prison (Goertz, page 88).

Many Templars settled in the Caucasus. Around 1870 a group of Templars moved to Palestine where they established a settlement at Lydda.

Another group formed at this time was the Apostolic Brüdergemeinde founded by Herman Peters, Gnadenheim. Peters and a group of twenty families were part of the “exuberant” movement who started their own congregation when the Brüdergemeinde moved to regulate such activities. Later the Herman Peters group moved to Crimea and subsequently to Siberia. They were also known as the “bread breakers”.

Another schismatic group originating from the militant Separatist-Pietist movement was that of Klaas Epp (1838-1913) who moved to Russia in 1853 establishing the Am Trak settlement. Klaas Epp was the nephew of David Epp, Aeltester of the Heuboden Gemeinde in Prussia who had corresponded with the KG in 1835. Klaas Epp and his followers accepted Jung-Stilling and his novel *Heimweh* literally. In 1880 they embarked on what became known as the great trek, moving to Turkestan in eastern Asia where they expected to meet the Lord at His Second Coming. It has been said that Jung-Stilling’s novel, *Heimweh*, was eventually read as a second Bible among the Russian Mennonites, illustrating again the dangers of reading alien confessional books.

Section 6.04: The Landless Struggle.

Part of the dream of the immigrants moving to Russia in 1804 was the expectation of an abundant supply of good land for their children and children's children. These expectations were certainly satisfied in the case of the 367 families who settled in the Molotschna Colony in 1804/5 each of whom received a full allotment of 65 desjatien of land--175 acres. Although some settlers had many cattle, horses and the financial means to develop their farmsteads, and others only little, all were equal in terms of land ownership.

By 1841 the situation had changed in that 1700 families out of 2733 owned no land: 30% were Vollwirten and the remainder were landless ("Anwohner"), usually young married children, parents or workers living on small plots at the end of the village allotments. By 1867 there were 1620 landowners, 2617 Anwohners, which meant that 71 per cent were landless.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that although almost a quarter of the original Molotschna land allotment was still reserved for further growth, in reality large portions of the reserved lands were rented out to large estate owners at nominal rent. Many Anwohner attempted to improve their lot by renting small parcels of land from these "Landlords", often at rates ten times higher than their costs, explaining some of the huge mansions built during the 1880s and after. Although the tenant farmers had no vote in the village assembly, they were expected to pay an equal share of taxes, often levied on a per capita basis.

Historian Franz Isaak has written that "this state of affairs was a powerful incentive for dissatisfaction, disputation, and general social unrest" (Goertz, page 111). The entire Molotschna divided into two camps, the landowners against the landless. In desperation the landless turned to government officials and their elected representatives for help. However, the elected officials were those benefiting from the situation and the petition of the landless was rejected on the grounds that it would result in a loss of cheap labour for the landowners.

By 1863 the landless could no longer tolerate the exploitation and oppression. So a committee consisting of Jakob Doerksen, Franz Isaak, and Johann Fast was formed to represent their cause. A petition with 150 names was filed with the Supervisory Committee requesting immediate distribution of the reserved lands.

A Commission consisting of two representatives from each village prepared a submission dated February 1, 1864, which recommended that the land be subdivided in smaller parcels of 16 desjatien so that the Anwohner could farm the land from their existing holdings which generally represented all the equity they had. Unfortunately the landowning faction worked against these proposals recommending that the land be divided into half farms of 32 desjatien. This would mean that most Anwohner would be bankrupted as they would lose their existing holdings.

The Minister of State Domains now appointed Islavin to investigate the complaints. The Ohrloff Gemeinde under Aeltester Harder expressed itself in support of the proposals of the landless. On February 14, 1866 an Imperial Edict was issued requiring the distribution of 16,000 desjatien of reserve lands in allotments of 12 desjatien per Anwohner. Oberschulz David A. Friesen was also

removed from office, because of alleged irregularities of 133,000 rubles in the public accounts.

The landowners with the cooperation of individuals in the Supervisory Committee, were able to prevent the distribution of large portions of the reserved lands which they continued to use for themselves. The government was again forced to intervene and ordered the Commission to present final proposals which it did in 1869. But this was not the end of the matter. Many of the landless believed that the proposal for land distribution had been fraudulently altered with the number of landless families reduced to 1266 from 1563, each of whom was to get 12 desjatiens instead of the original 16. Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89), Halbstadt, a former KG-er, took up the cause of these families.

Thiessen was a successful merchant without a farm and thus classified as "landless". Thiessen accused the landowners of bribing government officials in order to manipulate the land settlement to their advantage. Thiessen made numerous trips to Petersburg to lobby government ministers on behalf of the landless, and wrote and published four booklets in support of their cause. He also became an advocate of the emigration movement. In 1874 he was exiled to Siberia for his efforts on behalf of the disenfranchised. In 1876 he bribed his way out of imprisonment and escaped from Russia with the secret police on his tail. He emigrated to the United States where he settled in Jansen, Nebraska as a member of the KG. Cornelius Krahn called Thiessen "A Mennonite Revolutionary" stating that "among the prophets and fearless fighters for the new dawn was A. Thiessen...[and that he did] influence the cause of justice and Christian love in a community that had almost forgotten what this ingredient was" (*Men. Life*, April, 1969, pages 73-77).

The situation of the landless in the Molotschna did improve. Some justice was eventually done. In the 1860s land became available because of the emancipation of the serfs which allowed many to lease parcels on their own or in private groups such as in the Crimea starting in 1860. A more significant improvement resulted from the development of a system for the purchase of large blocks of land for the settlement of new colonies. These provided opportunities for the landless to acquire land of their own. The Sagradovka Colony founded in 1872 was the first example of such a purchase by the Molotschna Colony.

Reference has previously been made to the more moderate course of developments in the Chortitza Colony. Chortitza acted earlier to alleviate the "landless" problem, particularly by the establishment of daughter colonies: Bergthal, Ignovkfa, Judenplan, Fürstenland, all of which helped to alleviate the problem. The Old Colony also had more of a craftsman and artisan tradition and by the late 19th century had become predominant in manufacturing.

Unfortunately the landless problem was never completely solved for the Russian Mennonites. Even in 1910 at the pinnacle of the power and wealth of the Commonwealth, no less than 80 per cent of Mennonite families were landless, working for wealthier neighbours, or eking a living on some new settlement in Siberia. Even the Mennonites recently emigrated to Manitoba recognized the problem and provided a steady stream of charitable assistance beginning as early as the 1880s.



Edward Wüst (1818-59), a fanatical Separatist-Pietist totally committed to propagation of Separatist-Pietist religious culture and language.

Proselytizers like Wüst were prepared to go to any length to turn alienated young people and marginalized adults against their families and communities. Photo courtesy of Goertz, The Molotschna Settlement, page 85.



Circa 1880. Oberschulz David A. Friesen (1807-93) and wife Helena Klassen (1812-92), Halbstadt. David A. Friesen served as the Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony from 1848 to 1865, a record 17 years. He was often aligned with the landowners against the landless, with conservatives against progressives. His wife Helena Klassen came from a family with a public service tradition, her father Johann Klassen (1785-1841) and uncle Johann Regier (1802-42), has served as Oberschulzen covering the years 1827 to 1842. Helena's brother Abraham (1828-1906), was a KG minister. Photo courtesy of Schroeder, Ruszlanddeutsche, page 18.

Section 6.05: The Battle over Education.

The school system became a battle ground between conservatives who saw the primary function of education as supplementing and supporting parents in instilling Christian values in the children, and the proponents of the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism who saw the schools firstly as an opportunity to seduce innocent young minds against the faith of their parents, and secondly as primarily a tool to provide certain learning skills.

Education was a sensitive issue with a long history among Mennonites. In 1536 a young priest, Menno Simons (1496-1561), took issue with the Reformation Church for misinterpreting and subverting the plain meaning of the Gospels. How else was it possible for a millennium of killing, persecuting and oppression of the poor to have taken place in the name of Christ. The learned Doctors of Philosophy and leaders of the Church always devised some sophisticated doctrine to circumvent the simple command of Jesus, "Love your enemies as yourself," namely, "...thou shalt not kill."

Persecuted by Church and State, Menno's followers fled eastward settling in the Vistula Delta in West Prussia, modern-day Poland. By the 1780s orthodox Mennonites again felt threatened, this time from fellow believers who were turning for renewal to Separatist Pietism, a religious movement originating in the Lutheran Church, not unlike American Revivalism (later Fundamentalism). The Separatist Pietist movement stressed the importance of "inward" spiritual life but was very categorical and considered the Lutheran church to be fallen and of the devil. It emphasized millennial teachings whereby Russia was considered the haven of the church in the end times where Christ would gather His church in anticipation of the Second Coming.

As a young minister of the Danzig Gemeinde in Prussia, KG founder Klaas Reimer, observed that these trends were rapidly leading to "pride, arrogance and unrighteousness" in the church. In his book *Causes and History of the Emigration*, Bergthaler Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) noted how the sons of the wealthy in Danzig, West Prussia were sent to advanced schools in Danzig and Berlin and that when they returned they were often arrogant and had lost all respect for their faith and culture.

The reforms of Johann Cornies, by and large, were sound and the great majority of residents in the Molotschna benefited. However, the reformed system, like its predecessor, was also open to abuse, although these deficiencies did not come forth until after the conservatives had emigrated to America in 1874. Three teachers, Voth, Heese, and Franz, illustrate some of its best and worst characteristics.

Tobias Voth (1791-?), was converted to the teachings of Jung-Stilling and became a fervent advocate for Separatist Pietist religious culture. In 1822 he became the first teacher of the Ohrloff Verein school, a teacher training facility. He taught his students that the faith of their parents was invalid and that they were not Christians and also tried to subvert their communities using evening classes and mission prayer meetings as devices, instigating much dissatisfaction and disputation.

Heinrich Heese (1787-1868) was a teacher who established the Chortitza Zentralschule, or secondary school. When his strong arm tactics encountered opposition he made the famous statement about the Old Colony Chortitzer Mennonites that “their poverty and lack of understanding had transformed them into a lower form of creature” (Heinrich Heese, “Autobiography,” *MQR*, April 1969, page 67). Heese was also known as a fervent Russian patriot whose poetry lauding the Russian Czar seemed almost fanatical from today’s perspective.

Heinrich Franz (1812-89) was educated in Prussia by the Pietist Bishop Lange of the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde. Like both Voth and Heese, Franz lacked any university or special teacher training. He was a competent pedagogue known for his outstanding work in German and arithmetic, though extremely pedantic. Franz dominated religious music in the home, school, and church through his *Coralbuch with notes*, first published in 1860. He was a harsh disciplinarian, referred to as cruel even by historian Peter M. Friesen, who typically lauded anything ever done by an adherent of Separatist-Pietism. Strict military discipline became a trademark of later Russian Mennonite school teachers.

When Baron von Korff came to the Bergthal colony during the 1860s and offered them secular textbooks with pictures, Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe wisely declined. He knew that the intention was eventually to assume a role in the education of their children. The assessment was proven correct by the Russification program which the Imperial government implemented shortly thereafter.

Whatever belonged to higher education was seen as leading to “sophistry, unbelief, and corruption of the church, for knowledge puffeth up. 1 Cor. 8:1” (Balzer, “Faith and Reason”). In German such highmindedness was referred to as “Hochgelehrsamkeit”.

The truth of this statement was observed in many from among the Russian Mennonites such as historian Peter M. Friesen who attended institutions of higher learning such as Separatist-Pietist Bible Schools in Europe and elsewhere and returned to their home communities filled with disdain for their traditional faith and who commenced fervent proselytising for all manner of fabled endtimes teachings based on the novels of Jung Stilling. It was fortunate for these people that they preached extemporaneously as had they carefully composed and written out their sermons as conservative ministers did, their descendants would be extremely embarrassed at the teachings they propagated so fanatically, which were proven totally false by the effluxion of time.

Advocates of the Cornies reforms conveniently forgot that these measures caused immense social disruption and disputation when they were implemented in the Molotschna and Old Colony, alienating the majority of the population. In setting rigid standards Cornies inhibited the creativity of the best of the pioneer school teachers and prohibited traditional Mennonite art forms such as *Schönschreiben* and *Fraktur* which he regarded as sissified. These advocates also ignored some of the negative aspects of the post-Cornies pedagogue: they were known as frightfully strict and almost abusive disciplinarians, many of their students became vulnerable to a fawning Russian nationalism and/or pan-Germanism, many fell victims to the fanciful teachings of German Separatist-Pietism, and, worst of all, they disdained the Plaut-dietsch language and Low German culture

which had once dominated commerce and socio-economic life in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea during medieval times.

It was understandable that the majority of parents in the community would be genuinely opposed such educational “advancements.” In most communities such attempts to subvert the minds of the village children would have met with immediate physical retribution. Because of their pacifist beliefs the orthodox Mennonites were unable to respond in that fashion; being powerless to act they were extremely vulnerable to such insidious attacks and consequently a popular target.

By the 1870s the conservative majority among the Russian Mennonites had already undergone a century of struggle over the issue of education and schools. They had experienced challenges from members of their “own” faith community who had adopted pietist religious culture and used the educational system to turn their children against them and their faith. Conservative Mennonites had also been challenged by governments both in Prussia and Russia who saw it as necessary to control the minds of the children in the furtherance of the modern nation-state and to generate willing cannon fodder for their military machines.

The early Separatist-Pietists in the Molotschna were mainly from the landless class and thus the founding of the Brüdergemeinde had strong socio-economic characteristics. The establishment in any community will generally not be the first to start a revolution to overthrow the system from which they are benefiting. But the early membership of the Brüdergemeinde also included a number of young village teachers, who although landless and impoverished, had great influence over the innocent minds of their students. This illustrated again the dangers for any community in engaging teachers for their children who were not thoroughly indoctrinated in the principles of their faith. In fact, if such individuals are not available it would be better to hire non-Mennonites with a passion for teaching rather than those of questionable loyalty or those unwilling to take the time to study the precepts of their own faith first, before running after the popular religious fads and fancies of the day.

On the other hand proponents of the conservative faith tradition among Mennonites must remember their obligation and duty as parents to instill in their children not only a thorough knowledge of their faith and the history of their confession, but also a love for their people and culture, and above all, a vision of the faith which inspired their forebears in the pursuit of truth and the Gospel. These proponents should also remember that those people in the history of the Mennonite faith who succeeded in articulating that vision and furthering its work generally had at least the equivalent education and/or better than that of their contemporaries and used that knowledge as a sacred trust. This was entirely distinguishable from “Hochgelehrsamkeit” which was a shallow superficial knowledge often coupled with fanatical ideas such as taught by Separatist-Pietist Bible Schools in Switzerland and Germany during the 19th century who often imbued their students with false teachings and disdain for their elders.



*Heinrich Heese (1787-1868).
Photo courtesy of Goertz,
The Molotschna Settlement,
page 121.*



*Heinrich Franz (1812-89).
Photo courtesy of Goertz,
The Molotschna Settlement,
page 122.*

Section 6.06: End of the Paradigm.

The proponents of Separatist-Pietist religious culture among the Russian Mennonites have painted a very bleak picture of religious and moral conditions during the 1860s. These views were, of course, grossly exaggerated and patently self-serving as Separatists later endeavoured to justify their separatism in light of the horrible social dysfunction, estranged families and fractured communities left in the wake of their fanatical actions. For decades members of the same family refused to talk to each other because some had adopted Pietist-Separatist religious culture and others refused to condemn everything they held dear including their parents and their beliefs at the mere mention of the word Jung-Stilling.

In reality there were many thousands of fine upstanding Christians among all the Gemeinden in the Molotschna who did not deserve the disdain and arrogance which they incurred from the Separatists. With the 1874 emigration many of the devout families who still held to conservative religious views emigrated to America leaving the remainder vulnerable to being overcome by Separatist-Pietist religious culture. Many integrated with groups which had adopted millennialist teachings and other congregations adopted such teachings as younger leaders influenced by such ideas came into leadership.

The Ohrloff Aeltester Johann Harder was firmly opposed to Separatist-Pietist millennialism and advocated the evangelical view that the millennium had commenced with the birth of Jesus. In fact, Harder assisted his cousin, KG Aeltester Peter P. Toews, to publish a booklet by Peter J. Twisck, *Das Friedensreich Christi*, as a bulwark against the inroads of false teaching. But Harder's successor, Goertz believed in pietist chiliasm. When evangelist Bernhard Harder espoused these views in his sermon at Goertz's ordination, half of the audience walked out during the service, indicating that many rank and file members in the Ohrloff Gemeinde were still firmly in control of their senses and had not yet succumbed to such fanatical beliefs.

The situation changed quickly. Bernhard Harder (1832-84), a cousin of Johann, the Ohrloff Aeltester, was a school teacher who became the best known evangelist among the Russian Mennonites. Thousands dedicated themselves to Christ through Bernhard Harder's preaching. He was a confirmed millennialist propagating Württemberg Separatism. Harder never joined the Brüdergemeinde although many others did as a result of his preaching.

By 1883 the remnants of the "old" Gemeinden met as a Conference for the first time. They acquired the name "Kirchliche", literally "the churched" or those upholding the spiritual efficacy of the old-line Gemeinden. In reality, the teachings and religious culture of Separatist Pietism were widely accepted among the "Kirchliche" by the turn of the century, and it became an older somewhat more reserved sister church of Brüdergemeinde, although considerable open hostility between the two continued well into the 20th century.

Another church development which should be mentioned is the formation of the Alliance Church in 1905. The Alliance church movement was an attempt to foster a more tolerant spirit in a denomination which was to be neither Brüdergemeinde nor Kirchliche, but also based largely on Separatist-Pietist religious culture.



Driving across the Russian steppe ("stappe") - sketch by Steinbach author and publisher Arnold Dyck, Collected Works, Volume One, page 197/East Reserve 125, page 7. The flared wagon box and three horse team known as a trioka were a common sight in southern Russia.

A. Dyck

By 1874 the population of the Molotschna was 30,000, and the total Russian Mennonite population was 55,000. Of these 18,000 immigrated to America in 1874 to 1876.

The Russian Mennonite commonwealth reached its zenith in 1910 with a population of 100,000. The 1917 Revolution heralded the Mennonite holocaust during which 35,000 perished in the Soviet inferno. In 1944 35,000 fled to the West behind the retreating Wehrmacht. 23,000 of these refugees were later expatriated and shipped back to the Soviet Union in box cars where they languished in Siberian labour camps until the 1960s. During Glasnost in the 1980s and 90s thousands fled to Germany where they settled in areas like Bielefeld not far from Saxony and East Friesland from whence many of their ancestors had originated half a millennium earlier.

During their 70 years of tribulation and persecution by the Soviet oppressor, God worked many miracles and there was a flowering of faith comparable to the golden age of the Dutch Mennonite Church in the 16th century.

In reflecting upon the social and religious issues which divided the Russian Mennonites during the 1850s and 60s one is struck by the dangers of fanaticism particularly in religion. If even a small portion of the energy expended by the Separatist-Pietists in chasing after every new edict and command issued by the spiritual gurus in Württemberg had been spent on learning about their own faith and dealing with their own morality, much of the factiousness and disputation which marked Russian Mennonite history during the last half of the 19th century need never have taken place. Many families were torn apart and church communities fractured suffering horribly from their own kin and co-religionists because of nothing more than senseless fanaticism and inexcusable ignorance.

For Further Reading:

Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education in Russia," in John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia* (Altona, 1989), pages 75-97.

Chapter Seven: The Kleine Gemeinde 1850-66

Section 7.01: The Peacemaker 1850-64.

The period 1850-66 was one of paradoxes for the KG being marked both by numerical growth and physical expansion. At the same time, the KG was fully integrated into society and no issue which affected the Molotschna could fail to affect it. Although the positive trends enjoyed under the leadership of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, continued throughout the decade, the cultural and religious turbulence of the era--the onslaughts by Separatist-Pietism, ecclesiastical disputation, and the landless struggle, did impact inexorably upon the KG. Coupled with festering internal problems, these forces eventually resulted in a major division in 1866.

Like elsewhere in the Molotschna the KG also experienced a changing of the guard in terms of leadership. In 1847 Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, son of former GG minister Johann Friesen, Rosenort, was elected as Aeltester to replace his uncle Abraham Friesen. The overlapping Aeltestership was intended for once to avoid the ordination problem which had been experienced twice previously.

The old guard was gone--Wiebe, Friesen, Balzer and Reimer--as were most of the early members of the reform movement, replaced by younger people, many by now second and third generation KG-ers. The denomination had also benefited from a steady stream of new members, both by transfer from other Molotschna churches and also from among new immigrants from Prussia, bringing in new ideas and vitality. Only Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, brother to Aeltester Abraham, first elected as deacon in 1824, continued to serve well into the 1860s, becoming a respected Ohm and senior member of the ministerial.

The new ministerial included: Abraham Friesen (1807-91), Neukirch, the new Aeltester's older brother; Heinrich Enns (1801-81), Fischau; Johann Dueck (1801-66), Muntau; deacon Klaas F. Friesen (1818-71), Neukirch, another brother to the Aeltester; ministers Peter W. Friesen (1815-92), Tiege, and Peter Thiessen (1808-73), Schönau, and deacons Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), Tiege and Jakob W. Friesen (1808-89), Blumstein. The latter four were all sons or sons-in-law of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, a sign of the tremendous respect held for the latter.

The 1850s were certainly years during which the KG enjoyed a significant degree of acceptance as it completed the process of moving from being an infant conventicle struggling for survival, to respected but cautious acceptance, and moving on from there to being considered one of the senior Gemeinden in the Molotschna whose voice was listened to carefully by colony administrators and government officials.

Even before the commencement of the decade, Aeltester Johann Friesen was faced with a challenge from Peter Thiessen (1808-73), a new minister elected in 1849. On December 25, Thiessen made a strong presentation to the brotherhood regarding his conflict with the Gemeinde with the result that he was re-

moved from his office the next day, and on the 16th of June, 1850, he was voted out of the Gemeinde.

Many similar matters arose in the Gemeinde during the 1850s, all of which were carefully recorded by minister Johann Dueck (1801-66), Muntau (*Leaders*, pages 449-98). In reviewing Rev. Dueck's ministerial journal it is evident that the implementation of evangelical discipline was a carefully measured response to acknowledged and confessed sins, applied only after due process in a democratic forum. In the majority of cases the measures achieved the intended purpose of assisting a wandering soul to find a penitent heart and full reconciliation with the Gemeinde. Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), Tiege, son of Ohm Klaas, for example, was removed from office as deacon on February 12, 1852, for accounting irregularities.

The KG also provided aid for others in need. On April 10, 1849, a commendation from the Supervisory Committee was read to the brotherhood, declaring thanks "...for grain which had been provided to the Jews." On January 27, 1852 the KG held a collection for the Holzsteinische Gemeinde "...which had been impoverished because of war."

Like all other congregations in the Molotschna, the KG was affected by the Crimean War in 1853 when Britain, France and Turkey attacked Russia laying siege to the naval base at Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula, and bringing the ugly spectre of war to within two hundred miles of the Mennonite Colonies. All landowners were required to take part in the "podwodden" and there were numerous stories about the horrors of war witnessed by the young men who drove the wagons and who in some cases experienced personal injury.

One of these, Diedrich Isaak (1827-1902), later of Grünfeld, Manitoba, was wounded during the course of his duties when a grenade exploded, fragmenting the top of his skull. Peter Klassen (1837-55) was forced to serve as a wagoner in 1855. He "was ill when he returned and shortly passed away." His mother Sarah died the same day and they were buried in one grave. Peter was the son of Franz Klassen (b. 1801), Wirtschaft 18, Neukirch, 1835, and brother to Anna Klassen (1839-1927), wife of KG minister Gerhard P. Goossen, Grünfeld.

Heinrich R. Brandt (1838-1909), later a pioneer in Steinbach, Manitoba, was between 16 and 18 years of age and also had to haul military supplies for the Imperial Army. He later told his children of some of his experiences: "...one night when a bomb had rolled into camp the whole camp got up and fled in short order. Often while coming into camp with provisions he had seen scattered boots, a hand or other parts of fallen soldiers. He had to get used to seeing such things" (*Brandt Reunion*, page 14-15). The extensive description of the "podwodden" experience written by Heinrich b. Friesen (1837-1926), later of Inman, Kansas, has already been referred to (see Section 6.1).

On January 10, 1854, the KG consented to a voluntary collection for the nursing care of wounded soldiers. The war also impacted the KG as a number of its members died from the typhus epidemic which followed in its wake. These included Jakob S. Wiebe (1799-1856) and his second wife (Justina Friesen (1816-56), Schönau, who died within a week of each other. Jakob Wiebe was a brother to minister Heinrich Wiebe (1794-1838), Tiege, already mentioned. Another cou-

ple suffering the same fate was Isaak Loewen (1815-56) and Anna Wiebe (1819-56), Schönau. He was the son of the venerable Isaak Loewen (1787-1873), Lindenau.

Being restititional in its theological disposition meant that the KG held the view that they were only one among other Gemeinden who shared the vision of reestablishing the New Testament church. When immigrants arrived from Prussia, KG-ers would often be there to greet them, always hoping that they might be people of similar beliefs and/or that they had brought some ancient writings from Holland and Prussia not before seen, and if so, they collected and translated these, if appropriate.

When a letter from David Nuszbaum of Lagaht, Bern, Switzerland, arrived unexpectedly, it created considerable interest, so much so that an extensive reply was written by the KG ministerial dated December 2, 1856. The response was of great interest as it provided an exceptionally fine self-portrait of the KG. It described their physical environment, their faith, various aspects of their church polity and governance, ordinances, and a reference to the canon of devotional literature (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 148-153).

Building on the groundwork laid by Abraham Friesen, the KG was drawn, albeit largely unwillingly, into an important role as mediator in the Molotschna during a turbulent period. During the separation of the Brüdergemeinde in 1860, the so-called barley dispute, and Halbstadt church building dispute, the KG continued its peacemaker role.

The letter from the KG ministerial to the Gemeinden in the Molotschna dated March 25, 1860, admonishing all parties to pursue peace with each other has already been referred to in Section 6.1. With respect to the secession of the Brüdergemeinde, KG Aeltester Peter P. Toews noted that "The Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde was also asked for his advice and approval in order to hinder these people. This however the Aeltester politely declined as we have seen in the foregoing writing....These secessionists however teach that Holy Communion should be given only to the true believers and accordingly call the rites of communion of our Gemeinde a devil's service" (*Storm and Triumph*, page 153).

The endeavour of the Kirchenkonvent was to work towards interdiction of the secessionists by legal process and eventually, if possible, their banishment to Siberia. For this plan to succeed, they required the endorsement or approval of all the Gemeinden in the Molotschna, including the KG. The text of the reply by Aeltester Johann Friesen dated March 25, 1860, stated as follows:

"Declaration to the Molotschna Mennonite Gebietsamt at Halbstadt;"

"We have been asked by Peter Schmidt, member of the [Agricultural] Society, for a declaration of our position with respect to certain members of their Gemeinde who have seceded. We have little to advise and declare which would add to what we are taught by the Apostle, in 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 'And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed'. Also see the further declaration of the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 11:32, where he stated that such disobedient ones should be judged and proved by the Gemeinde, in order that they would ultimately not

have to be condemned together with the world. Other similar references with respect to this matter could be brought forward from the Word of God.”

“However, in accordance with 1 Corinthians 5:12 we are not to judge those who are without us and as there are no members of our Gemeinde among these secessionists, we do not wish to express ourselves further in this regard.”

“We have also undertaken the labour of discussing this matter personally with them, and have tried to dissuade them from their intended action, which however did not seem to have much effect on them. Therefore we request that you do not take offense if we gladly refrain from becoming involved in this matter, and not take part in a matter with which we are not totally familiar, and which is foreign to us. We would gladly be of service to you in any matter that is not contrary to the Word of God.”

“In all other respects, please consider me to be your most subordinate friend.”

“Neukirch, on the 25th of March, 1860, *Aeltester Johann Friesen*”

The reply by Johann Friesen effectively quashed any hope which the Kirchenkonvent might have had to utilize the legal process to banish the secessionists from the Colonies.

The role which Johann Friesen and Johann Harder played as peacemakers in these lamentable disputations stood to their eternal credit. Friesen has already received some credit for his work with respect to the barley dispute. In 1874 Peter P. Toews wrote, “As Aeltester Johann Friesen was repeatedly summoned to attend the conferences in order to assist in the peace negotiations, a resolution of peace was achieved through his efforts.” Johann Harder played a more prominent role in the matter of the secessionists.

On February 24, 1861, minister Heinrich Enns, Fischau, wrote a letter to Christian Schmutz, who had written in the *Mennonitische Blaetter* objecting to the collection of money for a Menno Simon’s memorial and a theological school in his honour. Enns by now was the leading minister of the KG and chosen to reply on its behalf. The intent of the letter was to express appreciation to Schmutz whose views on the issue apparently mirrored those of the KG, “...to send you this letter in order to impart to you our deepest joy that there are still Gemeinden in Baden that do not agree with the new legalism and works-righteousness” which is what Enns called the fanatical endeavours of the Separatist-Pietists. Enns continued, “Your understanding of the Holy Scriptures is also our understanding and our convictions and principles.”

Enns questioned whether such a school was even necessary, “For we are convinced that in the Gemeinde of God, which is founded upon the immovable cornerstone which is Jesus Christ, and whose members are the living building blocks from which are built the spiritual house and holy priesthood, there always have been and always will be men for the building up of the Gemeinde without first having had to prepare themselves by theological studies.” But the greater issue was the questions shared about Schmutz and the KG as to how genuine the commitment of the proponents of the theological school was to the actual writings and teachings of Menno Simons and “consequently such celebra-

tions and memorials, though they be covered and clad in the most beautiful garments, will not be useful or beneficial in any way.”

The resolution of the Halbstadt building dispute in 1862 and the prominent role played by Johann Friesen has already been mentioned. Another interesting event of 1862 was the immigration to the Molotschna of David Epp, the minister from Heuboden, Prussia, who had corresponded with Heinrich Balzer in 1835. Epp exerted tremendous pressure to be allowed to preach in the KG worship service and was finally allowed to do so with predictable results. Peter P. Toews noted that if Heinrich Balzer had still been alive, this whole exercise would not have been necessary as David Epp was “very badly deluded.”

A traumatic incident occurred in 1863 when widower Heinrich Loewen (1830-63), Tiegenhagen, left the assemblies of the KG to join Ohrloff as he wanted to marry for the second time, doing so over the tearful protestations of his elderly father, Isaak Loewen, Lindenau. A short time later (June 2), Heinrich was killed by a bolt of lightning as he sat between two friends. “That he was deeply remorseful because of his departure from the Gemeinde and regarding his transgression, was evidenced by the fact that on the day of his death he had opened his *Gesangbuch* to sing No. 660. This whole story is described in detail in a book written by his father Isaak Loewen (published in *Leaders*, pages 530-554). It is also worthy of note... that B[ernhard] Harder had said to one of our brethren, that he was still trembling from the shock of that stroke of lightning” (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 157-8).

On February 2, 1864, a minister Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Nikolaidorf, later Schwesterthal, Crimea, came over to the KG. He was an intelligent devout man, formerly a school teacher in Prangenau in his younger years. In 1874 he immigrated and settled in Grünfeld, Manitoba.

On February 16 and 23, 1864, the aged Ohm Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, was voted out of his office, because of a distrust of fellow minister Johann Dueck, Muntau. Klaas Friesen had become blind in 1863. His friend, Ohm Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), was of the opinion that this might have caused his dissatisfaction which was totally out of character for him.

Although the membership of the KG remained relatively small with some two hundred to two hundred and fifty baptized members in 1860, it remained fairly consistently at three per cent of the Molotschna population.



The Wirtschaft of Heinrich Loewen (1830-63), Tiegenbagen, Molotschna. The photograph was taken by his son Heinrich F. Loewen (1862-1935), a well-to-do farmer and preacher from Meade, Kansas, who travelled back to Russia to visit the old homeland. Since Heinrich Loewen Sr. had married Anna Fast (1824-62), widow of Klaas Brandt (1815-57), a wealthy Vollwirt from Tiegenbagen, these substantial buildings probably originally belonged to Brandt. Photo courtesy of Loewen, Family, Church and Market, page 127. Heinrich Loewen Sr. was killed by a bolt of lightning as he sat between two friends visiting at the home of Jakob Reimer.



Jakob T. Barkman (1848-1935) and Aganetha Giesbrecht (1848-1918) Rosenfeld, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, later Steinbach, Canada. Photo courtesy of Loewen, Family, Church and Market, page 127. Aganetha was the daughter of Steinbach, Manitoba, matriarch Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht (1825-1912), see Section 10.06.

Section 7.02: Physical Expansion.

The growing legitimacy of the KG congregation during the 1850s coincided with a time of increasing prosperity. The opening of Black Sea ports during the 1830s had opened the door to a cash grain market which encouraged specialization in grain farming, particularly winter wheat. The humble mixed farms of the 1820s had given way to sophisticated commercial farming operations, fully integrated into the world economy. Since the birth rate in Mennonite settlements was such that the population doubled every 25 years, land shortages developed.

The strategy of Vollwirt farmers, those owning a full village farm of 175 acres, was to provide an adequate land base enabling each child to establish themselves on their own farm. The situation required an increasing supply of land. During the 1840s and 50s the source was found in villages opened on the reserved land in the eastern portion of the Molotschna Colony. The 1835 census coupled with available family records provides considerable detail regarding the pattern of settlement of children as parcels and resources became available. By 1860 only 25 per cent of Molotschna residents belonged to the envied Vollwirt class and so achieving the status of Vollwirt was an accomplishment in itself, an impossible dream for the majority.

This also resulted in changing settlement patterns. Where the original members of the KG had lived in the older villages along the Molotschna River such as Petershagen, Blumstein, Tiede, Lindenau, etc. the next generation were often found in more recently established villages such as Kleefeld, Margenau, Prangenau, Nikolaidorf, Contentiusfeld, etc. The family of Isaak Loewen (1787-1873), Lindenau, provided an example of the implementation of the Vollwirt land strategy. All 13 of his children acquired full farms and were found in Schönau, Mariawohl, Paulsheim, Blumstein, Waldheim, Kleefeld, Hierschau, Tiegenhagen and Alexanderwohl. The third generation KG farmer often found himself in the new settlements outside the Molotschna Colony, to be discussed below.

These strategies were also promoted by the KG itself through a policy allowing interest free loans from the congregation treasury for young farmers. In other cases, well-to-do individuals were encouraged to co-sign for such loans and/or extend loans themselves. The KG at this time still practised the policy that it underwrote all the loans of its members. Although the KG probably had an average of two-thirds who were landowners, compared to a third or less for the general population, these were only individual measures and not of much assistance to the landless.

This was a time of great unrest among the poor in the Molotschna over the landless struggle which influenced the KG as well. In 1863 the ministerial received a petition signed by many of its poor requesting that the congregation acquire land and make it available to them. The idea was that the KG would establish daughter colonies or settlements exclusively for its own people. The denomination was in the enviable financial position of being able to implement such a solution independently of the Colony. These proposals coincided with the emancipation of the serfs in Russia in 1861. As a result much land became

available for purchase or rent outside the colonies. At the same time, these measures made an inexhaustible supply of cheap labour available to Mennonite farmers as the serfs were released from the estates where they had lived in feudal servitude.

The first outward settlement of Mennonites was in the Crimea starting as early as 1860. Mennonites had become familiar with the area through "podwodden" in the Crimean War. The first and most important settlement was in Karrassan where a Mennonite church was established in 1862.

A group in the Feodosischen District in the north central area of the Crimea "had assembled itself" to the KG in 1863. Annenfeld ("Annovka" in Russian) was originally a Mohammadan village called "Schuscha". The land in the area was flat and the soil a sandy loam, lighter than that of the Molotschna. The village was purchased by a group of settlers from the Molotschna under the leadership of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), Ohrloff, Molotschna. Instead of getting rich as they had dreamed, the group experienced grave disappointment and sought spiritual solace. Wiebe now remembered the holy life and modest piety of a former employer in the Molotschna, one of the leading brethren of the KG.

In 1861 three Wall brothers, including Abraham (b. 1823) originally from Ohrloff but later Schönau, Molotschna, purchased a block of land in the Crimea where two villages, Bruderfeld and Schwesterthal, were established, the latter 17 verst from Annenfeld. Abraham had three daughters, namely, Anna - Mrs. Aron Schellenberg; Maria - Mrs. Johann M. Fast; and Katharina - Mrs. Franz Janzen. Abraham's sister Katarina Wall (1825-70) married Jakob Wiens (1813-93), and moved to the Crimea. Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Nikolaidorf, Molotschna, was among the group settling in Schwesterthal. He wrote "On May 1, 1861, we moved to the Crimea on land known as Karatebell....we purchased 4700 desjationen from Maria Restewitsch at 20 ruble silver per desjation. Of this I purchased 100 desjationen....," a double farm. Baerg was elected as a minister in Bruderfeld on September 11, 1862. After a period of genuine soul searching and severe spiritual turmoil he joined the KG in 1864.

A number of KG members had moved to the area on their own. In 1860 the family of Abraham S. Kornelsen (1806-92) moved to a nearby village, Hoffnungsberg. In 1866 their son Abraham married Maria Wiens, daughter of Jakob. Peter Wohlgemuth (b.1805) was another pioneer in the Crimea, originating in Wollé, Poland. They emigrated to the Crimea in 1863, settling in the village of Johannesruh, some 30 verst northwest of Annenfeld. Accordingly the KG community in the Crimea involved at least five villages: Annenfeld, Hoffnungsberg, Johannesruh, Schwesterthal and Bruderfeld.

In due course Jakob A. Wiebe made contact with Aeltester Johann Friesen who organized the various groups as a KG congregation with Baerg as the first minister. Wiebe was elected on December 3, 1867, as the second minister for the Crimean congregation.

At the same time a much larger movement was taking place to Markusland, a leasehold settlement located 15 verst east of the Chortitza Colony across the Dneiper River from the village of Einlage. The settlement was originally estab-

lished by the KG to allow the young people in the congregation to obtain their own land. Isaak Harms (1811-91), Lindenau, was one of the primary instigators of this settlement putting up his own property as security to enable the transaction to proceed. Some of the landless farmers such as Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), later pioneer merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba, did very well at Markus and quickly established themselves as prosperous members of the community.

Two villages, Andreasfeld and Friedrichsthal, were established with the first families moving out from the Molotschna in 1863. A congregation was formally organized on November 23, 1864, with the election of Isaak Friesen, Fischau, as minister with 45 votes and Peter Wiebe, Schönau, as deacon with 29 votes. A total of 78 votes were cast in this election held among the brethren at Markus.

The Markusland lease was only in effect for six years and so a more permanent solution was required. The answer was found in the Borosenko area, 30 verst (kilometres) northwest of Nikopol where a block of 18,000 acres of land was purchased for 184,110 ruble, about 10 ruble per acre.

The petition within the KG for the purchase of land on behalf of its landless farmers has already been mentioned in connection with the Markusland settlement. This required that everyone in the Gemeinde execute the "Gemeindespruch" or Deed covering the requisite legal documentation. The issue of whether the church should become involved in the acquisition of land caused considerable controversy but was endorsed by the leadership and implemented. In the end some land was purchased and some leased commencing in 1865 and the balance over the next three years.

According to one source 120 families settled in Borosenko *en masse* in 1865. Other sources indicated that the move took place over a period of years. Although the Markus lease only expired in 1869 some families had already relocated to Borosenko in anticipation. Others such as Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), did so in 1869.

Steinbach ("Kuzmitskoye"), a village along the Bazavluk River, was the only village shown in a military map from 1866, and is believed to be first of the Borosenko villages founded. The village included about 20 KG families and some other colonists. A great deal of information about life in Steinbach as well as in Borosenko is available through the journals of Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92), son of Klaas Reimer, KG founder. Abraham's journals provide an absolutely amazing window into 19th century life on the Russian steppes. The village of Steinbach was also important as six families moved to Manitoba in 1874 where they reestablished the village, which would become the eighth largest city in the Province.

The village of Blumenhoff ("Alexandrovka") was located 10 kilometres southeast, along the Solenaya River. The land in the vicinity of the village is quite hilly which may have inspired the name. It had one long row of premises with a shorter second row built at right angles to the main street at the lower end near a depression or slough. It had as many establishments as a two-rowed village meaning it may have included 30-40 families. The importance of the village was

evident when the KG built its first worship house there in 1872. Blumenhoff became the main centre of the KG in Borosenko, and being the home of Aeltester Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), his congregation was frequently referred to as the "Blumenhoff Gemeinde". The village was transplanted to Manitoba when the families of brothers-in-law Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) and Johann Warkentin (1817-86) established a village three miles north of Steinbach in 1875 named "Blumenhof".

The village of Heuboden ("Maryerka") was located three kilometres north-east of Blumenhoff, along the Solenaya River. The land here was more level and the village itself was laid out perpendicular to the river flats which were at least a kilometre wide at this point, explaining the name of Heuboden--hay bottom or hay meadow, very appropriate to the physical landscape. Heuboden was a village settled by the Friesens Gemeinde and became the heart of the Gemeinde of Abraham L. Friesen, whose congregation was consequently referred to as the "Heuboden Gemeinde". Some of the older well-established farmers of the KG purchased additional land which they used to induce their children to settle beside them. David Klassen (1813-1900) offered his son Abraham B. Klassen 70 acres of land if he would remain in Borosenko after his marriage. The Heuboden cemetery was located a half-mile east of the village next to an ancient Scythian burial mound, common in the area. The main village in the KG settlement at Jansen, Nebraska, was also named Heuboden, as was a small KG hamlet five miles northwest of Grünfeld, Manitoba.

Rosenfeld ("Yekaterinovka") was another important village many of whose residents belonged to the Heubodner Gemeinde. The village was located east of Steinbach, between the Bazavluk River and Nikolaithal, which became the capital of the Nikolaithal Vollost, when it was established in 1872. Another map published in Peterman's *Mitteilungen* 44 (1898), page 44, placed the village 10 miles northeast of Heuboden along the Solenaya River, half-way to Grünfeld. Rosenfeld included a number of prosperous farmers and an excellent selection of fine homes. The name was transplanted to Manitoba in 1874 with a small KG village three miles northeast of Grünfeld, Manitoba.

Anafeld was a smaller village with eight farmers located on the banks of the Bazavluk River. It was too small to have its own school and so the children attended school in Steinbach which lay several kilometres to the southwest.

Neuanlage, also known in the beginning as "Mariafeld", was another smaller village in the Borosenko area the location of which has not been positively identified. According to one source it was 10 kilometres distant from Rosenfeld. The Peterman's map showed Neuanlage about 10 kilometres north of Rosenfeld, further north along the Solenaya River, in the area of Grünfeld. Notable in Neuanlage was the family of Johann Koop (1831-97), a large-scale farmer from Muntau and later Mariawohl, Molotschna.

In 1866 a group of KG families purchased 5400 acres of land 30 miles north of Nikopol establishing the village of Friedensfeld ("Miropol"). The original village was laid out along the west bank of a branch of the Solenaya River, with

some 20 establishments. In a spirit of trust, three Brüdergemeinde families were allowed to settle in the village which gave rise to no end of trouble. With typical Separatist Pietist arrogance they immediately commenced extreme proselytizing, seeking where they could tear families apart. One account reported they harassed a young mother on her death bed until she was screaming in anguish. After the KG had immigrated to America in 1874, the families that remained joined the Brüdergemeinde. The settlement subsequently suffered decades of internal disputation and hostility, perhaps fitting given the sorrow and grief they had caused the KG, who had naively tried to help them. The area to the southeast of Steinbach, Manitoba, was later named Friedensfeld, in honour of minister Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), who had lived in Friedensfeld, Borosenko.

Grünfeld ("Zelyonoye") was founded in 1867 by a group of seven KG families. It was located some 24 verst north of Heuboden along the Solenaya River. Grünfeld had the distinction of being the only village which was half Russian and half Mennonite. The Russian part was called "Gerwerf". What became known as the "Blumenhoff Gemeinde" was originally known as the "Grünfeld Gemeinde", because some of the early leadership of the reform group settled there. Prominent in Grünfeld were the children of Johann Isaak (1809-64), Schönau, and Cornelius Loewen (1827-93), and brothers Cornelius (1836-1908) and Johann Toews (1826-95). The ministerial of the settlement consisted of former school teacher Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72) and deacon Abraham Loewen (1833-86), Hierschau, who moved to Grünfeld in February 1867. Many of the Grünfelders settled in a village by the same name, now Kleefeld, Manitoba, in 1874.

Hochfeld was a "chutor" or estate established in 1872 by Johann Warkentin (1817-86), originally from Blumstein, Molotschna, and later Blumenhoff, Borosenko. The settlement lay "behind Grünfeld", presumably meaning to the north. Six or so families lived in Hochfeld mostly related to the founder.

Each village was governed by a Schulz (mayor), Beisitzer, and Schultebot or village assembly, just as in the Molotschna. As will be dealt with in more detail later, each of the villages except Anafeld had its own school and teacher.

As long as the KG was living in the Molotschna its members were governed by the Molotschna "Brandordnung" (mutual fire insurance company) and "Waisenverordnung" (church trust company for orphans and widows). After the establishment of its own villages in Markuslandt, Borosenko and in the Crimea, the KG established its own Waisenverordnung and Brandordnung. Each village had its own Brandschulz who recorded the property to be insured for everyone in the village and was responsible for collection of fees to cover losses. The Brandaeltester was the manager of the entire system covering all eight villages. Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), Friedensfeld, nephew to Johann Rieger (1802-42), Schönsee, former Molotschna Oberschulz, was the first Waisenvorsteher of the KG Waisenverordnung. He was elected as a minister on January 20, 1873, and replaced as Waisenvorsteher by Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908).

Four families including Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75), Ohrloff, and Heinrich Fast (1826-90), Fischau, Molotschna, lived in Nikolaithal, Kherson Government,

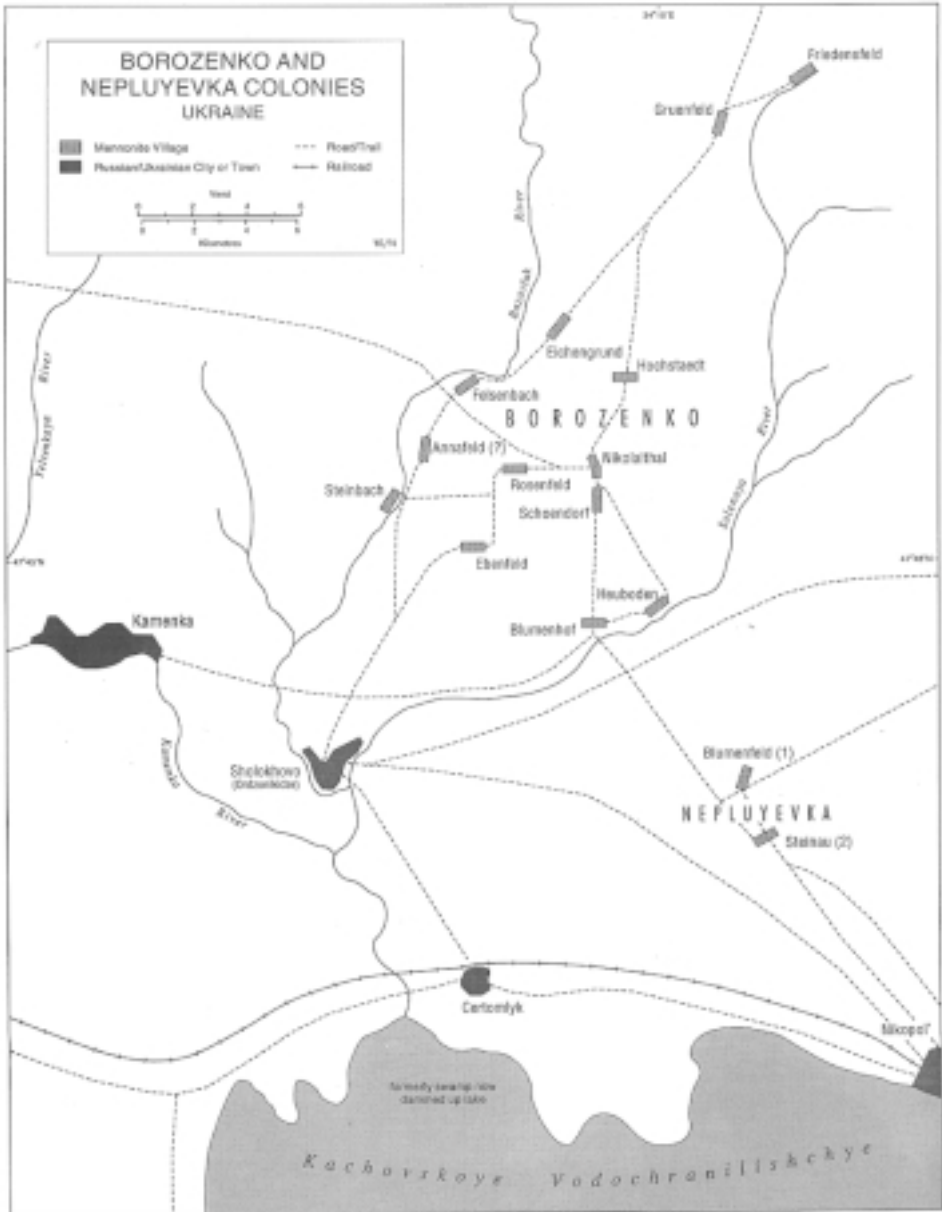
also known as “Gruschewka” or “Fürstenlandt”, located southwest of Borosenko, just across the Bazavluk river. Two families, including Peter W. Loewen (1825-87), lived on rented land on the estate Sawitzke along the Bazavluk River “behind Steinbach”.

The tremendous physical expansion of the KG could only take place at the expense of the Molotschna congregation which declined to as few as 24 families by the time of the emigration of 1874. Nevertheless the Molotschna KG continued as a vital and important congregation with a ministerial consisting of Johann L. Dueck (1833-94), Alexanderkrone, deacon, and Abraham Klassen (1828-1906), Prangenau, as minister, with Heinrich Enns (1807-81), former Aeltester, resident in Fischau.

The physical expansion of the KG represented a flexing of muscle for the denomination. For the first time, its members would be able to live in cohesive almost exclusively KG settlements, which would solve certain problems but also bring about problems of its own. The outward movement certainly represented some firsts for the Molotschna, as the KG settlements in Markus and Borosenko were the first congregational daughter settlements founded privately. The Kuban settlement established in 1862 resulted from an offer of free land a thousand miles away, to enable landless Brüdergemeinde adherents to move out of the strife ridden Molotschna.

By comparison the KG purchased good quality expensive land, within sixty miles of the mother colonies, well located for marketing of crops, funding the purchases entirely from its own resources. As a result of these measures every member of the KG had an opportunity to become a landowning farmer, a considerable achievement at a time when two-thirds of the Russian Mennonite population remained landless. The wisdom of the KG purchase in Borosenko is still evident in the present-day. The land is obviously more fertile than in the Molotschna, reflected even in the comparative prosperity of the collective farms in the Borosenko area.

There were also disadvantages: when the mass decision was made to emigrate, the bottom fell out of the real estate market, but the decline in prices was two times worse in Borosenko, than in the older more established Molotschna. The movement to the new settlements with the resulting pioneering environment may have made the KG-ers more vulnerable to the Separatist-Pietists who were prowling around the countryside like hyenas during these years. It certainly suffered heavy losses in Friedensfeld and in the Crimea, but the losses in terms of total membership were estimated at a modest 15 per cent, and tolerable considering that the KG continued to adhere to the unpopular but evangelical teachings of the conservative faith tradition. “The easier and more compromising, and yet still Christian pietist way, held little attraction to those who remained true to the spiritual covenants they had once made with their Lord.”



The Borosenko Colony established by the Kleine Gemeinde in 1865. Eventually 120 families settled in 18,000 acres of land. The villages of Schönendorf, Nikolaital, Ebenfeld, Felsenbach, Eichengrund and Hochstädt were settled by Old Colony people. Additional parcels of property were acquired in the vicinity to establish the villages of Grünfeld, Friedensfeld, Neuanlage, and the estate Hochfeld owned by Johann Warkentin (1817-88), Blumstein. Map courtesy of Huebert and Schroeder, Mennonite Historical Atlas (Winnipeg, 1998 (2d)), page 18.



Friedensfeld. View from the north end of the "drank", looking south. The "drank" was a body of water created by damming up the river; a common practice in the region. The former Mennonite flour mill is located by the bushes to the left on the picture. Since 1919 another street has been built up along the southwest side of both the lower and upper "drank". The photograph is taken from the northeast corner of the village approximately where the well was located on the 1919 map. Photo by D. Plett, April, 1996.



The cemetery located half a mile east of the village of Heuboden, Borosenko, situated beside a "Grogoney" or Scythian burial mound. The village lies perpendicular to the river road, to the right of the photo. This photo was taken from on top of the burial mound shows the original portion of the cemetery used by the Mennonites. It is assumed that the KG made the decision to establish the cemetery beside the "Gorgany". Presumably those who bought the village from the KG continued the practice. After the massacre of 1919 Ukrainians were settled into the area and continued to use the cemetery, burying their dead on top of the Gorgany. This cemetery is believed to be the last resting place of the venerable Isaac Loewen (1787-1873), patriarch of all KG Loewens and Pletts. Photo by D. Plett, May, 1998.



The former village school and worship house in the village of Heuboden, Borosenko, home of KG delegate David Klassen (1813-1900), who later settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba. The buildings probably date to the 1890s.



Blumenhoff, Borosenko, view towards the south from just northwest of the cemetery. The overgrown brush covering the cemetery is visible to the left of the photo. The location of the photographer was the site of a Mennonite flour mill, destroyed years ago, visible by a scattering of small rock debris. The view is more or less down the former cross street. The building in the centre is located on the main street/river road, roughly in the centre of the village. In the rear can be seen the hill/plateau lying south of the Solenaya River where extensive open pit mining operations are in progress.



Another photo taken from the site of the former flour mill in Blumenhoff, Borosenko. Frank Dyck, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Zaporozhze points out the huge ravine running north perpendicular to the river road. The ravine was visible from Rosenfeld, six kilometres north. May 1998.



View across the Bazavluk River towards the northwest, the site of the original village of Steinbach, Borosenko, on the west bank. In the foreground, a corral with 60 head of cows, being milked by hand. On the plateau, at the west end of the village, a Grogoney (Scythian burial mound) stands silent watch over the graves of KG-ers as well as victims of the 1919 Machnov massacre buried in the village cemetery.



Steinbach was not a traditional name among the Russian Mennonites nor was it known among the Prussian Mennonites. This photo of the members of the KG Heritage Tour enjoying their lunch along the banks of the Baseluk River explains the historical origin of the name, a "stony brook". Boulders were strewn along the east bank of the river at this point, extremely rare in the Ukrainian steppe. According to Gerald Wright who did some research on the topic during the 1960s there are six or so Steinbachs in Germany. Steinbach, Manitoba, founded in 1874 by seven KG families from Steinbach along the Baseluk River, has now become a City, the eighth largest in the Province. A current road map of the Borosenko area was published in Preservings, No. 12, page 45.



The village of Grünfeld, 10 kilometres north of Borosenko. Like most villages on the steppe, it was laid out in a river valley. Grünfeld was the home of notable settlers such as Cornelius Loewen, Abraham P. Isaac and cousin Gerhard P. Goossen.

Section 7.03: The 1866 Division.

The period of relative stability and physical expansion for the KG commencing in 1850 also witnessed the 1866 division, undoubtedly the most tragic event to befall the congregation during its 70 year sojourn in Russia. The 1866 division came about when the glowing embers of dissatisfaction with the leadership of Aeltester Johann Friesen, were fanned into open inflammation by the events surrounding the excommunication of Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89), Halbstadt, on February 9, 1864.

The reason for the separation of Thiessen are evident from a letter written to his father by leading minister Heinrich Enns, Fischau, dated February 18, 1864. The original problem seemingly arose when Thiessen terminated his servant and beat him physically which was common practice in the Molotschna but not allowed in the KG. Instead of accepting the consequent admonishment, Thiessen argued with the members of the ministerial and Gebietsamt. The situation was aggravated by his use of the courts regarding a number of matters including a claim for forfeiture of a deposit paid to him by a Jew who had bought flour but never completed the deal.

After several admonishments and rebukes had resulted only in counter-accusations from Thiessen, the ministerial gave him notice that he would be separated and that the matter would be dealt with at a brotherhood meeting on Sunday two weeks hence. Because of a variety of circumstances, however, the excommunication took place the Sunday prior. Thiessen now claimed, with some validity, that he was prejudiced by the change as he could not be present to defend himself and that the action was invalid due to improper process. In accordance with ancient tradition, the KG had a policy that if someone was excommunicated they were not allowed to attend the worship services. Thiessen, maintaining that he had not been validly expelled, refused to honour the protocol and entered the worship services five times, resulting in the termination of services and dispersal of the assembly. Thiessen continued to insist that the excommunication was invalid and that the congregation was obligated to take him back into membership.

A great deal of anxiety and disputation followed and a number of people also left the congregation on Thiessen's behalf. As a result, the Aeltester Johann Friesen, and several members of his ministerial, including the ministers Peter and Abraham Friesen, and the deacon Jakob Friesen, decided to seek consultation to assist in coming to some resolution. On the 2nd or 3rd day of December, 1865, they sought counsel from friend Johann Harder, Ohrloff Aeltester, Blumstein, who was related to many KG-ers.

After the consultation these ministers came to the view that the only proper remedy was to reaccept Thiessen and those who had left the Gemeinde on his behalf. On January 3, 1866, a brotherhood meeting was held where the ban was withdrawn from Abraham Thiessen. But instead of resulting in a reconciliation of parties to the dispute, the opposite occurred. Three days later, Heinrich Enns, the leading minister, read a lengthy letter to the assembly reciting a litany of failings on the part of Johann Friesen and demanding his resignation. This led

to a lengthy counter-statement by the members of the ministerial who supported Johann Friesen.

This was followed by counter-declarations to counter-declarations, and dismissals served by each group against the other. The KG by this time was living in four separate areas, Molotschna, Markus, Crimea and Borosenko, and numerous letters were written and exchanged between these congregations as many stood at the crossroads, not knowing with which party they should hold. In the words of Peter Toews, “the actions of Heinrich Enns had been too hasty and too arbitrary, for many.” But many also felt betrayed by Johann Friesen who had always admonished them to strictly enforce the ban by observing avoidance towards the separated one, and now he himself had voluntarily taken Thiessen back without penitence or “the bending of knee.”

Many of the main writings and declarations regarding this event were collected by Aeltester Peter Toews in his “Sammlung” (published in *Storm and Triumph*, pages 163-184). But Peter Toews added the comment that he was able to include only a small portion of the writings which were exchanged regarding the matter and that he compiled only those necessary to an understanding of the unfolding of events and the main arguments exchanged. In the words of Toews, the writings pertaining to this event would make a large book by themselves.

The details of these accusations and counter-accusations are beyond the scope of the book and the reader may wish to study these writings for themselves. The result of the matter was the KG was divided into two parts, with one half remaining with Aeltester Johann Friesen. The ministerial of this group consisted of minister Abraham F. Friesen, Neukirch, and deacon Klaas F. Friesen, Neukirch, the Aeltester’s brothers; minister Peter W. Friesen, Tiede, and deacon Jakob W. Friesen, Blumstein, sons of former Aeltester Abraham Friesen, and Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, the uncle to all of the foregoing. Since all the members of the ministerial were Friesens this congregation was sometimes been referred to as the “Friesens Gemeinde”.

The other congregation included the ministers Heinrich Enns, Fischau, and Peter Baerg, Schwesterthal. Heinrich Enns was elected as Aeltester at an election held in Fischau on October 10, 1866. Also elected at the same meeting were cousins Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) and Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72) Liebenau, as ministers, and Abraham Loewen (1833-86), Hierschau, as deacon. The brethren from all four geographical areas were called to take part in the election. For lack of a better term, the Enns group can be described as the “Reform Gemeinde”. The reform congregation did not support the purchasing of land by the Gemeinde for the landless and some reformers such as Heinrich Enns refused to sign the legal documents involved.

Section 7.04: Johann Friesen 1808-72, Neukirch.

Johann Friesen, the third KG Aeltester, was the son of Johann Friesen (1758-1830), Schönau and later Rosenort, Molotschna, and Margaretha von Riesen (1784-1835). As already mentioned, his father was a senior GG minister, and his mother was the sister of the second KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff. Johann Jr.'s eight siblings at one time or another all belonged to the KG, illustrating the power of the matrilineal connections within conservative Mennonite communities.

Johann F. Friesen (1808-72) was married four times. The 1835 census listed Johann and his wife, Anna Wiebe age 22, living with his mother and step-father on Wirtschaft 19 in Rosenort. His second marriage to Maria Enns, the daughter of Aeltester Heinrich Enns, lasted only 30 weeks. His third wife was Elisabeth Klassen, daughter of David Klassen who served as one of the delegates to America in 1873. Ohm Johann lived in the village of Neukirch where he owned a successful Wirtschaft. He was active in silkworm farming and in 1850 he was cited in the *Unterhaltungs Blatt*, a German language paper, for being the top silk producer in Neukirch.

Johann F. Friesen was elected as a deacon in the KG in 1838 and as minister in 1840. He was elected as the Aeltester to replace his uncle, Abraham Friesen, in 1847. As Bishop, Johann Friesen played a prominent role in the resolution of the "Church Building" dispute and "Barley" dispute which had caused great disruption in the Molotschna community. In 1860 Johann interceded on behalf of the infant Brüdergemeinde by withholding approval of arrests and banishments. His day-to-day leadership and work in the church is outlined in some detail in the ministerial journal of Johann Dueck (1801-66), Muntau. Johann Friesen led the KG through a period of considerable growth but his legacy was diminished by the 1866 division.

The influence of Johann Friesen was illustrated by the situation of Jakob A. Wiebe (1837-1921) who worked for a member of the KG and became impressed with their Christian witness. Evidently he "occasionally visited Johann Friesen and was asked at one time to preach in the Kleine Gemeinde church. Here he was greatly impressed by ... " their piety and lifestyle..." Several times Johann Friesen visited Jakob Wiebe's group in the Crimea, and offered to organize them as a part of the Kleine Gemeinde. It was through the influence of Jakob Wiebe that this group in the Crimea became a part of the Kleine Gemeinde." However, Johann F. Friesen failed to deal immediately with Wiebe's expressed concern that he could not be saved without a rebaptism. This indicated that Wiebe had been seriously influenced by the religious culture and language of Separatist-Pietism. The omission on the part of Aeltester Friesen was to have serious ramifications for the KG in 1869, when Wiebe led a secession of the majority of his Crimean congregation.

In 1867 Johann Friesen sold his Wirtschaft in Neukirch, Molotschna, to Nikolai Isaak (b. 1849) and moved to Borosenko, settling in the village of Rosenfeld. Ohm Johann was still very active at this time. Abraham F. Reimer recorded that "on June 12, 1870, the Johann Friesens returned from a trip to the Molotschna." Monday, March 2, "Joh. Friesen from Rosenfeld was here [in

Steinbach].” Ohm Johann still had some ten families in his pastoral care at this time (see Section 12.02).

On March 25, 1871, Ohm Johann apparently tried to establish joint worship services with the Heubodner having told his cousin Abr. F. Reimer “that in the future we shall have the services together.” On Sunday, March 28, “services were at Joh. Friesens’, Rosenfeld, a good half of those from Heuboden were there.” But on Monday, the 29th, there was “no service except in Heuboden. The mutual services seem to have failed. During the brotherhood meeting the majority did not vote for it.”

Johann’s third wife was injured in a tragic mishap described by son Johann K. Friesen: “Much snow fell in the winter of 1870-71 but then there suddenly thawing weather so that the whole land was a sheet of ice. It became impossible to drive with a sleigh unless the horses had been shod with sharp horseshoes. The parents were on their way to go visiting on their sleigh to Cornelius Eidses in Neuanlage. The road was very bumpy and the sleigh tipped over, towards mother’s side, so that father fell over mother. And mother being pregnant, she incurred serious internal injuries and was confined to a bed from that time forth until she gave birth. Although the advice was to help her through this, she as well as the baby died on March 17.” She was buried on the 19th.

June 15, 1871, Johann F. Friesen married for the fourth time to Anna Isaak, sister of Franz Isaak, Ohrloff minister and historian, already mentioned previously. The marriage ceremony was performed by Johann’s school teacher brother Peter, Marienthal, by now a GG minister. These decisions proved unpopular. At this time the remaining families that had stayed under his pastoral oversight joined with the Grünfeld (Blumenhoff) Gemeinde under Peter P. Toews.

Johann’s health was also deteriorating rapidly. July 6, 1871, cousin Abr. F. Reimer “was 2 nights and 2 days in Rosenfeld at Joh. Friesens’, who was sick.” On the 15th of July, Abraham’s son Abraham stayed with Ohm Joh. On Aug. 5, Abr. F. Reimer “had dinner with Joh. Friesen who is still sick. He must sit while sleeping.” On the 20th “he looked like dying.” On the 29th Abr. was at “Joh. Friesens.” Oct. 2, Abr. F. R. again visited “at Joh. Friesens, Rosenfeld. He had been in bed for 8 days. He had improved.” On the 9th Reimer again went to Rosenfeld, spending the evening with Ohm Johann. It seems that at this point his wife returned to the Molotschna to stay with her own family, “Monday, Oct. 11, Mrs. Joh. Friesen, went along with Ungers, Rosenfeld, to the Molotsch.”

Ohm Johann evidently did not expect to survive his illness. On January 22, 1872, Johann gave the Gemeinde records and documents into the care and custody of Aeltester Peter Toews. On Sunday, May 14, 1872, Abraham F. Reimer and son Kl. attended worship services in Blumenhof. “The ‘big’ brotherhood meeting took place until 3:30. The 16 youths were introduced. Joh. Friesen spoke regarding the church.”

Ohm Johann’s last hour was drawing nigh. On Tuesday, May 30, “Dr. Fülhaf from Nikopol was at Joh. Friesens in Rosenfeld.” But to no avail. The next day, the 31st, “at 6:30 a.m. Johann Friesen died. He was 64. He was very sick during the night. He was sick for 11 months.” The burial took place on June 2, “It was a big funeral.” An auction sale was held on June 27, 1872.



Johann K. Friesen (1857-1934), Rosenort, Manitoba, was the son of Aeltester Johann F. Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, Molotschna. Son Johann K. Friesen served as a teacher and became a prominent member of the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Furrows in the Valley, page 330/Sesquicentennial Jubilee, page 88.

Genealogist Johann P. Friesen, Rosenort, Manitoba, described his cousin's final days as follows: "He became sick of dropsy, whereby he had much suffering to endure, and at times considerable water would be emitted from his legs. In the interim he was almost fully restored to health; and yet, at the last, he experienced intense burning in his legs, so that he often screamed, until finally--on the 31 of May, 1872, he breathed his last [in the] hope that through grace he had entered unto eternal rest. He had to endure a very hard battle of suffering, physically as well as spiritually, for also his Aeltestership--which he has served for 34 years [including his years as minister and deacon]--did not go easily for him, or without sorrow and cares; rather it also gave him anxious hours, together with accusations, since he was also subject to human foibles and follies. Shortly after his death, all of his earthly possessions were sold through a public auction and the children were taken in by friends; Johann, Aganetha and Maria came to the grandparents David Klassens, and David was at Cornelius Eidses."

Johann and brothers Abraham and Klaas were known as the "Neukircher Friesens". A biography of Aeltester Johann F. Friesen and three of his epistles relative to the 1866 division were published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 355-78).

Section 7.05: Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau.

Heinrich W. Enns (1807-81) was the son of Cornelius Enns (1782-1835), who settled on Wirtschaft 13 in Fischau, Molotschna Colony in 1804 together with his parents. Heinrich's mother was Maria Wiebe (1784-1845), daughter of Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1746), from Blumenort, Prussia, who immigrated to the Molotschna in 1803 and then to the Old Colony in 1816. Maria's brother Gerhard Wiebe (1800-58), was the father of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Aeltester of the Berghal Colony, which provided important connections in later years. Four of Heinrich Enns' sisters and their families belonged to the KG creating a matrilineal network critical to his growing influence.

Heinrich Enns married Margaretha Friesen. He took over Wirtschaft 14 in Fischau, possibly in 1836 when uncle Johann Enns left Fischau and moved to the Old Colony. The ownership of a full farm at age 28 placed Heinrich in a fortunate position financially. Later Enns reflected upon the conditions prevailing shortly after the death of his father in 1836: "It was about nine or ten years after my baptism when I began to realize and consider the deterioration of the Grosse Gemeinde, and saw that I could not stand before God. Indeed in such circumstances, I felt that I would make myself a party to the sins of others! As a result, I submitted myself to the Kleine Gemeinde, where I expected to find more peace for my conscience. After some years I was called upon to be a teacher [minister]. After a number of years I again became restless and questioned within me, whether this had been God's will for me, because so much evil dwelt within me. Neither could I console nor quiet my conscience to the fact that the Gemeinde had become lukewarm and felt more secure in many respects, particularly so after both Aeltesten were gone, and our hearts became more burdened with cares for our natural provisions. We, of course, consoled and flattered ourselves, we did not want to get rich; but still aimed at greater things, such as large Wirtschaften fashioned as comfortably as possible. That is to say, we were very well off, in fact some of our people were rich."

Heinrich married for the second time to Sarah Toews, daughter of Cornelius Toews (1802-31), Fischau, who had taken his own life. Enns was an earnest Christian who tried to use his manifold talents for the work of Christ's kingdom. He was elected as a deacon of the KG in 1849 and as minister in 1851. In a letter to Peter P. Toews of August 21, 1876, Jakob Woelk, Fischau, a former neighbour, mentioned that Enns had always been willing to assist him when he had needed advice as a young inexperienced school teacher. Heinrich married the third time to Wilhelmina Plett (1815-64), widow of school teacher Gerhard Goossen (1811-54), Blumstein. Minna Plett was the sister of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), Kleefeld, Molotschna, and aunt of Johann Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde.

Enns was a strong advocate of the writings of the faith. This is illustrated by a story told by son Heinrich of how he "had to ride horseback on his grey in the direction of Blumstein to return a large *Martyrs' Mirror* which his father had borrowed from Aeltester Johann Harder, who lived on the west side [of the village street] where my brother Cornelius also lived for a time. He [Heinrich Jr.] placed the book into a bag slung over his back and wanted to return it. As he

entered the village, he [Harder] was just returning home from the church in Ohrloff. His [Harder's] mother was an Elisabeth Plett, and my mother was a Minna Plett--they were half sisters." Heinrich Enns was credited for having spear-headed the KG publication program of the 1860s.

The Heinrich Enns family was listed in the village of Fischau with daughter Sara, age 13, attending school in 1861/2. Gerhard P. Goossen, Heinrich's stepson, was the village teacher. Enns became the leading minister responsible for official correspondence including: 1) A letter to Christian Schmutz, 1861; 2) A letter to Heinrich Loewen, 1863; and 3) A letter to Peter Thiessen in Schönau, 1864. Enns was widowed for the third time in 1864.

Ohm Heinrich was a strong-willed man whose one-mindedness sometimes hindered his effectiveness. He led a movement dissatisfied with the leadership of Johann F. Friesen, his one-time son-in-law. In early 1866 the KG separated into two groups and Enns was elected Aeltester of the reform faction. He was the fourth person to hold the office. Enns resigned in 1868 amid considerable controversy. In a letter of April 19, 1874, he shared freely regarding some of the issues which resulted in the 1866 division.

In 1875 Enns emigrated and settled in Rosenort, Manitoba. Later he planned to move to Kansas. In a letter of August 21, 1876, Jakob Woelk of Fischau, inquired whether Enns was still living in Manitoba, or whether he had moved to Kansas as he had intended. According to two letters written by Enns in 1877, he actually lived in Gnadenau, Kansas for a time, presumably at the home of son Cornelius Enns, indicating they had reconciled after Cornelius joined the secessionists from the Crimean KG in 1869, turning against their elders. Heinrich Enns died in Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1881.

A number of letters by Heinrich Enns were published in 1986 and 1990 (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 48 and 165-181, and *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 3-72 and 533-540). Two epistles written by Enns from Gnadenau, Kansas, in 1877, are particularly important. In these letters Enns makes various observations regarding the KG and its religiosity in earlier times. Enns was a dedicated man who served God and Gemeinde with great fervour. A biography of Heinrich Enns (1807-81) and a collection of thirteen of his letters written to Aeltester Peter P. Toews between 1866 and 1870 were published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 370-400).



1922. Heinrich H. Enns (1876-1944),
Blumenhof, Manitoba, teacher,
farmer, poet and Holdeman deacon.
Heinrich was a grandson of
Aeltester Heinrich Enns (1807-81),
Fischau, Molotschna. Photo courtesy
of Plett Picture Book, page 83.

Section 7.06: Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89), Halbstadt.

Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89) was the son of Peter Thiessen (1808-73), and Margaretha Friesen (1810-77), Schönau. Margaretha was the oldest daughter of Abraham, the second Aeltester of the KG. Abraham F. Thiessen was married for the first time to Agatha Harder. He was a successful merchant resident in Halbstadt.

Abraham was expelled from the KG in 1864 because he had struck his servant. This incident sparked a major schism in 1866 (see Section 7.3).

Thiessen was well known as the champion of the landless Mennonites in Russia. Thiessen made many journeys to St. Petersburg to lobby senior government ministers for justice on behalf of the disenfranchised and “voiceless” Anwohner in the Molotschna Colony and to challenge corruption and fraud, during the years 1866-73. As a result of these activities, Abraham F. Thiessen was accused by his enemies and imprisoned. His first wife died on June 1, 1873. Peter I. Fast has written that Abraham Thiessen was in prison in Berdjansk at the time and that he was taken out of prison in order to attend the funeral (see Section 6.4).

Abraham F. Thiessen wrote four books advocating his cause: *Ein Brief nur fuer die Mennoniten im Berdjanschen Kreise* (Odessa, 1872), 26 pages; *Die Lage der Deutschen Kolonisten in Russland* (Leipzig, 1876), 17 pages; *Ein Raethsel oder Die Frage weszhalb war ich vom Jahre 1874 bis 1876 in Verbannung?* (n.p., 1876), 16 pages; and *Die Agrarwirren bei den Mennoniten in Sued=Russland* (Berlin, 1887), 24 pages. In 1874 Abraham Thiessen was banished to Siberia for his land reform activities.

Thiessen later described his experiences: “`The leading of God is undefinable and often we humans only recognize later what has been required of us’ is what an acquaintance on the road called out to me on April 27, 1874. This was the day when without any investigation I was seized and transported away in a manner which does not even occur with thieves and murderers in other European states. That I was not locked into chains with murderers and forced to walk all day to my place of banishment cost me 400 rubles. During the two years of my banishment these words now and again came to mind and I frequently wondered: could this banishment coupled with the theft of all my property, without even a notion on my part of the cause of all this, serve any useful purpose?”

Thiessen wrote about the horrible human rights abuses he observed: the all-pervasive presence of secret police as well as prisons overflowing to the rafters with prisoners held for years without knowing why. He also described the punitive tax system in Russia coupled with draconian collection methods, which made it almost impossible for the peasants to ever rise out from their poverty.

Historian Henry N. Fast writes that “since his wife had passed away by then [1874] he sent his only son Johann to America with his brother Peter.” Thiessen escaped from banishment two years later, in 1876, bribing his way out of prison and escaping to Western Europe with all the adventures of a `cloak and dagger’ novel. Abraham F. Thiessen immigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, in 1876. According to M. B. Fast, Abraham settled along “Russian Lane” on the north side although the only property listed in his name in 1880 is on the south side, on Section 35. He was a member of the KG in Jansen.



Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89), Neu-Halbstadt. He was referred to as "the Mennonite Revolutionary" by Dr. Cornelius Krabn. Photo courtesy of Cornelius Krabn, Mennonite Life, 1969, April, page 77.

Abraham married for the second time to Anna Heidebrecht, daughter of Peter Heidebrecht, Blumstein, Molotschna, a wealthy KG Vollwirt. In 1887 Abraham F. Thiessen returned to Russia out of his concern for the plight of the landless Mennonites "to speak for the poor and oppressed". This time he was expelled before he could accomplish his mission.

An interesting story about Abraham F. Thiessen was told by Martin B. Fast, long-time editor of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, which occurred in 1880 when Fast had become converted to the religious culture and language of Separatist-Pietism. Apparently Fast had confronted Thiessen in order to share his experience with Thiessen and presumably attempt to persuade him of the veracity of his new religion. Thiessen had chuckled and replied, "Martin, you have now alighted

upon a small sandhill where children gladly wish to play. I was there once too, but now I have stepped onto the ladder and am ascending in search of truth."

Abraham's son Johann (1866-1958) also lived along "Russian Lane" in Rosenort, Cub Creek County, Nebraska. Johann A. Thiessen demonstrated a lot of his father's ingenuity and by 1880 already had 240 acres cultivated land and a farmyard worth \$3000. He became a successful merchant banker in Jansen, Nebraska.

In many ways Thiessen represented the continuation of a KG concern for justice on behalf of the underprivileged which can be traced back to his grandfather, Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1789-1849), Ohrloff, and his defense of the unfortunate Anna Thiessen, banished to Siberia in 1821 for her sin of incest. In 1860 it was KG Aeltester Johann Friesen who intervened to stop harassment and possible banishment of the infant Brüdergemeinde.

Abraham F. Thiessen became a controversial figure among the Russian Mennonites, and had many critics as well as supporters both within and without the KG. To some he was a villain of the piece and to others a visionary advocate for the downtrodden and oppressed. Abraham F. Thiessen was certainly an important figure in the history of the KG as well as in the wider Mennonite community (see Section 11.03).

Section 7.07: Isaak Harms 1811-91, Lindenau.

Isaak Harms (1811-91), was the son of Johann Harms who settled in the village of Blumstein, Molotschna in 1804. Blumstein was a village with a large KG community and most of Isaak's siblings remained in the denomination. Isaak Harms Sr. closely resembled his older brother Johann in physical appearance being of medium build.

In 1832, Isaak Harms married Anna F. Sawatzky, daughter of Cornelius Sawatzky, and Anna von Riesen, Ohrloff, and hence a member of the extended von Riesen clan. Isaak Harms moved to Lindenau in 1846 where they owned "a Wirtschaft with a fine set of buildings." He was a prosperous farmer and by 1856 he had a "Scheune" or large hay barn where worship services were held and where Anna's cousin Abraham M. Friesen was married.

Isaak Harms was one of the major supporters of the KG resettlement program for its landless during the 1860s. In July of 1863, Isaak Harms accompanied by son Cornelius, and Peter Toews, later Bishop, made an extensive journey to inspect land available for rental. The journey was later described by Peter Toews: "We made our first inspection of the land near Snamenka on the Dnieper which had just recently been designated for the settlement of Fürstenlandt. As we drove through Snamenka we marvelled at the well-tended vineyards of the Russians, which were not yet to be found among the German people in the Molotschna at that time. We now continued on our journey. At Nikopol we took the middle crossing over the Dnieper, and then on to the Old Colony. Here we stopped at the Vorsteher of the farmers in Schönberge, who was the leader of the settlement on Fürstenlandt, where we found a hospitable retreat for the night. While the aged father Harms received his night lodging in the guest room of our friendly host, the young Harms and myself, proceeded to do likewise on the hay in the Scheune (hay shed). We had a very good sleep and did not even dream of all the things which we would experience in the next fifty years...[We] continued our journey. At Einlage we again crossed over the Dnieper and drove to the so-called Markuslandt, where we arrived at the home of the nobleman. After various negotiations between Harms and the nobleman, a lease agreement was made which provided for the rental of the land for an initial term of six years. The village of Friedrichstahl was settled that very same fall, and the later well-known Andreasfeld, was settled the next spring."

In 1863 the Isaak Harms family moved to Markuslandt, which he had been instrumental in founding. Klaas R. Reimer credited Isaak Harms for giving poor young men like him a chance to get started on their own properties, "...I am frequently mindful of a man such as the aged Isaak Harms and how he had repeatedly put his entire property at stake for us poorer brethren."

At the expiration of the leases in 1869, the Isaak Harms family moved to Heuboden, Borosenko. On April 7, 1873, Abraham F. Reimer recorded that "Isaak Friesen from Barmtze [?] and the elder Isaak Harms from Heuboden were at their place for dinner and Vesper." On October 2, 1873, Isaak Harms held an auction sale in preparation for the emigration.

In 1874 Isaak Harms moved to Jansen, Nebraska, even though three of his children had decided to move to Manitoba. Isaak bought a section of land in the

northwest corner of Cub Creek Precinct. He successfully encouraged his children and nephew Heinrich Ratzlaff to leave Manitoba and settle on this property, Section Five, named Blumenort, also known as "Harmsedarp".

In 1877 Isaak Harms married for a second time to Karolina Plett (1822-87), widow of his first wife's uncle Klaas Friesen. "By 1882 Harms together with his children was farming 640 acres, however, he rented his part to his sons at one-third share."

After the death of his second wife in 1887, Isaak Harms travelled to Manitoba visiting family and friends including step-son Cornelius P. Friesen in Blumenort. In 1889 Isaak Harms married for the third time to a young widow Maria Fast (1851-1937), from Kansas, who had moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, to be near her parents, Heinrich and Charlotte Fast, Wirtschaft 18. Maria must have been a vivacious young woman to win Isaak's affection, and to persuade him to forsake his well-established "Harms' darp" in Jansen, Nebraska, where his children and grandchildren lived.

There was controversy regarding the fact that Harms had divided all his property in Nebraska among his children prior to his third marriage, evidently leaving him indigent. On September 1, 1889, Abraham F. Reimer recorded: "Brotherhood meeting dealing with Is. Harms, regarding his division of property and his wife." The matter was resolved as on Tuesday, September 3: "Is. Harms married the widow Fast from behind Steinbach."

A letter is extant which indicated that Harms incurred debts in Manitoba which were paid by the KG in Manitoba. On February 10, 1890, his protege, Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer, wrote his son, Peter S. Harms, Nebraska, about Harms Sr.: "How he finds such a marriage in his old age, in his 80th year with a wife of 38 years. That it is often not good when this happens; that such things should not happen, as the consequences are seldom good."

The third marriage ended with the death of Isaak Harms on September 4, 1891, in Steinbach, Manitoba. Abraham F. Reimer, Blumenort, recorded that "Sunday, August 6, 1891, worship services were held in Steinbach, and that the old Harms was buried, aged 80 years and 7 months." Isaak Harms was buried in the "Pioneer Cemetery" in Steinbach.

Although Harms' situation relative to his third marriage created a cloud regarding his personal life, this should not be allowed to obscure the significant contribution he made to the KG and the wider Mennonite brotherhood in Russia as well as in America.

Section 7.08: Piety and Worship.

The study of piety and worship within the KG provides an intimate look into the internal workings of a church community. The KG became a faithful steward of the ancient practices and traditions of the Flemish branch of the Mennonite faith, as practised by the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde in Prussia. Unfortunately only little has been written on the topic and certain aspects have been extrapolated from later documentation and even from observing KG in the present day.

Much of church life and polity of the KG was informed by a foundational teaching of “simplicity in Christ”. In 1833 Heinrich Balzer explained this concept in his treatise “Faith and Reason”: “The grace of the Holy Spirit convinced the believers of the first century in their ‘understanding’ and knowledge of the heart that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity in Christ. In this way they received the grace of God in abundance, and thus managed to live in this world bearing poverty, misery, contempt, exile, affliction, and tribulation. Brotherly love made them like a great family and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another. Worldly honours, high repute, elevated rank, and the pleasures of social life they regarded as vanities, as mere sham and smoke.”

The church governance and polity of the KG was Flemish in practice so that a study of the 18th century Gemeinden in Prussia sheds light on the KG and vice-versa. The church leadership consisted of a threefold ministry of Aeltester (Bishop), Lehrer (ministers) and deacons, based on the Apostolic model. All were elected at democratic meetings of the brotherhood chaired by the Aeltester.

The worship services of the KG were patterned on the evangelical model set forth in the Revelation of the Apostle John: “And I saw no temple there: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof”, Revelations 21. This was interpreted to mean that the community of God itself was the temple and the glory of the Lord was the only adornment appropriate in the evangelical church. In the early church “the congregations of Christians met together for worship in large rooms” consisting of congregational singing, reading the Holy Scriptures, exposition of the Word of God, and silent and vocal prayer.

The worship services of the KG developed out of the small Bible study and prayer circles which started in 1812. After the excommunication of the reformers in 1813, these conventicals evolved into simple worship services alternating between Petershagen and Muensterberg, the two villages where the reform movement was born. By the 1840s the KG had grown sufficiently to warrant two worship services each Sunday, also making it easier for the members scattered across the Molotschna to attend. Prior to 1872 the KG did not have their own house of worship and services were held in the premises of larger farmers who had a hay shed or threshing barn which was cleaned out for the service, comparable to the practice of Amish denominations, where the services are rotated among the private residences of the members.

The KG worship services followed the Flemish pattern. The service commenced with the singing of two songs from the *Gesangbuch*, led by the Vorsänger

or chorister, who intoned each stanza separately. The lyrics were sung in the ancient “long note” style still practised among conservative Mennonites in Latin America. The *Gesangbuch* was the only songbook, made up of lyric poems many written by Reformation martyrs. The opening sermon (“Vorpredigt”) followed, about 30 minutes in length. After two more songs, and kneeling for silent prayer, the main sermon was presented. The congregation met for worship service on Sunday and every ecclesiastical or church holiday.

In 1860 teacher Heinrich Franz, Gnadenfeld, published his *Coralbuch* which used a system of numeral notes or *ziffern*. It quickly became popular among Mennonite congregations all over Russia, and a major issue between conservatives and progressives in most congregations. Rev. Jakob Epp has recorded some of the disputation at brotherhood meetings in the Chortitzer Gemeinde regarding the issue. The “numbered” melodies also became popular among the KG and during the early 1860s many of the Vorsänger started using them, a practice which Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, the senior minister, found objectionable as being too big a departure from the established ways. As a result of Ohm Klaas’ objections, he became dissatisfied with the minister Johann Dueck, Muntau, and was removed from office in 1864, ending his 40-year ministry. The *Coralbuch* was later republished in Steinbach, Manitoba, by merchant H. W. Reimer, in 1902 and again in 1918.

Singing in the KG was slow and easy. The Vorsänger intoned the words clearly for each verse and all verses were sung, sometimes as many as 12 or 24. The melody dragged at the end as it became slower and slower. The tone was nasal and the rhythm was enhanced by the slurring of the beginning and ending of each phrase. The cadence of the songs and the droning melodies had a hypnotic effect on the worshippers. The traditional songs were known to all, creating a common bond of the spirit which traversed all restrictions of time and space. It was as if the melody and the words pouring forth almost instinctively flowed from the innermost beings of the singers. As they sang, the members of the Gemeinde felt the presence of the Spirit of Christ and their ancestors in the faith and they were united as one in the house of God.

Sermons in the traditional Mennonite churches in Russia were usually handed down from one minister to another. The Separatist Pietists disdained the others for this practice, insisting on extemporaneous preaching which was short on substance but had emotional appeal.

Sermons in the KG were unique in that each minister carefully prepared his own. Typically KG sermons were studded with Biblical references and quotations from the seminal writers of the faith such as Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Peter Pieters, Jakob Denners and George Hansen. Accordingly the sermons reveal the theology and interpretation of each minister. A sermon included a biblical text, an opening prayer, the exposition of the preparatory theme, kneeling prayer, the exposition of the major theme, closing prayer and benediction. Since the sermons would be used a number of times, contemporary references were minimal. A dozen or so early KG sermons have been translated and published in English.

The ordinances as practised among the conservative faith tradition have already been mentioned, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptismal candidates were instructed for four Sundays before the baptism. The baptismal candidates required witnesses who testified as to the veracity of their faith. Prior to the actual baptism all candidates were required to acknowledge and affirm their personal faith before the entire assembly.

The communion service was known as the "unity" or "Einigkeit". This reflected the foundational significance of unity of spirit within the Gemeinde. All members were to be at peace with one another as symbolized by the oneness of the kernels of grain in the communion bread and the grapes which became one as they fermented and changed into wine. The Aeltester served each of the ministers and members throughout the congregation with the communion bread. After the bread was eaten, a flask of wine was served to the members, each one drinking in turn.

Dirk Philips (1504-68), the most prominent leader of the conservative tradition, added five ordinances to the two already mentioned; footwashing, evangelical discipline, the practice of love, keeping of the commandments, and the suffering persecuted church. The institution of footwashing by Klaas Reimer in 1829 has already been mentioned. Although the practice was disdained by other Mennonites at the time, the unique symbolism of the act of Christ as servant leader has again been recognized by many Christian faiths in modern times. That the KG continued to practice "the washing of feet of brethren coming in from a distance" was evidenced by the fact that there was some disagreement about the practice in 1867. The brother and sister kiss was practised.

The KG philosophy regarding prayer and devotions was expressed by the statement of Aeltester Peter P. Toews that "when deeds are speaking words fall silent." In other words the preaching and testimony of Christians was to be demonstrated by the witness of their lives and conduct rather than telling others what they should and should not be doing.

The significance of such thinking on faith and practice was evident in the conservative Mennonite view of conversion. Theologian John C. Wenger defined conversion as "The response of the sinner under the conviction of the Holy Spirit in which the sinner repents, renouncing his sin, and exercises faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord." The volitional element is the climax of conversion, and is the change of purpose and inward turning to Christ. A true conversion had not taken place unless the believer changed his ways, forsaking all sinful habits, and manifesting the fruits of a righteous life within. Discipleship was the focal point of a genuine evangelical conversion. The essence of conversion was the penitent sinner looking in grace to Christ, the Redeemer. This was the one and only requirement for salvation. God alone in His grace and mercy could judge the veracity of a believer's devotion and piety. Those that followed Christ in humble discipleship and childlike obedience and committed themselves unto His care needed never be anxious nor worry. An emotional conversion experience was recognized as Biblical but not if it had been artificially induced.

In stark contrast, Separatist Pietism added numerous legalistic requirements

to that of Scripture, including an emotional experience, a particular mode and form of baptism and a concept called assurance of salvation. The need for continual assurance and reassurance evidently reflected immense insecurities about the veracity and validity of their own faith, as if they themselves could not quite believe their own fanatical dogma. These requirements which varied greatly from one denomination to another, were stimulated by outward rituals and rites, such as blaring music, jingoistic speakers, dancing and gyrating, all calculated to create the state of frenzy necessary for such hysterical religious exercises.

The letters of the KG "Schrifttum" indicated that much of their personal piety centred on Bible study, reading the books in the canon of devotional literature and silent prayer. Visiting between members of the congregation centred on the same activities. Often visitors and hosts would sing together from the *Gesangbuch*, or the hosts might read from scripture or *Martyr's Mirror*. Family worship varied from one family to another. In some families breakfast was preceded by the reading of scripture and silent prayer. Many families followed a similar practice at bed time together with family singing. Family prayer was silent and always practised before a meal.

The spiritual responsibility of the head of the house for the family altar and the spiritual instruction of children was continually emphasized. Heinrich Balzer had written, "Therefore I counsel and implore each member of our church to make it not too difficult for his own child to find his salvation in innocence...." The success of these objectives was illustrated by Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908), son of Ohm Klaas, Rosenort, who compiled a "Prayerbook" during the years 1844 to 1851, while he was between 10 and 17 years old. The compilation included a variety of prayers, such as morning prayers, afternoon prayers, evening prayers, and New Year's wishes for his parents for 1844 to 1851. Such a work reflected a home where the values and teachings of Christianity were instilled in children from the earliest age.

Family togetherness and love were considered of the utmost importance and encouraged by the agrarian lifestyle where family members could work and live together from morning until night. Other sources tell of an ancient custom whereby elderly family patriarchs and matriarchs would put on a special "love meal" for their extended families. On September 10, 1865, Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), by now a widower living in turn with various of his children, invited all his children to such a meal, purchasing roasting lamb, coffee and brandy for the occasion. He wrote to all his children "my love compels me to invite you all again for this year." A similar practice was alluded to by Aeltester Peter Toews in a poem written of a family meal commemorating a successful harvest hosted by his father Johann Toews (1793-1873) on July 25, 1863.

Together and family values characterized the conservative faith tradition and it was not unusual for families consisting of eight or more children of different ages to enjoy socializing together as a unit. Family love and closeness such as this provides an explanation for the flood of family and genealogy books now found among KG descendants.

The members of the KG spent considerable time in private prayer. An orphaned girl working as a maid in the home of KG minister Abraham Klassen (1828-1906), Prangenau, later recalled that “uncle Klassen regularly reposed into the summer kitchen by himself to pray.” Needless to say, the KG found the image of the Separatist Pietist loudly braying out his arrogant self-serving prayer on street corners for public dissemination and admiration, as distasteful then as it is today. Unfortunately there are always a certain percentage of people who naively assume that the more fanatical the screaming and louder the music the more powerful the presence of the Holy Spirit, not realizing that the same effect is achieved among heathen the world over who conduct similar rituals and religious exercises, which are surely no proof of any kind of divine presence. There is an appropriate saying in Low German which goes, “De Grata et geschrieht, de doula et geruecht” meaning literally, “the louder and more frenzied the bedlam, the greater the stench”, which would seem to be applicable in this case as well.

By comparison, the von Riesens in the KG evidently changed their name to Friesen, because they did not want to be mistaken for nobility, a connotation which in their view conflicted with the notion of “simplicity in Christ” and a life of humble discipleship in reverence to Christ, the Son of God, born in a stable. In a letter of 1824 Abraham Friesen chastised his brother Peter for donating money to the Berliner Verein, where his name was published in their books. Friesen stated, “...let us give our alms in secret to the poor and above all to our own brethren in the faith in accordance with the teachings of Paul, whereby our names will not be recorded and sounded out with a trumpet as the hypocrites gladly do...that our entire joy would be...that our names are recorded in the book of heaven, Luke 10:20.”

Funerals in the KG were private affairs practised according to tradition. No funeral eulogies were allowed. In fact, early KG leaders such as Aeltesten Klaas Reimer and Abraham Friesen took strong positions against the practice of eulogies (“Abdanken”) which was becoming common in the Molotschna at the time. The writings surrounding the 1866 division revealed that some of the ministers had deviated from this position and had started performing such services. It was reported that the funeral for Blumenort school teacher, Cornelius P. Friesen in 1899 was held according to the old custom, “No preaching and only a few songs were sung, and von Steen was quoted.” The fact that the service was noted demonstrated how much change had taken place.

Weddings were a sombre affair, and the betrothal of the couple took place after the Sunday morning worship service. The wedding itself was usually preceded by an engagement party (Verlobnisz”) generally two weeks prior. Attendance at weddings of other denominations where drinking and dancing took place was strongly discouraged.

The prohibition of the marriage of the second sister was actively practised among the KG. The teaching illustrated a genuine biblicism in that a husband and wife were deemed to be one according to Scripture. It followed, therefore, that a marriage to a sibling of a spouse was incest. The position was based on

Catholic canon law and was supported by reference to the writings of earlier Aeltesten. The practice was only abandoned in the 1920s in Manitoba.

The KG was unique for its strict stand against smoking. References to smoking in KG literature compare the practice to the smoke ascending from hell. In a letter of 1830 Klaas Reimer referred to a story told by his father who had visited at his Meume's home, who were entertaining wealthy guests who reposed into another room to smoke and how they had later "...found the table fully occupied, and it had smoked frightfully." The KG policy against smoking was based on the teachings of the Waterländer Gemeinde in Holland and in particular the writings of Pieter Pieters. Ironically the KG was the subject of much scorn and ridicule from other congregations as it was the only Gemeinde which took a stand against smoking. Perhaps it was no coincidence that a son of the KG, Jake Epp, implemented bans on smoking as well as warnings on cigarette packages, during his tenure as Canadian Health Minister in 1986.

Another interesting aspect of KG faith and piety was an emphasis on dreams, and the belief that dreams provided divine guidance in the life of believers. In a letter of 1820, KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen related a dream he had experienced, "...I had ... prepared myself to ascend up unto a high mountain...But when I turned about and wanted to go back, I quickly had to cling to the ground, lest, as it seemed, I would plummet down into the precipice...After a tremendous battle, I was able to descend from the mountain...." Abraham Friesen used the dream to illustrate the soul journey, the continuing battle of discipleship, and his reasons for joining the KG in 1818.

Another example of the dream culture was found in Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93), whose dreams influenced her family's decision to emigrate from Russia in 1874 and prevented a secondary migration from Steinbach, Manitoba, to Nebraska in 1876. Another KG woman, Anna Doerksen Barkman (1854-1937) recalled an important dream of how she wanted to cross a river to join her family who had gone ahead, but could not do so because of the deep water. Finally her mother came to lead her safely across. The dream was interpreted as an allegory of her spiritual journey. Maria Kornelsen Enns (1844-1913), Rosenthal, Jansen, Nebraska, referred to a dream in which she saw her brother, Steinbach school teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen who "... appeared so distressed and pitiful; and on your lap, you had little Aganetha, who had already grown much....I pushed my way forwardand asked...if you were.... sick. Then you spoke...`Yes, I shall die soon', At this, I awoke, and the tears ran down my cheeks." The dream spoke of the pain of separation from siblings and friends which resulted from emigration. Dreams and visions also gave people hope of the coming redemption and of being reunited with the saints who had gone on before.

The topic of piety and worship in the KG is vast and extremely significant. A whole book could be written on the topic and hopefully the foregoing chapter will be of some encouragement for anyone considering such a task.

For Further Reading:

Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, pages 1-200.



*This painting of a group of Anabaptist-Mennonites meeting for worship in a "Schuene" (bay barn) is reminiscent of the KG, the only Gemeinde in the Molotschna which did not worship in a church building.
Photo courtesy of Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten, page 19.*



*Closely knit families and genuine family values were the norm among conservative Mennonites. This painting by A. Robert shows a typical Mennonite family in Berne, Switzerland in the 19th century.
Photo courtesy of Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten, page 132.*

Chapter Eight: Cultural and Social Life

Section 8.01: Journals and Correspondence.

Much of what we know of the cultural and social life of the KG in Russia comes from their own writings in the form of journals and correspondence, a significant quantity of which survived relocation to North America in 1874 and is still extant. This aspect of KG life and culture will be considered first as the writing paradigm of the KG was the window through which other areas of cultural and social life can be studied and examined. Reading, study, and writing, was intrinsically embedded in the KG psyche and social fabric and articulated a number of significant cultural practices.

As already mentioned, the KG tradition of print culture and its canon of devotional literature went back three hundred years to the Reformation. Print culture was only the most visible part of a much wider and more systemic regime of reading and writing articulated by the requirement that all adherents be capable of reading and interpreting the Bible for themselves. Indeed, the practice was modelled on that of the New Testament church where the apostles communicated with the Gemeinde by epistles.

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

The tradition continued with the flight of many believers to Northern Germany and Prussia, from whence there were extensive exchanges of letters between the mother congregations in Holland and the Weichsel delta. The writing and reading culture was particularly evident among the leadership of conservative churches such as Dirk Philips, George Hansen, Hans von Steen, Peter Epp in Danzig (see Section 2.4), already referred to, and others such as Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96), Aeltester of the Ellerwald Elbing Gemeinde, who maintained an extensive diary, etc. The reading and writing culture was broadly based within the lay membership of the Gemeinden, a grass-roots phenomenon.

The reading and writing culture was again enhanced with the emigration to Russia as the immigrants wrote back to Prussia with news of the new settlement. In 1790 an Aeltester was appointed for the Chortitza Colony by letter. The autobiography of Klaas Reimer made a number of references to correspondence with leaders in Prussia. The letters exchanged between Abraham Friesen, the second KG Aeltester, and brother Peter in Prussia, provide a unique look into the hearts and soul of a family whose noble pursuit of Christian truth and social justice raised them above the monotony of the human condition and the mere

pursuit of health and happiness.

Many members of the KG in Russia maintained journals. Although only a limited number of journals are extant, evidence indicates that journal keeping was a wide spread practice. The different kinds of journals included the following: the daybook--a daily recording of events, weather, activities, etc.; the account book, keeping records of farm sales, yields, etc.; the family book ("Familienbuch"), the family tree, usually a genealogy back to Prussia; and the historical anthology, a collection of historical writings, serving as a private reference library at a time when the ownership of a Bible and a few printed books was a considerable achievement. Many journals were combinations of the above. The maintenance of journals was extremely important among free holding middle class farmers, often providing the only available record of past crops, seeding or frost dates and other events determining the life cycle of 19th century agrarian life.

The 18th century in Prussia was considered a classical period by the KG and Aeltesten such as Cornelius Regehr, Cornelius Warkentin, Hans Buhler, were considered normative in their ministry and teaching. Their biographies, letters, sermons and poems were collected and preserved in numerous KG journals. For example, Aeltester Peter P. Toews included in his document collection a long letter written by Hans von Steen on November 30, 1769. The letter itself referred to an active reading and writing culture in the various Gemeinden in Prussia. Two letters by Peter Epp were also preserved (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 39-40).

The "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau, was the most fully developed example of the genre. It included a number of poems and biographies of venerable Prussian leaders, a selection of contemporary writings regarding KG life and faith, a number of Reimer's own writings, as well as poetry (see Section 10.03). In terms of day books and diaries the journals of Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer, Kleefeld, and later Steinbach, Borosenko, were by far the most significant record of social and cultural life among landowning Russian Mennonites in the 19th century. Reimer had an amazing ear for the nuances of daily life, providing in the process, a detailed record of the activities of his vivacious wife, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, midwife, nurse and matriarch, making her the most extensively described woman of her life world (see Sections 9.11 and 10.07).

As already mentioned there was much writing by women in Reformation times, who carried more than their share of sacrifice and martyrdom. In more recent times, women traditionally had oversight over the parts of the household economy such as poultry, dairy and garden production. It was natural therefore that they would assume responsibility for keeping the family account book recording production and sales. The journal of Cornelius Loewen provided an example of an account book, as his wife, nee Helena Bartel (1833-76), "recorded the weekly butter sales in her neat handwriting, whilst her husband documented the labourers and maids he hired, the goods and services he purchased, and the loans he arranged and payments made."

Although few journals are extant from the Russian period, responsibility for journal keeping had been assumed by women within decades of the 1874

migration to North America, for various reasons which are not yet fully understood. The earliest extant journal of a KG woman was that of Margaretha Plett Kroeker (1842-1920), Steinbach, Manitoba, covering the years 1892 to 1908, an extremely well written and valuable record of events. Maria Koop Plett (1868-1918), the sister-in-law to Margaretha, was another KG woman who maintained a diary covering the years 1906 until her death in 1918.

It seemed that the immigration and resettlement experience always provided a stimulus for letter writing and correspondence. The physical expansion of the KG out of the Molotschna inspired a whole new generation of letter writers as families living in the different congregations communicated with each other by post. Only a minuscule fraction of the letters written during this period are extant, and yet, provided significant information about the life and thought of the period. A similar flowering of letters occurred during the 1874 emigration and after. Numerous samples of such correspondence have been published.

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

It is estimated that the KG "Schrifttum" including KG sermons, letters and journals, collected and available at various archives probably exceeds 100,000 pages of material.

There was a logical explanation for the vast amount of primary source material available from the conservative faith tradition. Conservatives such as the KG looked back to the time of the New Testament church as the classical age, the fount of spiritual authority and inspiration. The tread of historical faithfulness over the centuries was of great importance, affirming God's unfolding revelation for mankind. It was natural, therefore, that conservatives would place emphasis on reading and writing as keys to claim this birthright and heritage, also resulting in a sense of historical consciousness.

In contrast, Separatist-Pietists were focused on--or obsessed--with assurance and reassurance of salvation and the unabated enjoyment thereof, coupled with an emphasis on eschatological prophecy. They developed a forward looking mentality, focused on the end times, and naturally less concerned about writing and documenting the past, the unfolding of history (*Storm and Triumph*, pages 5-6).

Journal keeping was not a luxury for conservative Mennonites such as the KG. For them these records were a necessary tool for the operation of their *Wirtschaften*, and the production of crops for a specialized commercial market place, as well as representing a strategy for the preservation of their cultural borders. Since the Separatist-Pietists, at least initially, came from the landless classes, they were not as likely to have been exposed to a writing culture tradition. The Separatists were also articulated by pietism which had its own indigenous devotional literature and therefore they had little need to document and preserve their own literary tradition, the validity of which they rejected in any event.

Section 8.02: Poetry. A Grand Tradition.

Poetry was another genre of this literary tradition going back to Reformation times when 8000 martyrs shed their blood for the faith in Holland and elsewhere in Europe. Often times the martyrs recorded their faith stories in verse and/or others would write poetic elegies for them. These epic poems were sung by fellow believers and eventually compiled into the first Dutch-language “Gesangbuch”.

By 1550 Mennonites had already migrated to Danzig and other locations, fleeing persecution. After a century-and-a-half they adopted the German language and soon their Dutch and Low German martyr songs and others like them were translated or else written in German. In the mid-18th century Bishop Hans von Steen in Danzig, Prussia, compiled a collection of these songs into a German “Gesangbuch” which is still in use by thousands of orthodox and conservative Mennonites in Latin America. Thus the “Gesangbuch” became an early benchmark model for the Mennonite poetry tradition.

Consider the following verse nine from song 138 in the *Gesangbuch*, under the Section on “Brotherly love”. Read the words and feel the stirring of the rhythm

In jener Welt wird es noch besser hergehen,
da wird vor dem Vater die Brüderschaft stehen
im heftigsten Feuer, in seligster Brunst,
die ziehet zusammen des Königes Gunst.
Ach, drücket zusammen die Herzen und Hände
und bittet, dasz er Zion Hilfe bald sende;
so kennet die Liebe nicht Anfang noch Ende.

Translation:

In yonder world, how blessed and joyous we'll be,
our peoplehood united, the Saviour will see,
in the fire of the Spirit, and zeal of the bless't,
we'll all taste together, God's grace and sweet rest,
so unite now our hearts and lift up our hands,
we pray, Zion's help soon us He'll send,
for true love knows, neither beginning nor end.

It was unfortunate that so many Mennonite scholars during the 1950s and 60s were obsessed with condemning and disparaging their own heritage and culture. Had they done a little *bona fide* historical research and study regarding these beautiful poetic works, they possibly might have identified one or more of the composers as their own ancestor. The poems in the *Gesangbuch* reflected the spiritual life of the generations of the conservative faith tradition from the Reformation to the present.

Poems were routinely written to celebrate and commemorate all manner of occasions from weddings and births, to funerals. In other cases poetry was used as a vehicle to write history. The journals of KG elders included numerous

poems telling the stories of ancient Bishops in Prussia and Holland who devoted their lives in the service of God's church. The "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer, Muntau, was a classic and highly sophisticated example of this genre of writing (see Section 10.5).

Some of this poetry was brilliant and moving. Any reader doubting this statement should read, for example, the epic poems of Rev. Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), the renowned KG theologian (see Section 5.4). To experience the power of the lyrics the reader must feel the meter and rhythm and consider that such epic poems were 50 and more stanzas long. The following extract from Heinrich Balzer's "Eulogy for Klaas Reimer" will illustrate the point. The poem was written to commemorate Aeltester Reimer after his death in 1837:

1. "Kronen ewiger Seeligkeiten
Will Got allen denn bereiten
Die hier durch Geduld in Leiden
Sich bereiten zu den Freuden.

2. "Labend wird es ihn erfreuen
Die mit Traenen hier austreuen
Wenn sie dort die Frucht erblicken
Jauchzend froh und voll entzuecken.

3. "Also liebe treue Bruder
Und ihr Schwestern als Mitglieder:
Troestet euch mit diesen Grunden
Wenn in euch will ueberwinden.

63. "Ruhe wird erst dorten werden
Wenn wir einsten von der Erden
Unsern Geist in Gottes Haenden
Ihm am Ende uebersenden. AMEN.

The poetry tradition referred to above was an important part of pioneer life when the Mennonite settlers arrived in Manitoba in 1874. Ministers regularly used the inspirational poem-songs in the "Gesangbuch" to enhance their sermons. Each village and each family clan, seemingly, had one or two poets who wrote poetry, often for special occasions such as funerals, weddings and anniversaries. Much of the poetry, of course, was very mundane, but it told a story and conveyed genuine moral and spiritual values.

Others simply wrote poetry because they enjoyed it or as a means of spiritual introspection. Jakob L. Plett (1864-1931) was a gifted poet and his great-grandson Patrick Friesen has become something of a Canadian national icon for his award winning production "The Shunning". One of Jakob's poems was translated by Margaret Penner Toews in 1981 and published in Royden Loewen's

Blumenort book, pages 190-191. Another poem by Jakob L. Plett, in its Danziger German original, "Ein Bruchlied aus Prützen", was published in *The Golden Years*, page 160. Although many did not write poetry, everyone enjoyed reading poetry and listening to readings of poems at various family and community functions.

The poetry and literary traditions of conservative Mennonites were generally viewed with disdain by Pietist Separatists. An example of these attitudes is found in Peter M. Friesen, Sparrau, who referred to their picturesque Danziger dialect as "a kind of German that can be put alongside the heavily ridiculed American 'Pennsylvania Dutch' which is certainly worse than the amusing German of the 'uncle' and 'aunt' letters in the *Mennonite Rundschau*" (page 628). In fact, the "wannabe" learned folk who despised not only their native Low German/Plaut-dietsch but also the vernacular German used in church and school, were not restricted to the Mennonite Colonies. Professor Paul Schach, University of Nebraska, has written about the would-be "gelaernte Lait" of the villages among the Colonists in Russia and laments the contemptuous disapproval for the dialect among these "intellectuals" and explained that this was often due to an ignorance of linguistic history. Others naively assumed that the reference to "Low" German meant a German of lesser value, not realizing that "Low" referred to the geographical origins of the language as in the "Low" Countries.

The poetry genre of literature among conservative Mennonites has also been overlooked for another reason, being the difficulty in translating the ancient Danziger vernacular to English so that modern-day descendants can read and understand it. The poetry was written so that the metre and rhythm became part of the message, the opposite of some modern-day poetry where the lack of punctuation or sentences becomes part of the poetry. The difficulty is to find someone who can not only translate the meaning of the poetry but also put it together in English with some kind of meter and rhythm approximating the original. Margaret Penner Toews, Neilsberg, Saskatchewan, a renown poet with four poetry books to her credit, each selling in excess of 10,000 copies, is one artist with the ability to complete such a translation.

Known primarily as KG Aeltester and founder of the Canadian Holdeman movement, Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) was also one of the finest poets of the generation that immigrated to Canada in 1874. His poetic work still awaits scholarly compilation and publication. According to his son Isaac W. Toews, the poem, "The Refiner" was among his best creations, articulating his faith and reflecting the wisdom of a great man of God. The poem was translated into English by Margaret Penner Toews, daughter-in-law of Isaac W. Toews.



*Isaac W. Toews (1887-1976),
Abbotsford, British Colum-
bia, son of Aeltester Peter P.
Toews. Photo courtesy of
Clarence Hiebert,
The Holdeman People
(South Pasadena, California,
1973), page 309.*

The Refiner

The Master Refiner with quiet intentness
is watching the silver and tending the fire--
not a twitch of His eyelids! With hand sure and steady
He knows just the heat that the process requires.

Now if speech be of silver, and silence be golden,
Lord, stoke up the fires and purify me.
Help me discern what is sanctified silence
And, with equal discernment, speak gladly for Thee.

O Master Refiner, I pray do not spare me!
Trusting Thy wisdom, I yield to the flame,
Till, pure of all dross, I reflect Thy bright image
And, moulded for service, I'm stamped with Thy name.

(Peter P. Toews, "The Refiner," trans. and ed. Margaret Penner Toews, *Five Loaves and Two Small Fishes* (Neilburg, Saskatchewan, 1976), 13; republished in Plett, ed., *History and Events* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1982), vi.)

The genre of poetry under consideration has not yet been the subject of any organized research and systematic study. "The Refiner" speaks for a proud and noble poetry tradition within the conservative wing of the Mennonite church. It was a genre birthed in the martyr fires of the Reformation and brought to life and maturity through four centuries of migration and persecution and still practised in many conservative communities to the present day.

Section 8.03: Morality Literature.

Printed writings, of course, were very expensive and hard to come by in southern Russia, where there was not even a German printer in the early years. Mennonites like most other cultural groups passed along stories and folklore by word of mouth and hand-written accounts which were copied and recopied from one journal to another.

The practice of transcribing and collecting hand-written stories for each individual's personal journal reflected a wider tradition common to the Molotschna pioneers dating back to Prussia. It was nothing more or less than the ancient pre-printing press way of disseminating information, back to the days when monks laboriously made hand written copies of manuscripts. It was a cheap and relatively efficient method of duplicating information compared to the cost of printing. The collection of these type of stories was a practice parallel to both the writing and print culture traditions of the KG.

On November 13, 1821, Klaas Friesen (1793-1873), Altona, copied an account of a certain incident experienced in the City on November 28, 1813. The document is only partially extant and the story incomplete. But it does illustrate how these type of stories found their way into the popular imagination. Although incomplete, the page with Friesen's explanatory note bearing his signature, "Klaas von Riesen" was preserved by niece Helena von Riesen Jansen, later of Beatrice, Nebraska.

Of particular interest was the fact that the stories collected among the KG were invariably of a moralistic nature.

The journals of Cornelius P. Janzen (1863-1941), Ridgewood, Manitoba, illustrated the type of stories and poems collected. A poem called "Erdbeben in Lisbon" or "Earthquake in Lisbon" dealt with the tragic earthquake which destroyed the city of Lisbon in 1755. The same journal included a story called, "A man called Hosea", about an evil man who persecuted Christians and a young innocent maid--a believer, who was his gardener. Likely Janzen copied these writings from the collections of his father-in-law, school teacher Cornelius P. Friesen. "Die Vier Rosenorter" was an anonymous poem about four men from Rosenort murdered in 1811 on the steppes by Nogaier found in the poetry book of Jakob L. Plett. A poem about the horrible death of a man named Loepp was found in the "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau.

Given the position of the KG against smoking it was natural that a number of these stories would focus on the dangers of smoking, usually drawing the analogy of smoke ascending from Hell.

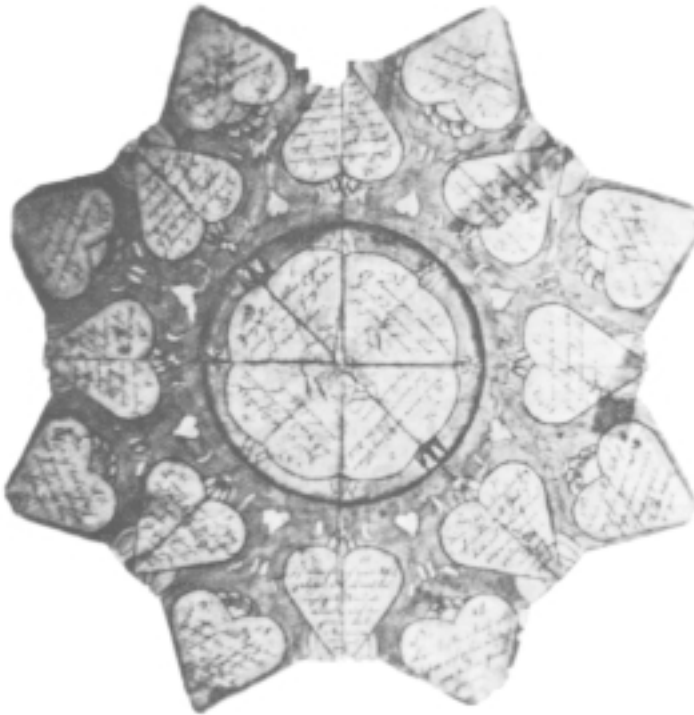
Although the stories satisfied a basic human need and natural curiosity, they also served a dual purpose as a secondary devotional literature, less rigidly controlled than that found in the canon of printed literature. This was illustrated by the "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer, already referred to, which contained poems and biographical sketches such as the story of Cornelius Regehr and Cornelius Warkentin, emissaries to the pioneer settlements in Russia; a poem about George Trappe, emigration agent for the Russian Crown, an autobiographical writing by Aeltester Cornelius Regehr, Heuboden, which portrayed his rebelliousness in school and how God saved him from that condition, etc.

Some writings viewed with exceptional favour were laboriously duplicated by hand strictly for the purpose of wider dissemination, presumably in cases where actual publication was not warranted. The treatise "Faith and Reason" by Heinrich Balzer was a writing widely distributed by this method.

Over the years an *ad hoc* body of handwritten literature developed so that a number of the same stories are found in many KG anthologies.

Teachers used these handwritten monographs as teaching aides to instruct children in various moral virtues. For example, teacher Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), Blumenort, Manitoba, included a handwritten copy of the autobiography of Aeltester Cornelius Regehr, Heuboden, Prussia, among his collections of writings. Presumably Friesen used the story to teach history as well as the obvious moral lesson, that children should be obedient and respectful in school and zealously pursue learning.

The sample writings ("Vorschriften") which the children copied to practice their handwriting were usually short historical vignettes often with moralistic overtones.



In 1843 Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), Contentiusfeld, Molotschna, married for the second time to Katharina Friesen (1820-84), daughter of Ohm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, Russia.

Thiessen gave his bride a beautiful valentine ("Liebesbrief") as an engagement present. "It consisted of 20 daily messages of love, presented to the bride 20 days before the wedding, with the last one to be read on the day of the wedding"--Litke, A Journey with Grandfather, page 49.

Photo courtesy of E. Abrahams, Frakturmalen, page 120/Historical Sketches, page 649-63/East Reserve 125, page 40.

Section 8.04: Travel and Visitation.

Travel and visitation was a significant factor in defining the life world of KG-ers in Russia, equally important to the writing culture already discussed. The social interactions made possible by correspondence and travel were foundational to the rich experiential embryo which made 19th century life rich and fulfilling, in spite of the lack of modern day conveniences and gadgetry.

Travel and visitation was articulated, first of all, by the fact that the members of the KG lived spread throughout many of the 60 villages in the Molotschna, typically with several families forming a small KG conventicle in a particular village. As a result there was daily travelling and visitation among the members of the congregation as well as with numerous friends and relatives, business associates and others, who were not KG-ers.

The early Molotschna experience was enriched by a constant interaction with Prussia not only by correspondence but also by travelling. Immigration started again in 1818 after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. There was a continual stream of immigrants arriving some of whom joined the KG. In 1833 David Klassen (1813-1900) immigrated to Russia accomplishing the arduous trek by horseback. Peter von Riesen's son-in-law, Cornelius Jansen, emigrated to Russia in 1852 but first travelled there on horseback to investigate opportunities.

There was also occasional visiting back and forth between Prussia and Russia. Peter von Riesen came twice to visit his brethren in Russia, in 1816 and again in 1832. On April 14, 1838, Regina von Riesen (1795-1852) and her GG minister husband, Heinrich Neufeld (1791-1865), Rosenort, Molotschna, left for a pastoral visit to Petershagen, Prussia. A daughter Susanna, was born the day they arrived on the yard of brother Peter in Rosenort, Prussia, on May 14, 1838. On their return trip they met a young woman, Elisabeth Schöndorf, who joined them and later married their son, Abraham. In 1856 the Jansen family returned to Prussia, this time by carriage and relays of post horses. The post carriage would stop at roadside inns where the travellers would eat and the horses were fed. Peter Isaak (1780-1857), Tiege, travelled to Fürstenwerder, Prussia, in 1846, to visit his sister, Anna Isaak (1777-1850), Vierzehnhuben, widow of Heinrich Plett (1769-1843). They travelled with team and wagon. During the journey his travelling companion died and he went on alone.

There was also frequent travel to neighbouring Russian villages for various purchases, the hiring of harvesters, or to attend the annual exhibition and fair (Jahrmarkt), in Tokmak, Nikopol or Ekatherinoslav. During the Crimean War many members of the KG experienced the "podwodden" already discussed.

After the opening of the Black Sea ports in the 1830s, farmers frequently travelled to Berdjansk or Nikopol with wagon trains loaded with wheat for the world market. Three or four wagons would be hitched together and driven by one man. At the seaport the grain would be weighed. Some members of the KG such as Peter Toews (1838-82), Steinbach, Borosenko, became known as teamsters and were on the road to Nikopol regularly. It even happened that young men fell into temptation: January 24, 1865, Peter W. Toews, Margenau, "...confessed or asked for forgiveness for having played checkers in the public house while driving to Berdjansk."

Travelling could also be dangerous. In 1811 Nogaier robbed and murdered four men from the village of Rosenort, and many KG-ers copied a poem about the tragedy into their "Familienbuch". Peter Jansen, son of Cornelius, had a bad experience when he and his speedy horse outran a group of thieves who were trying to rob him. Peter was carrying the money from a herd of cattle his father had sold. Accidents could also happen. Johann Toews (1793-1873), Fischau, recorded the story of how his wagon loaded with young pigs had gone out of control and tipped over while coming down a hill on the outskirts of Melitopol in 1827, resulting in an accident which killed his father-in-law Johann Harder (1764-1827), Blumstein.

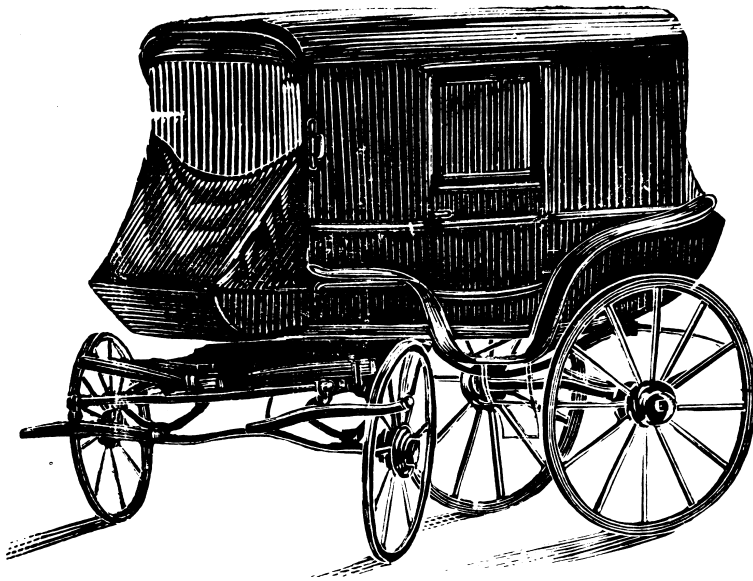
On one occasion a young woman, Katharina Brandt, daughter of Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort, was driving with her two young children. She stopped her horse and buggy beside the Molotschna River and went down the river bank for a drink. But her horses were thirsty and dragged the buggy down into the river with the youngest girl in it. The mother rushed to save her little daughter but also drowned.

Travelling increased considerably after the outward expansion from the Molotschna of the KG commencing in 1860. The trip to the Crimea was a 200-mile endeavour and took several days to complete. Contemporary journals indicated that journeys were made on a regular basis particularly by members of the ministerial who travelled constantly on pastoral exchanges and for ministerial conferences.

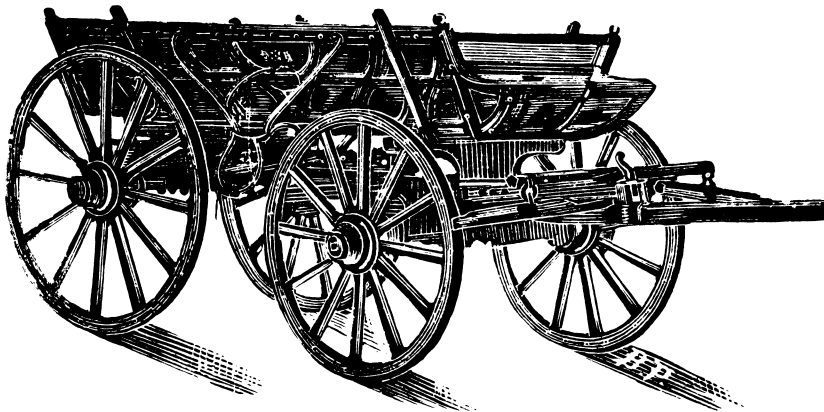
In a letter of April 28, 1868, Cornelius Enns, son of Aeltester Heinrich, described such a journey from Borosenko to Annenfeld, Crimea, which he had just completed, together with two other men, each with their own wagon. Because of inclement weather they were not able to make it to the next town and camped on the steppes the first night. The next day it rained and the load became too heavy for their horses. They left one wagon and hitched three horses to one of the remaining wagons. It was dusk by the time they arrived at the next stop. In the morning their horses were still overtired but they made it to Shingar for night when it started to rain again. By midnight it had cleared somewhat and so they drove on. But by morning they had only made it to Kirk where they stopped for breakfast. As it looked like more rain they pressed on and made it home to Annenfeld late Saturday, a four-day journey.

In 1869 12-year-old Johann F. Toews was allowed to accompany his uncle Peter P. Toews and family on a ministerial trip to the Crimea. Young Toews was to act as a baby sitter for his uncle's young children. He later recalled seeing large memorials at Otschapav just before entering the Crimea, monuments erected to honour the soldiers who had fallen in the Crimean War.

Much of the travelling was done with a "Vordeckwagon", a light wagon with a covered top.



Mennonite covered wagon, called a "Verdeckwagon", unknown among Russians. In essence the "Verdeckwagon" was a carriage with a cab which allowed driver and passenger some comfort in inclement weather. A variation of the "Verdeckwagon" is still in use among the Mennonites of Mexico and Latin America. Photo courtesy of Damit es nicht Vergessen Werde, page 249.



The Mennonite freight wagon, also unfamiliar to the Russians. Note the angled sides of the wagon box, a typical feature in Russia. When the Mennonites moved to North America in 1874 some farmers took their wagons along, believing them superior to the much larger and more heavy duty American freight wagons. But soon the Russian wagons were no longer used. Photo courtesy of Damit es nicht Vergessen Werde, page 249.

Section 8.05: Material Culture.

Material culture refers to “the aggregate of physical objects or artifacts used by a society.” Decorative culture would be that aspect of material culture chosen, designed or created in some way by the individuals within that culture. Many aspects of decorative culture are generally recognized as folk art. Historically decorative culture was certainly one of the important aspects of women’s experience.

Notwithstanding that the conservative branch of the Mennonites faith were people of the “plain” tradition, it would be evident even to the casual observer that their decorative culture was artistic, and that their aesthetic values and forms revealed distinctive ideas of beauty and tastefulness. And yet, almost nothing has been written about this aspect of 19th century life in Russia. This in contrast to the Swiss or “old” Mennonites where a new book on *Fraktur* art, quilts, architecture, furniture, etc, is almost a monthly event. In the meantime the last remnants of the material culture that once existed are rapidly being lost.

Unfortunately most of the limited writing about Mennonite decorative and material culture is disassociative and generally no consideration or research has been conducted on the historical origins of a particular form or genre of decorative culture or folk art. Typically the writers seem blissfully unaware of any sense of historical consciousness or else assume that they themselves are at the threshold of an infant artistic tradition.

It is difficult to understand or explain this lack of interest: is it simply plain garden variety ignorance, or a form of cultural “Ludditism”, or some peculiar manifestation of “modernism”? On a recent trip to Mexico I was struck by the great expense and effort made to preserve other ancient cultures such as that of the Maya many of which are no older than the Dutch-North German-Prussian-Russian historical tradition. Great concern is generally expressed over the potential extinction of any animal or plant species and it would seem equally important to preserve an indigenous cultural tradition such as found among the KG and its diaspora to the fullest extent possible.

The lack of writing about decorative culture is unfortunate for women as they played a major role in many aspects, from linens, quilting, food preparation and presentation, household decoration, *Fraktur*. Women had considerable influence upon all aspects of decorative culture, be it furniture, the decorative features used in buildings, planting and layout of orchards, etc.

A notable exception is the work of Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen (*Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*, 229 pages), whose analysis of the historical origins of the designs used in Mennonite furniture making is ground breaking. Kauenhoven traces the artistic designs and architectural creations of the Mennonite tradition to the those of the Renaissance. Her work illustrates the potential results of research and scholarly analysis of almost any aspect of material culture.

Mennonite furniture tradition and much of the entire spectrum of material culture dated back to the artforms and designs of the Renaissance. Reinhild

Kauenhoven Janzen has written that the Mennonites “were influenced by the form, the styles of ornamentation, and the use of space in buildings and furniture of their neighbours. Thus elements of the Vistula Delta tradition became Mennonite.” She included thirteen items as part of the canon of the Mennonite furniture tradition, including the chest (Kjist), the bed (Bad), the settee (Ruebaenkj), chair (Schtoul), wardrobe (Kjleedashaup), table (desch) and the wall-hung pendulum clock.

The item most commonly taken along from Russia in the 1874 emigration to America was the Kjist, which served dual purpose as a packing crate and as a tasteful piece of furniture upon arrival in the new land.

The most important of the items in this category is a Kjist believed to have belonged to Klaas Reimer, founder of the KG. The Kjist may well have been the dowry trunk of Agatha Epp, Reimer’s first wife. In any event, it probably originated in Prussia, travelled with Klaas Reimer to Petershagen, Molotschna, in 1804/5; was inherited by son Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), Tiege, whose heirs took it to Nebraska in 1874 after his death from whence son Johann F. Reimer took it to Manitoba after his marriage in 1886; inherited by son Cornelius R. Reimer who took the Kjist to Mexico in 1948 and from there with his widow, Susanna Kornelsen Reimer, to Belize ten years later, and presently owned by daughter Susanna Reimer Penner.

A unique and extremely valuable item of material culture was a walking cane hand carved by Klaas Reimer in 1792 while herding cattle in Prussia, presumably in Neunhuben where he was living by then. The handle of the cane was shaped with a bulb at the end with seven intricately carved rings. The year and the initials “K R” are carved into the ring separating the handle from the stem. The stem consisted of a half dozen or so strands carved so that the strands curve and wrap around each other circularly all the way to the point, some 20 inches. The cane is carved out of one piece of wood.

Oral tradition holds that the cane was always inherited by the youngest son, and thus it went to Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), Tiege, and not to Abraham (“Fula”) Reimer (1808-92), Rosenort, the oldest. The descendants of Klaas settled in Jansen, Nebraska, taking the cane with them. It was inherited by son Johann F. Reimer (1860-1941) who fashioned a brass ring around the top of the stem of the cane to keep the strands from unravelling. Johann took the cane to Manitoba from where it travelled to Mexico in 1948 with son Cornelius R. Reimer and from there to Belize. The Klaas Reimer Kjist and cane illustrate the benefits of studying material culture which often stands as immutable evidence of that history.

Son Johann F. Reimer was a man who recognized the value of the wisdom of the past, and believed in preserving that which was good such as his grandfather’s Kjist and cane. Johann was also a creative person. As a young man herding sheep on the Jansen ranch in Nebraska in 1878, he drew a number of sketches which demonstrated that he had inherited some of his grandfather’s artistic talent.

The love of woodworking if not carving was also passed on to another grandson of Klaas Reimer, namely, Rev. Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915), Blumenort,

Manitoba, who had learned the art of carpentry as a young apprentice for his uncle Bernhard Rempel, Lichtfelde, Russia. Peter was also a talented furniture maker and a number of items he constructed were documented in various contemporary journals as well as in his "Account Book". A miniature chest (Kjist) was possibly the only item built by him still extant. Sometime around 1906, he built the miniature Kjist as a gift for his daughter Sarah (1887-1971), as a place to store her personal valuables.

Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has written about a phase in the Mennonite furniture tradition where it is remembered "in nostalgic, miniature renderings of the standard pieces." Peter R. Reimer built the miniature Kjist in his senior years, possibly as an attempt to pass on something valuable and treasured to his daughter. The fact that Sarah preserved it and passed it on to her daughter, Katharina Barkman Plett, who still cherishes it, affirmed that he was successful in passing on a deep respect for the past which he loved so dearly.

Other items of the Mennonite furniture tradition within the KG include the Kjist of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82), Fischau, Molotschna, and later Rosenfeld, Manitoba.

Another similar item is the Kjist of Heinrich Fast (1826-90), Fischau, Molotschna, and one of the pioneers of Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874. This piece is interesting as the colourful portraits commonly posted in the lid of the Kjist have remained intact until recently. This is unusual, as many modern owners of such artifacts, remove these colourful portraits due to ignorance about the custom. The lid of the chest traditionally served as a sort of private shrine, or small cubicle, where colour and art were considered appropriate. The Gerhard Doerksen Kjist also illustrates this tradition except that the colourful artwork consists of a New Year's wish by Doerksen himself, a gifted *Fraktur* artist.

An exceptional artifact in the KG tradition was the dowry chest of Helena von Riesen (1822-97), daughter of Peter. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has written that this beautiful specimen was "Probably made in Gdansk (Danzig circa 1800), owned by Helena von Riesen who married Cornelius Jansen in Schidlitz, Gdansk, in 1846. Brought from Berdjansk, South Russia [to Nebraska] in 1873. Oak, six solid boards, dovetailed joints. Inlaid veneer ornament of flowers with interlaced borders. Till on the left inside and mounts for kerchief board across the back. Embossed ornate-tinged iron hinges and handle plates, tooled cast-iron handles, brass key plate. Independent five legged stand."

Another important item in the KG material culture tradition is the trunk of Anna Barkman, daughter of Peter M. Barkman, Annenfeld, Crimea. According to oral tradition, as the family was finishing their preparations to emigrate in 1874, Peter asked his 8-year-old daughter to pick three gallons of the finest kernels of Turkey red winter wheat to be used as seed when they arrived at their new home in Gnadenu, Kansas. The wheat was packed into the trunk and in this manner the Barkmans did their part to introduce Turkey red winter wheat to the mid-western plains. The Anna Barkman trunk was not in the Mennonite furniture tradition, being a simple box-like trunk, but nevertheless reflected the KG aes-

thetic values already discussed.

Another item with roots in Prussia was the pendulum wall clock of Margaretha Plett Kroeker (1842-1920), Kleefeld, Molotschna, and one of the pioneers in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874. According to oral tradition the clock was made in Prussia. The clock itself bears the date, 1819. Since the Kroeker ancestors had already immigrated to Russia in 1804 the clock must have come to Russia with the family of Johann Plett (1765-1833) who immigrated in 1827. Grandson Cornelius P. Dueck remembered how his grandmother would carefully rewind the clock each night, pulling down the weight. With its steady ticking the clock was a constant and comfortable reminder of the past.

Other material culture items in the Plett family are two cream pitchers believed to have originated with Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903), mother of Margaretha. One of these, a copperware pitcher, had a clear blue band painted around the middle, and a portrayal of a young woman sitting on a bench in a garden. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen opined that it was of the sort manufactured in England and sold in South Russia in the mid-19th century. It seems obvious that the study of such items and their transmission to the present can provide a good deal of information about the life and values of their owners in ages past.

A final item in the KG material culture tradition is another clock, a gold pocket watch which Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), a Frisian minister in Kronsgarten, Russia, had purchased for his beautiful young bride, Aganetha Quiring. The watch was inherited by son Jakob Bartel (1808-72), Neukirch and later Mariawohl, Molotschna, and then by his son Jakob (1858-1929), who settled in Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874, later moving to Meade, Kansas. The watch is currently on display at the Meade Historical Museum.

In most respects the cultural and social practices of the KG in Russia mirrored those of their Flemish neighbours in the Molotschna Colony. A few unique traits did develop over the decades articulated by specific aspects of their religious philosophy and practice and eventually reflected in particular material culture traditions.

The KG belief in simplicity in their lifestyle and life environment, dictated that their material traditions would be plain and functional, but tasteful, namely, function over form.

This principle informed certain distinct values in aesthetics. The KG liked tasteful colours such as blue and grey. Blue, and more specifically, the so-called heavenly blue ("Himmel Bleave"), considered the "duse" or Godly colour by many cultures, came to be called "Kleinegemeinsche Bleave" or Kleine Gemeinde blue, evidently because they used it so frequently to paint buildings and equipment such as wagons. Although these descriptions were meant as put-downs by ignorant neighbours, most people today would join the KG in objecting to the gaudy colours evidently used by most others to paint and decorate their houses, furniture and wagons. The KG were allowed these indulgences by the all powerful Johann Cornies who appreciated their support and enthusiastic endorsement of his agricultural reforms.

In keeping with tradition and the practicalities of farming life, the clothes of the KG were quite dark in colour instead of the usual brighter colours (Peter M. Friesen, page 198). Johann F. Harms, who grew up in Kleefeld which had a sizable KG community, wrote that the daughters of the KG were distinguished by “the simple black bonnets” which they wore in school, and for which they were undoubtedly teased (quoted in *Storm and Triumph*, page 20).

Folk historian Johann W. Dueck, Rosenhof, described the apparel of the KG as follows: “...the grandparents had still spun their own flax and made their own clothes with the yarn, the linen cloth being extremely durable. The shirts we wore were made either of white or grey linen cloth or of a thick blue grayish cotton material. Peaked caps were worn on the heads of male persons and on their feet long boots or wooden shoes (‘Korcken’). Similarly with everything else. Almost no factory-made goods were available. Everything was made at home. Tables, benches, beds and chairs and other similar items by woodcraftsmen: wagons, sleighs, plows, harrows, and the like by wheelwrights, lathers, and blacksmiths, etc.” (*History and Events*, page 101).

The conservative emphasis on simplicity as the greater and more tasteful beauty naturally articulated a tendency to retain traditional forms as Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen has demonstrated with respect to Mennonite furniture. In America, the “Kjisten” and other furniture pieces in the canon representing the ancient designs and artforms of the Renaissance, were often discarded by Mennonites who had abandoned their ancestral faith, because they were equally ignorant of the intrinsic value and worth of these artifacts. Quite symbolically they often discarded priceless antiques only to replace them with cheap mass-produced furniture.

The KG teaching of “simplicity in Christ” also articulated a bias against new innovations. From a woman’s perspective, it must have been surprising how often new innovations in the agricultural area were immediately accepted as necessary for improved efficiency in farming production, while technological innovations which would have made the women’s work inside the house easier, were rejected as modern gadgetry. This reasoning would not have applied in Russia where women and men were co-producers in the household economy with distinct areas of responsibility, and where household work, in any event, was typically preformed by maids.

One of the unique aspects of KG protocol and culture in Russia was that they did not allow springs on wagons nor breechings or wheel harness (Johann W. Dueck, *History and Events*, page 102). The KG also worked against the practice of elaborate cornices and gables, which became popular in the Molotschna by 1840. To some extent such cornices became part of the local building code. In a letter of 1844 Aeltester Abraham Friesen explained that the KG did not prohibit such practices, but obviously they were very much discouraged.

The Kjist of Heinrich Fast (1826-90), originally Fischbau, Molotschna. In this instance the photographs and/or artwork traditionally mounted on the lid had not yet been removed when this picture was taken.

The open lid displays two portraits and a number of pictures and poems. Photo courtesy of Henry Fast, Preservings, No. 10, Part Two, page 71.



Klaas Reimer's cane which he carved in 1792 as a young man, herding cattle. The handle of the cane is shaped with a bulb at the end with seven intricately carved rings. The year and the initials "K R" are carved into the ring separating the handle from the stem. The stem consists of a half dozen or so strands carved so that the strands curve and wrap around each other circularly all the way to the point, some 20 inches. The cane is carved out of one piece of wood. The cane is now owned by David K. Reimer, machinery dealer, Seymour, Texas, and Spanish Lookout, Belize. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 7, page 46.

The "Kjist" believed to have belonged to Klaas Reimer, founder of the KG. It is currently owned by great-great-granddaughter Susanna Reimer Penner, Spanish Lookout, Belize. The open lid of the chest shows where the bright photographs and/or drawings were traditionally mounted. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 12, page 93.



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



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



Cream pitcher believed to have belonged to Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903), Kleefeld, Molotschna, and later Blumenhof, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 12, page 96.



The Bartel watch. Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), gave his sweetheart Agenetha Quiring a gold watch as a wedding gift. Later they emigrated to Kronsgarten, Imperial Russia, where he became a minister of the Frisian Gemeimde. Johann's son Jakob who inherited the watch later moved to the Molotschna Colony, first living in Neukirch and then in Mariawobl. In 1874 his son Jakob Bartel (1858-1929), emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska. The watch is now in the Historical Museum in Meade, Kansas. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 6, page 24.

Section 8.06: *Fraktur* and *Schönschreiben*.

Fraktur was an artform found in Holland and Northern Germany. It had roots in the handwriting flourishes of medieval monks as they transcribed manuscripts and in the natural desire to beautify them. From this came the form of “illumination” developing into the beautiful artwork which decorated many manuscripts in the middle ages. Erasmus (1466-1536), the Renaissance scholar, “emphasized the need for correct proportion, spacing and arrangement.” With the invention of the printing press, calligraphy books such as Mercator’s first Dutch handwriting manual in 1540 became common.

In her work *Frakturmalen und Schönschreiben*, Ethel Ewert Abrahams has written that “It is probable that Mennonite scholars and school masters for the early Mennonite schools were exposed to German manuscripts” which set forth a canon of *Fraktur* forms and specimens, as well as *Schönschreiben* or calligraphy. Abrahams has identified several categories of the artform: writing specimens (“Vorschriften”)--used to teach the alphabet and writing; Christmas and New Year’s Greetings--a particular form of writing specimen; book plates (“Büchnerzeichen”)--a centuries old custom of personalizing a prized book, providing cogent evidence as to their ownership; illuminated texts--most often seen in “Rechnenbücher”, handwritten and colourfully illustrated teacher manuals divided into subjects, each section containing a set of mathematical problems; Awards and Home Blessings--given out by teachers for good work or a colourful design with a motto or Bible verse used for decoration, possibly the inside of a kjiist; maize (“Irrgarten”)--a labyrinth through which the pupil traced a poem or verse, reminiscent of a spiritual pilgrimage and used to teach a moral lesson; and cutwork (“Scherenschnitte”)--a scissor was used to create a beautiful design sometimes also decorated with *Fraktur* and helpful in teaching geometric forms, mathematics and decorative skills.

Fraktur and *Schönschreiben* were taught in the Mennonite schools in Prussia and brought to Russia during the emigrations of 1788 and 1803. Ethel Ewert Abrahams has written that the most sophisticated examples of the artform were dated between 1780 and 1845. The decline in the artform after 1845 coincides with the period when Johann Cornies assumed control over schools in the Molotschna and prohibited *Fraktur* on the grounds that it was sissified. Although they generally cooperated eagerly with Cornies in most of his reforms, KG associated teachers such as Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), later Blumenort, Manitoba, and Jakob Isaak (1815-66), Tiege, continued to practice and teach the artform.

A Splendid Harvest, by Michael Bird and Terry Kobayashi, another work in this category, deals with the Germanic folk and decorative arts in Canada, with Russian Mennonite decorative culture as one section. It is complementary to that of Elizabeth Abrahams as it includes analysis and historical background, providing some information regarding the origins and evolution of *Fraktur* as an art form. It is helpful as a general reference covering a wider range of material culture including architecture, furniture, textiles, gravemarkers, even, possibly, mundane items such as cookie dusters, hinges and trinket boxes.

The oldest *Fraktur* item in the KG material culture tradition was a Valentine which Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), Tragheimerweide, West Prussia, gave to his beautiful 17 year-old bride, Aganetha Quiring, in 1794. In 1797 the Bartel family emigrated to Russia. Johann became a Frisian minister in Kronsgraben. The Valentine was inherited by youngest daughter, Aganetha, Mrs. Heinrich Plenert, and then by her daughter Aganetha, Mrs. Jakob Klassen, and then by her daughter Elisabeth Klassen, Mrs. Peter Martens, who rescued it from the burning rubble of their home and brought it to Canada. The Bartel Valentine, illustrates how the study of material culture can tell the history of a people--one item, the watch, wound up in Meade, Kansas, and the other, the Valentine, in Winnipeg, Canada.

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

Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82) was one of the finest *Fraktur* artists in the KG material culture tradition. Gerhard grew up in Fischau, Molotschna, where his parents settled in 1819 after emigrating from Prussia. Two particularly fine pieces of his work are extant, a New Year's Wish dated January 1, 1834, and another dated 1838.

Gerhard Doerksen also was a teacher in Fischau. In the course of his teaching career he completed his own "Rechnenbuch", believed to be the only one of its kind still extant in the KG material culture tradition. It was a beautifully drawn and illustrated specimen. Gerhard started compiling the book in 1844 at the age of 19 and completed the final chapters in 1849, probably spanning his entire teaching career. "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-coloured *Fraktur* art and various mathematical theories are expressed in verse form. Numerous title pages/section headings are detailed with intricate calligraphy and art work." The arithmetic book was divided into sections as follows: Pages 1-28 Math theory and tables, pages 29-34 addition, and pages 35-40 subtraction.

Johann Esau (1828-1906) was another resident of Fischau, Molotschna, who left some *Fraktur* art for posterity. Esau was the son of Peter and a cousin to Johann Esau (1832-1904), later of Rosenfeld, Manitoba, and KG Brandaeltester. Johann Esau (1828-1906), moved to Annenfeld, Crimea, from where he came to Canada in 1874 settling in Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba. Esau remained a bachelor. In the last years before his death, he was looked after in the home of Jakob T. Barkman (1848-1936), Heuboden, and gave this beautiful piece of *Fraktur* art to Barkman's daughter Margaretha Barkman (1892-1975) who married Jakob R. E. Reimer.

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

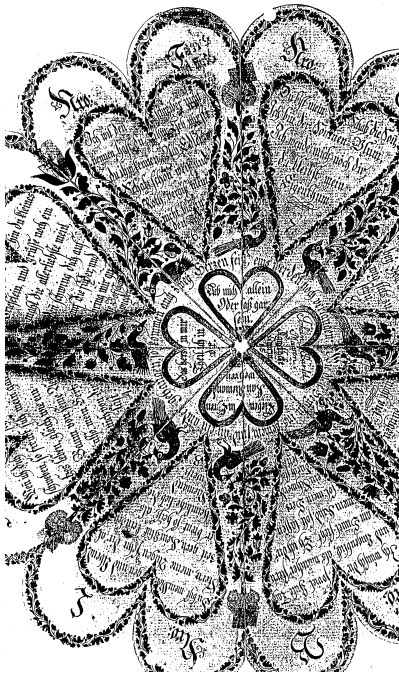
later of Blumenort, Manitoba.

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

Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg (1819-1905), grew up in Blumstein. In 1841 she completed a beautiful bookplate for her *Gesangbuch*, hand drawn, lettered and coloured. The story of her courageous defense of her faith is told in Section 10.18. She married Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), who became a KG minister. In 1863 Elisabeth compiled a medicine book, on the back page of which she drew the picture of a Red German cow.

In a recent survey of Mennonite and Amish folk arts, Professor Ervin Beck, Goshen College, has written that "one of the main benefits of the continued, sophisticated study of folk art will be to demonstrate that Mennonites have always been an artistic people": M.Q.R., Jan. 1997, pages 69-91. This article provides an excellent survey of the historiography on the topic as well as a valuable bibliography. It will be invaluable as a starting point for anyone wishing to do research in the area.

No serious study of the continuation of the material culture tradition among the KG has been undertaken to date. Although the topic is one of immense importance, particularly with respect to the experience of KG women, it is unexplored territory at the present time and ripe for anyone wishing to combine ground breaking research into their own heritage with a Ph.D. or Master's Degree.



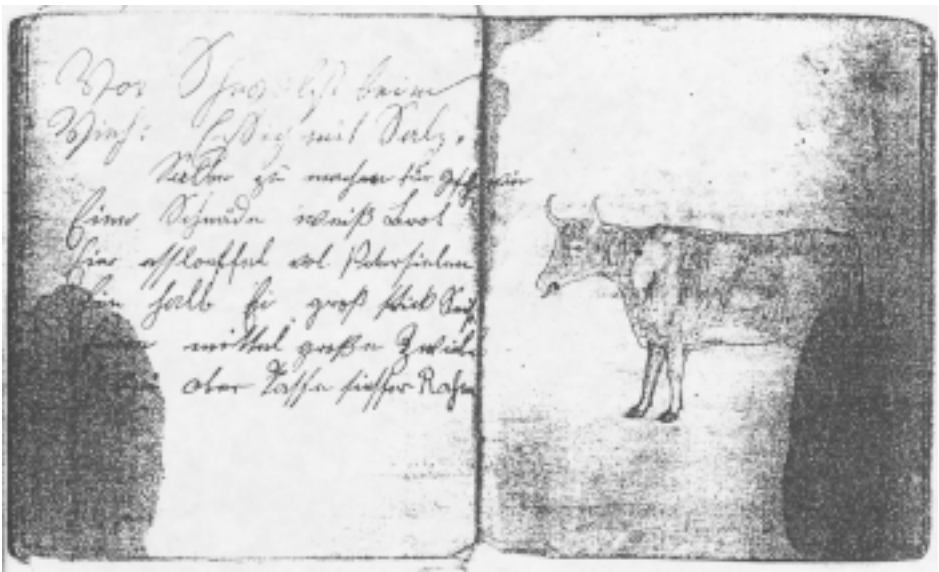
In 1797 Johannes Bartel (1764-1813), gave his bride Aganetha Quiring a Valentine. Later the family moved to Kronsgarten, Imperial Russia, where he served as a minister of the Frisian Gemeinde. Photo courtesy of great-great-grandson Theodore C. Martens, Box 657, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0. See also Preservings, No. 4, page 11.



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



In 1836, at the age of eight, Johann Esau (1828-1906), Fischbau, Molotschna, drew and coloured this beautiful New Year's Wish. Later he moved to the Crimea and from there to Grünfeld, Manitoba, Canada, in 1874. Photo courtesy of Elisabeth Reimer Friesen, Steinbach/Preservings, No. 12, page 104.



1863. Red cow drawn by Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg (1819-1905), Obrloff, Molotschna, in her journal in which she collected various medical recipes and remedies. In 1866 Elisabeth's husband Gerbard Schellenberg became a minister of the KG. Photo courtesy of Elisabeth Abrahams, Frakturmalen und Schönschrieben, page 96/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, 67.

Section 8.07: Education.

The philosophy of education of conservative Mennonites was most eloquently expressed by KG minister and theologian Heinrich Balzer (1800-46) of Tiege, Molotschna, already referred to earlier. In 1833 he wrote his famous treatise, "Faith and Reason". The philosophy articulated by Balzer had great ramifications in every aspect of life and particularly in education. The training of children was of the utmost importance lest "the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles." Farming was seen as the way of life most conducive to a genuine Christian lifestyle. To support his view, Balzer referred to Romans 12:16, "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."

Genuine faith must be instilled in the young before the forces of reason take hold and prevent a true understanding of "simplicity in Christ." It followed that the purpose of the school system was not to prepare people for higher education or to be successful in business and the acquisition of wealth, rather it was to prepare the youth to live an existential Christian life of piety and reverence for God based on simplicity and love for fellowman. A good education opened a child's heart to allow a knowledge of Christ to take root.

Balzer stressed a sound elementary education which was necessary to achieve understanding. But whatever belonged to higher learning "brings forth nothing but sophistry, unbelief, and corruption of the church; for knowledge puffeth up (1 Cor.8:1)". It was necessary to be articulate and literate in order to understand and truly experience the power of the Gospel. The voluminous journals, letters, sermons and other writings of the KG and its diaspora in America certainly revealed that they were both articulate and literate.

The KG participated fully in the Molotschna educational system. In fact, the system developed by Cornies served as the model for the KG when they established their educational system in Manitoba in 1874. To this day, teachers' conferences and mutual training forms the basis of the Kleine Gemeinde school system in Belize and Mexico.

KG children attended the village schools together with the children of the dozen or so other Mennoniten Gemeinde in the Molotschna by the 1860s. John F. Harms has written that the KG girls were distinguishable by the black head coverings. Harms attended school in Kleefeld which had a large KG community with six Vollwirthen and a number of Anwohner. Some of the KG children distinguished themselves in school. Maria L. Plett, Kleefeld, received first prize out of 100 students. Also attending school in Kleefeld was Katharina R. Reimer, later wife of Steinbach entrepreneur Abraham S. Friesen. Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941), attending school in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, was known for exceptional ability in calligraphy.

A number of teachers from the KG served with distinction. In a few cases some of their writings and teaching aides are extant which allow some reconstruction of their careers and/or teaching techniques. The following are some KG school teachers of the pre-Cornies era:

Gerhard Goossen (1811-54), the son of Gerhard Goossen (b. 1778),

Blumenort, Molotschna, was a school teacher by profession and served in this calling for his entire adult life. It appears that Goossen taught in Blumstein where son Gerhard was born in 1836. He was the teacher in Muntau in 1848, compiling the "Gemeinde Berichte". Shortly thereafter, he moved to Schönau where he taught the children of Johann Isaak (1809-64).

Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94) grew up in Lichtenau and became the village teacher. In 1848 he compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte" for that village. During the 1870s he also served as a insurance adjuster for the Brandordnung. In 1874 he moved to Manitoba settling in Lichtenau, two kilometres west of Steinbach. Much of his extensive correspondence is still extant, and includes numerous letters from his former students in Russia as well as America, which testify that he was much appreciated by his pupils. His descendants, including son Gerhard E. Kornelsen, grandson Gerhard G. Kornelsen, and great-granddaughter Mary Kornelsen, Steinbach, continued in his footsteps as members of the teaching profession. Gerhard S. Kornelsen served as the first head of the East Reserve Brandordnung in Manitoba. He was responsible for drafting the school regulations for the KG school system in Manitoba during the 1870s.

Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-92), was the son of Klaas Friesen (1774-1839), Lindenau. Cornelius taught in a number of villages including: Wernersdorf (1837-42), Alexanderwohl (1842-43), Wernersdorf (1843-47), Margenau (1847-60), Elisabeththal (1860-63) and Hierschau (1863-64). In later years, Friesen moved to Friedrichsthal, Markusland, where he taught, and from there to Anafeld, Borosenko, in 1869. In 1874 the Friesen family emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba. He also taught for a few years in Neuanlage, Manitoba. His obituary stated that he was a revered and respected teacher throughout his career. Considerable information about Cornelius Friesen is provided by a family study compiled by daughter Helena Friesen Jahnke.

Peter F. Friesen (b. 1812), brother to Aeltester Johann F. Friesen, Neukirch, settled in Marienthal serving as the village teacher. In 1848 he compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte" for Marienthal. He resigned from the KG in 1859 and became a GG minister. In 1856 Peter compiled a report regarding the moral conditions in the Molotschna. In 1866 he wrote a 30 stanza poem celebrating his 20-year teaching career in same village. In 1875 the family emigrated to Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Peter Baerg (1817-1901), was the son of Jakob Baerg, Prangenu. Peter recorded biographical information in his "Schreibbuch" which he started compiling in 1835. The journal contained 30 Schönschreiben pieces dated between 1835 and 1842 in the form of a teacher's exercise manual. In 1842 Peter married and apparently retired from teaching and went into farming. Later he moved to Nikolaithal and in 1861 to Schwesterthal, Crimea.

The teaching career of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82), Fischau, has already been mentioned in Section 8.06.

Bernhard Fast (1809-78) was the son of Peter (1780-52), Tiegenhagen, and a nephew to Aeltester Bernhard Fast (1783-1861), Halbstadt. Bernhard Fast (1809-

78), served for many years as the teacher in Rosenort where he prepared the "Gemeinde Berichte" in 1848. Another Bernhard Fast family was living in Rosenort and they were called "Farmer Fasts" to avoid confusion. In 1846 Bernhard was elected as a KG minister but was removed from the office in 1848. In the same year he bought a flour mill in Rosenort. In his later years he suffered from inability to pay his debts and an unsuccessful marriage. He taught in a school in Hutterthal. His son Peter I. Fast, recorded much information about the family in his journal. Grandson Martin B. Fast, later served as editor of the *Rundschau*, Elkhart.

Johann K. Friesen (1812-84) was the son of Johann von Riesen, Ohrloff, the brother of Aeltester Abraham Friesen. Johann K. Friesen taught in Pordenau, Schardau and Marienthal. He purchased his father-in-law's farm in Marienthal and came into debt. He resigned from the KG in 1859. In 1874 they emigrated to America settling in Harvey County, Kansas.

Johann Fast (1813-92) was the brother to Bernhard. Johann lived in Schönau and served as the village teacher. In 1848 he compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte". In 1867 they moved to Annenfeld, Crimea. In 1873 they immigrated to America, purchasing the land which later became Gnadenau, Kansas.

The Isaaks of Tiede have already been mentioned as an influential family in the educational field. Brothers Jakob (1815-66), Schönau, Franz (1816-99), Tiede, and Kornelius (1821-86), sons of Peter Isaak, Tiede, all served as teachers at various times. Jakob was a beautiful *Fraktur* artist. Franz was well-known as a minister of the Ohrloff Gemeinde and author of a history of the Molotschna Colony. In 1848 Cornelius Isaak compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte" for Margenau. In 1856 Cornelius wrote a report regarding the moral conditions in the Colony. Franz Isaak was probably the author of the "Gemeinde Berichte" for Gnadenheim in 1848. The Isaak brothers were brothers-in-law to Johann and Bernhard Fast who had married their sisters. Another sister Anna (1807-73) married Johann Friesen, third KG Aeltester.

Peter Isaak Sr. had a brother Franz (1784-1863), whose family was also involved with teaching. Son Peter W. Isaak (1812-88) was the teacher in Grossweide and compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte" in 1848. Later he served as a school inspector. Peter's son Gerhard moved to Minnesota in 1876 where his daughters Susanna (b. 1860) and Elizabeth Isaak (b. 1866) became well-known medical doctors.

Heinrich Warkentin (b.1805) was the son of Johann Warkentin (1760-1825), Blumenort. In 1848 Heinrich served as the village teacher and compiled the "Gemeinde Berichte".

The following are some of the KG school teachers in the Cornies and post-Cornies era teaching after 1843. Limitations of space will prevent more than a brief mention of the name, origin, subsequent career and emigration, etc.

Gerhard P. Goossen (1836-72) was the son of Gerhard Sr. above. He was a career school teacher. Gerhard Jr. taught in the villages of Lindenau, Liebenau and Fischau. In 1867 he moved to Grünfeld, Borosenko, and went into farming.

Gerhard P. Goossen became a leading minister of the KG, elected in 1866. He died at the young age of 36. Son Franz K. Goossen (1862-1929), followed in his father's footsteps teaching in Hochstadt, Manitoba, in 1888, and again in Blumenhof in 1912.

Peter L. Dueck (1842-87) was the son of Johann Dueck (1801-66), Muntau. Peter served as teacher in Gnadenthal, Molotschna. In 1867 he moved to Friedensfeld, northwest of Nikopol, where he taught. In 1872 he moved to Blumenhoff, Borosenko, again teaching. His life story was described in considerable detail by son Johann W. Dueck (*History and Events*, pages 93-105).

Abraham R. Friesen (1849-84) was the son of teacher Cornelius F. Friesen, see above. Abraham was a career teacher in Lichtenau, Molotschna. In 1875 he came to Manitoba where he taught in Blumenhof, north of Steinbach. In 1879, he moved to Lichtenau where he died several years later. His journals contained valuable descriptions of the life of a teacher in the Molotschna during the 1870s as well as the pioneer years in Manitoba.

Abraham Harms (1833-1909), was the son of Johann Harms who had served as a school teacher in Blumstein. Abraham was a "Kleine Gemeinde school teacher" teaching in Margenau, a village with a substantial KG community. He married for the second time to Anna Enns, sister to Peter Enns (1822-96), who later lived in Steinbach, Manitoba. In 1875 Abraham Harms emigrated from Russia and settled in Alexanderfeld, Kansas, southwest of Hillsboro.

Other sources regarding the Molotschna educational system included information about the KG teachers within that system. In 1848 Johann Cornies required that each village submit a "Bericht" or report with a brief history of each village. The names of the KG associated teachers completing these reports have already been mentioned above. In 1856 the Molotschna school teachers were asked to provide their written opinions regarding the moral conditions in the Molotschna. These writings are still extant and provide interesting observations regarding each teacher and their viewpoints. The KG teachers who shared their viewpoints have already been mentioned above.

The Molotschna school attendance records are extant for 1857/8 and 1861/2, providing further details of KG teachers, school trustees, as well as students and their parents.

In the course of the physical expansion out of the Molotschna during the 1860s, the KG developed its own schools and educational system in the new settlements. The journal of Dietrich S. Friesen revealed that by 1870 the teachers in the Borosenko area were working with a system of teachers' conferences and mutual examinations basically patterned after that in the Molotschna.

There was at least one difference in that considerable emphasis was placed on Russian language study in the Borosenko schools, not yet the practice in the Molotschna. This reflected the continuing KG interest in language proficiency. Many KG-ers in the 1860s were still able to read the seminal writings of the faith in the original Dutch editions and quite a number were capable of translating this material into German. Several KG-ers already spoke English when they ar-

rived in Manitoba in 1874 so that they were proficient in five languages--Dutch, High German, Low German, Russian and English.

The teachers who started their careers in Borosenko included the following:

Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99), son of Klaas Friesen, Rosenort, has already been mentioned. Cornelius was said to have had a good education and lived in Blumenhoff, Borosenko.

Heinrich Wiebe (1851-76) was the teacher in Heuboden, Borosenko, until January, 1872, when he bought the Wirtschaft of Abraham S. Friesen in Rosenfeld. In 1874 the Wiebe family emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba. In January, 1876, he came to a tragic death in a snowstorm.

Abraham T. Friesen (1854-1908) was the son of Jakob Friesen (1820-88), Kleefeld, and nephew to both Aeltesten Johann Friesen and Peter P. Toews. Abraham T. Friesen "... had been actively engaged in school teaching in Russia." The family lived in the village of Heuboden. In 1874 he emigrated to America settling in Rosenort, Manitoba. In 1875 he became the first teacher in the village of Steinbach. Abraham was a career teacher who taught in various schools in southern Manitoba. In 1891 he forwarded Heinrich Balzer's "Faith and Reason" to the periodical, "Gemeinde unterm Kreuz" for publication.

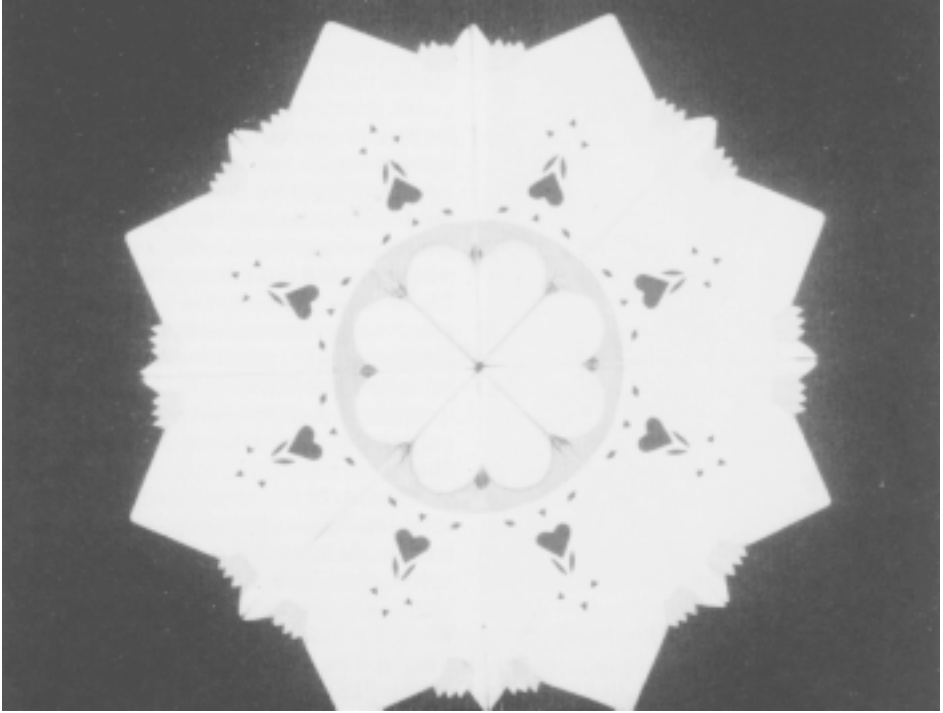
Diedrich S. Friesen (1849-1901) was the son of Jakob K. Friesen and a nephew of Johann K. Friesen, mentioned above. Dietrich taught in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. After emigrating to Canada, Dietrich was the first teacher in Grünfeld (Kleefeld), and later taught in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Abraham P. Isaak (1852-1938) became the teacher in the newly established settlement of Grünfeld, northwest of Nikopol, in about 1868. In his memoirs Abraham recalled that he received his training under Gerhard P. Goossen, who had taught for 17 years in the Molotschna. He credited Goossen with giving him much encouragement in the pursuit of the teaching profession. Abraham believed the world was round and taught this to his class, something not universally accepted at the time. He was the nephew of Peter Isaak, teacher in Grossweide in 1848. In 1879 Abraham Isaak served as one of three teacher examiners for the East Reserve, together with Jakob Friesen, Tannenau, for the Bergthaler, and William Hespeler, former Canadian government immigration agent, representing the Board of Education.

Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900), was the son of Abraham W. Friesen, Rückenau. Heinrich served as the teacher in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. He emigrated to Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874. In January, 1875, he left for Jansen, Nebraska.

Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), was the son of Cornelius Fast, Friedensdorf. He taught at a number of locations after his marriage in 1861. In 1870 he moved to Steinbach, Borosenko, and served as the village teacher. In 1874 Fast was one of the few settlers in Manitoba able to converse in English. In 1876 he moved to the West Reserve, where he continued his occupation of teaching. He taught in Altona, Steinbach, Heuboden and elsewhere.

Maria Friesen Radenzel (1844-1925) was the daughter of teacher Cornelius F. Friesen, above. She appears to have been the first woman teacher in the



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

Mennonite colonies in Russia. She taught in the KG village of Neuanlage, Borosenko, Russia, in 1873. After emigrating to Canada with her family in 1874 she was the pioneer teacher in Rosenort. She was among the first group of teachers registered with the Protestant School Board of Manitoba in 1879. In 1880 she transferred closer to home replacing her brother, Abraham R. Friesen, as teacher in Blumenhof, 3 miles north of Steinbach. She also taught in Grünfeld, now Kleefeld. Teacher or "Lehra Mitschje", as she was known locally, stands as a role model for thousands of Mennonite women who have since entered the teaching profession. Maria was the great-great-aunt to Gilbert Unger, later superintendent of the Hanover School Division, Steinbach, Manitoba, as well as a number of other prominent teachers (for a biography, see *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1996, Part One, page 9).

Because of their theological commitment to the education of children as expressed in the writings of Heinrich Balzer, particularly to instill the values of Christianity, and their three-generation pedagogical tradition, the KG had more teachers than it required for operation of their own schools after the movement out of the Molotschna. This would stand the denomination in good stead after 1874 as it wrestled with the privations of pioneer life in a new land.



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



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

Section 8.08: Folklore and Humour.

As in all traditional conservative societies, folklore was an important part of the KG culture and its historical ethos. Folklore often accommodated the hilarious humour invariably found among the Low German/Plaut-dietsch people. It was the earthy humour of the conservative Mennonites which inexorably separated them from the pious Separatist-Pietists whose arrogant spiritual elitism restrained them from cracking a smile at even the most hilarious story. It was the humour in life, even though sometimes black, which enabled ordinary people to survive and maintain their sanity often in the face of adversity and tragedy.

The passing down of folklore also presupposed the existence of storytellers who retold the tribal myths and legends from generation to generation. My grandfather Martin K. Friesen (1881-76), Blumenhof, Manitoba, was such a storyteller, at least in his more advanced years. His hilarious account of the woman in Russia who could do seven things all at the same time, and probably not suitable for a family audience, was only a minute part of his endless repertoire of stories. Through him I always have the impression of the extended Friesen/von Riesen clan as having an unassuming earthy sense of humour.

At one time each village or family clan had a born story teller. Unfortunately they are all gone and their ribald accounts with them. Like my grandfather who died in 1976, the last of this generation of folk historians and humorists have long since passed on; they lived in an age strangely unappreciative of past wisdom and folklore, be it expressed in humour or stories filled with pathos or tragedy. As a result only little has remained of the stories which once filled in the time for those milking cows, or travelling to town with horse and buggy, or sitting around the "Grotte Schtoave" in the evening "neighbouring".

Occasionally these stories, particularly those which might be construed as having some moral value were written down and recorded in various journals, thus advancing up the folklore ladder to become morality literature. The following are some of these accounts, the first two being from the *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* written in 1915 by Peter P. Isaak, the foremost folk historian of the KG.

One of the more colourful characters in KG folklore was Johann Plett (1765-1833), scion of a wealthy family in Fürstenwerder, Prussia. His father Hans Plett (c.1730-c.95) was a *Landwirth* owning 3 morgen of land (120 acres), about 3 times that of other landowners.

Johann and his family remained poor because he had been disinherited at the time of his second marriage to a Lutheran widow, Elisabeth Baer. She happened to be a maid in Johann's parental home. When the father discovered his son's plans to marry the maid, he told him, "If you do that, I will disinherit you and you need not come to my house anymore."

Johann's famed response was, "Na, Lieszbet, dan komm." "Well, Elisabeth, then come."

From this marriage was descended the well-known grandson Johann P. Harder (1811-75), Aeltester of the all-powerful Ohrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde in the Molotschna from 1860 until his death.

Young Johann Plett was considered a reprobate and excommunicated from the Tiegenhagen Gemeinde in 1793. He served with the Prussian Hussars, or mounted cavalry regiments, until 1797. He refused to be reconciled with his parents and only went back once while still in service as a Hussar in the Prussian Army. "Nobody thought of him as in uniform, so none of the household had recognized him. He later revealed this to them."

Johann Plett became renowned for ridding a house of a ghost for a man who wanted to sell his house, but was hindered by a neighbour whose plan was to buy it cheaply. The conniving neighbour dressed himself as a monster and spooked the house knowing no one would buy it if word spread that it was haunted. Johann volunteered to help his neighbour rid the house of the ghost. As night fell he hid himself in the house and waited for the spook to appear. When the fearsome creature dressed up with horns to look like the devil made its appearance, Johann attacked and wrestled it down. Upon unmasking the "devil", Plett recognized the instigator as a man in the neighbourhood. Johann Plett's grandson, Peter P. Toews, Aeltester of the KG in Russia later wrote a poem about the ghost incident.

Johann Plett married for the third time to another widow, Ester Merkers (1778-1855), nee Smit. Since both wives were of Lutheran background, all the children were baptised in infancy.

Johann and his family lived in considerable poverty. This was possibly due to his own wishes, as grandson Peter P. Isaak has written, "One time, my mother told me, which I can remember very well, on occasions when great-grandparents had many guests and sumptuous and costly meals were served [by servants], he wished that God might keep him from such extravagant living as he had to witness it in his parental home. It is thinkable that God heard him...." (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 214).

The Johann Plett family fled to Danzig during the Napoleonic siege where they almost starved. The head of a cat sold for a "Grosch". Finally in 1827 they were able to obtain emigration passes and emigrated to Russia. Family tradition has always made much of the poverty of Johann Plett and thus it almost came as a surprise when the 1835 census showed that he had acquired a *Wirtschaft* in Sparrau. Evidently he repented for his errant spiritual ways in the later time of his life and also attempted "to redeem the day financially...."

Another story was told of Philip Isaak (1769-1813), one of the Isaak siblings who settled in Tiege, Molotschna, in 1804, who was bitten by rabid dog. "My grandmother, from my father's side, told of this disease and how dreadful it was to see how he [Philip Isaak] was tied down with a strong rope before the attack of fury came and how he raved and raged. She said that a heart that would not soften at the sight was one of stone. She also told how she had taken along my father [Johann W. Isaak 1809-64], who was then a boy of four years, to see the great-uncle. He was just then tied down during an attack of rage and screamed and cried out in Low-German, "Go home, Go home." In his fright, my father ran to grandfather's house. In between the attacks of madness, grandmother said Philip Isaak had admonished the people to repent and turn to God to be able to

stand before God; free, and to be saved by grace at the hour of death. This he did so fervently that many were deeply moved.”

“The reason he died of this disease is as follows: as many will know, an anti-rabies drink was usually made for those who had been bitten by a mad dog. By taking this drink, the rage would be subdued, taking for granted that for a whole year after having taken this anti-rabies drink, he would drink no liquor. It happened that Philip was invited by relatives to a banquet. On such occasions it was a custom to pass around brandy. Although great-uncle was no habitual drinker, it was too much of a temptation for him to abstain, although he had not taken a drink for almost a year. He took a drink. Immediately, he felt it go through his body like an electric shock and he knew that the cure against rabies was made void. He said: “Now my life will come to an end, and dreadful suffering awaits me before death will come.” Grandmother said that he had passed away in the good hope of entering unto eternal rest. My grandmother told me of this incident on a Sunday morning while I did the chores. It was so impressive to me that it has remained vividly in my mind as though it had just happened.”

The story also illustrated another aspect of KG culture being that children were most often socialized by the women, by their mothers and grandmothers which helped to explain the extensive matrilineal culture which developed.

Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872), was born in Prussia. In 1812 he was out working on the fields with his wagon and team of horses when he was kidnapped by French army units and forced to accompany them on their way into Russia as they required teamsters to haul their goods. One night, when they were camped after having travelled all day, a high ranking officer noticed the weeping 16 year-old boy. He granted the boy's tearful pleas to be released and allowed him to go home.

In 1817 Martin and his brother Jakob fled from Prussia to escape being dragooned into the military. They walked all the way to Russia where they settled in Rückenau, Molotschna Colony. Tradition holds that their mother offered them a last glass of buttermilk as she wished them 'godspeed' on their journey. The brothers soon became successful Vollwirthen and both served as mayor or Schulz of the village. In 1825 the Imperial Czar visited the Mennonite settlements and ate a meal in the Martin Barkman home in Rückenau.

Peter Penner (1816-84), born in Ohrloff was a successful Vollwirt in Margenau. One writer has referred to him as “five wives, two lives” Penner. In Russia Penner was bucked off a horse and fell unconscious to the ground. He was given up for dead. But when the undertaker women started to prepare him for burial he had blinked an eye, revealing that he was alive. He recovered from his near death experience and from such arose the reference to “two lives”.

Peter Penner also had five wives, a feat not altogether unusual for the time. Because of the primitive medical knowledge in those days, women frequently died in childbirth. Stories were often told of how widowers in these situations might already look around at other eligible women during the funeral services. The situation was quite desperate for many men, suddenly left with a house full

of young children and no one to look after them. The story goes that in one such case, the dying wife in a spirit of love and sharing offered her husband that the new wife he would surely get could wear her clothes. "Oh," replied the not so tactful husband, "That's nice, but's it's okay, they won't fit her."

Peter B. Toews (1859-1945), was the son of Peter W. Toews (1831-1922), of Rosenfeld, Borosenko, and later Blumenort, Manitoba. Peter B. Toews, also known as "Grotta" Toews, as he was a tall big boned man, liked to tell stories. He related "...one incident which happened in Russia. The body of a dead person was put on a board in the sawmill. A group of boys dared each other to go into the sawmill to see the body. How would they believe that the boy had actually done what he claimed to? Whoever agreed to the dare should take a hammer and nail and put the nail into the board. That would be proof that he had been there. One of the boys went in but never came out. When the other boys checked on him he had nailed his own coat to the board by accident and was 'literally' scared to death" (*Pres.*, 1997, No. 10, Part Two, page 51.)

Another widely-known story was that of the bomb blast that killed Cornelius Fast (1813-55), father of Cornelius W. Fast (1840-1927), the school teacher. Cornelius Fast Sr. worked for David Cornies on his estate called *Altebirr*. where he served as blacksmith. Cornelius Fast II came to an untimely death in 1855 when a bomb that he was dismantling for Cornies exploded.

The KG also included colourful characters such as my great-great grandfather Martin Klassen (1822-ca.88) who seemingly was forever incurring the disapproval of the Bruderschaft, if not for failing to pay his debts or treating his cattle too harshly, then for having fault with his daughter "that she had stayed out for night with the Russians". In 1875 Klassen and his family came to Manitoba by themselves in late fall, and then "renounced the Gemeinde in the month of May" and moved to Kansas, where he settled in Gnadenu, eventually joining some "hyper-Baptist church".

Another interesting character was Johann Broeski (1838-1912), a Lutheran widower from Prussia who emigrated to Russia. He found employment among the KG in Borosenko. In 1874 Broeski emigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba where he married Anna, daughter of school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92). The marriage was "quite traumatic and ended in separation, and so did his membership in the Blumenort Kleine Gemeinde". During their sometimes stormy relationship, Anna tried to poison him with fly spray. On another occasion she burned their house down, evidently an indication that he was not a model husband. In any case, Anna's mental stability suffered and she became a ward of the church. Broeski lived in several Mennonite communities successfully placing a claim against the mutual fire insurance system in each location. Broeski later moved to Didsbury, Alberta, and also lived in Revelstoke, British Columbia.

Although the stories of characters such as Broeski, Klassen, and others, were tragic for the dislocation they caused among their families, they also demonstrated that conservative congregations were never monolithic organizations made up exclusively of people who all thought alike. Such characters as colour-

ful as they were, also consumed a large part of the available time of the ministerial and the resources of the congregation, with respect to discipline and charitable aid. They also provided endless material for local story tellers, captivating generations of youngsters with their unholy exploits and risqué escapades.

Earthy folklore and ribald humour made conservative Mennonites human and likeable people, no matter how pious or religious they might otherwise be. Although laughter and frivolity were discouraged by the religious culture of the KG and others in the conservative faith tradition, there was always the village story teller waiting for an audience, always a joke ready to burst forth, or a story to be heard and remembered. It was hard to be otherwise when surrounded daily by the earthy realities of farmyard life, of death, birth, copulation, the village idiot, all became the subject of morality tales and humour. This is what made the KG villages in Borosenko, Markuslandt, the Crimea, and before that, the Molotschna, fascinating places to grow up.



Anna Friesen Broesky (1848-1927), Grunthal, Manitoba. She is wearing traditional KG apparel. Anna came from a teaching family, her father Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92), served as a teacher for his entire adult life, teaching in various villages such as Margenau, Alexanderwobl and Hierschau. Anna's sister Maria Friesen (1844-1925) taught in Neuanlage, Imperial Russia, and was the first woman school teacher among the Manitoba Mennonites. She served as a pioneer teacher in Rosenort, Manitoba, and was licensed in 1879. Photo courtesy of Broski Heritage Book/Preservings, No. 12, page 106.

Section 8.09: Farming, the Household Economy.

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

Among the Mennonites in Russia these commercial family production units were known as “Wirtschaften”. Such a household economy was “highly self-sufficient in labour and consumption, but one that must produce for the market place in order to secure the means to reproduce its mode of production” (Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, pages 17-18). The concept of farm commercialization and the development of the household economy is helpful in understanding the experience of the KG in Russia.

The lifestyle of farming was lauded as the ideal and God-pleasing life. The renowned Heinrich Balzer, Tiege, stated, “One should not forget the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (12:16): ‘Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.’ The lowest estate, that of a husbandman [farmer], is the most conducive one for the preservation of genuine simplicity in Christ. In it we can find a plentiful livelihood through the industry and diligence under the blessing of God. And we should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after greater wealth or position of high distinction in this world would spiritually be only too harmful for the church. For expansion in [the realm of] the good things of this world certainly entails a restriction in spiritual benefits. ‘What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ Matt. 16:26.”

It was equally plausible that Balzer’s monograph “Faith and Reason” merely articulated a biblical justification for a pastoral agrarian lifestyle which was deeply and intrinsically rooted in the soul of KG ancestors from eons past. In any event, the KG carried out the philosophy articulated by Balzer with considerable enthusiasm. This was not a surprising development given that the parents of the core group of KG in Prussia were three times as likely to be in the middle wealth (“mm”) category in the 1776 census than the average Molotschna immigrant, namely, they were landowning household producers.

Many of the KG pioneers were well-to-do when they arrived in the Molotschna in 1804/5. Abraham von Riesen, patriarch of the massive von Riesen clan arrived in 1805 with 4 wagons, 1 plow, 7 horses and 14 head of cattle. His son-in-law Johann Friesen settled in Schönau with 1 wagon, 5 horses and 8 cattle. Peter Fast settled in Schönau with 1 wagon, 1 plow, 7 horses, and 11 cattle. Peter Wiebe settled in the same village with 2 wagons, 1 plow, 10 horses, and 14 cattle. Cornelius Eidse settled in Fischau with 1 wagon, 6 horses, and 8 cattle. And so the list goes on, these were average figures among the early KG.

The KG were widely recognized for their farming prowess. Johann Cornies recognized the farming abilities of his proteges as well as their eagerness in



“Das Pluggespann” (The plowing team) by J. P. Klassen. Usually the plow which had to be held down, was pulled by five, sometimes by six, horses, and the small rider on one of them often found it troublesome to control the team. Photo courtesy of In the Fullness of Time, page 41.

adopting and promoting the progressive reforms he implemented and which have characterised the agricultural pursuits of this denomination to the present-day. Cornies showed his appreciation to the KG by bending his normally inflexible protocols in order to accommodate their conscience pangs. Even Peter M. Friesen, the arch-enemy of the conservative faith tradition, acknowledged that “The yards, fields, gardens and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies” (page 198).

KG farmers were also recognized by others. The following were acknowledged as having the best flax production in their villages in 1851: Peter Thiessen, Schönau, Johann Toews, Fischau; Peter Heidebrecht, Lichtenau; Gerhard Fast, Ohrloff; Aeltester Johann Friesen, Neukirch; and Peter Penner, Prangenau. Another farmer Johann Warkentin, Blumstein, was among 11 in the Molotschna recognized for having the highest milk production from a particular cow in 1851. In an article in the *Unterhaltungsblatt* in 1850 two German agricultural students cited Isaak Loewen, Lindenau, as a “Lehrmeister” or master teacher in the field of silkworm farming.

Section 8.10: The Entrepreneurial Spirit.

The official position of the KG was against business and large enterprise of any kind. This was based on the writings of Pieter Pieters, long-time favourite among the KG, particularly as articulated in *Spiegel der Gierigkeit*, published by the KG in 1827. Pieters wrote as follows about entrepreneurship, “For it is impossible that an individual who loves himself so dearly, who blesses himself, looks after his own interest, and so greedily acquires for himself, can love his neighbour as himself, or do unto him as he would have done unto himself. Therefore it is most essential that a Christian person begins to weed out the evil root of greed, of self-love, and selfishness, the many comforts and the devouring in excess of one’s needs, and more of the same.”

Of striving for wealth beyond one’s daily needs, KG minister Heinrich Balzer wrote as follows: “Goods of this world beyond the standards of our assigned estate are surely incompatible with the simplicity of our holy forefathers and the teachings of the Gospel, for they demand something from man which he cannot possibly fulfil in loyal pursuit of our principles. And therefore, once he has grown fond of these things he is ready to sophisticate [“Küntsteln”] the truths by means of reason, to reformulate them in ambiguous clauses, and at the end to find them altogether dispensable, rather than to part from the goods of this world.”

Although large enterprise was not encouraged in reality there were many substantial farmers among the KG. In fact, they quickly became known as “muster Wirthen” or model farmers who gained the enmity of GG farmers for their eager support of the progressive techniques being introduced into the Molotschna by Johann Cornies, the great social reformer.

A number of KG members are noteworthy with respect to their farming operations:

Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), Kleefeld, rented additional Crown land and in 1871 had a wheat crop of 270 acres.

Heinrich Koop (1805-50), Muntau moved to Landskrone in 1839 where he established a prosperous farming operation with “a fine set of buildings”. Koops’ buildings were the subject of some controversy when the accusation was made that the KG ministerial had opposed his use of the new construction methods being implemented by Johann Cornies during the 1840s on the grounds that “it was too ostentatious and not humble enough”.

Johann Koop (1831-97), Muntau and later Mariawohl (not related to Heinrich) was known as a large-scale farmer who later started his own settlement north of Borosenko called “Neuanlage”. Koop was known for his equitable and fair treatment of employees, particularly Russian workers, who always flocked to work for him instead of other employers if they had a choice.

Johann Warkentin (1817-86), was a highly successful Vollwirt in Blumstein, actively involved in purchasing of land and reselling in smaller parcels. In 1872 he established the chutor Hochfeld.

Peter Heidebrecht (1815-96) was a successful farmer in Blumstein. In 1868 they moved to Markusland. A year later they moved to Borosenko where they

purchased 400 desjation of land (1100 acres) raising grain and sheep. In 1874 they moved to Jansen, Nebraska, where they owned a farm property of 1180 acres of land with 300 acres cultivated by 1880, valued at \$11,000 and 100 head of cattle.

Franz Kroecker, Tiegerweide (d. 1870), father of Franz (1835-1913), purchased a large tract of land or estate in Rohrbach, known as Alleow, in 1870. Of this land they leased 100 desjation to brother-in-law Peter I. Fast (1831-1916).

The KG also included successful entrepreneurs and innovators. Klaas F. Reimer (1812-74), Tiede, son of the KG founder, had a youthful curiosity in technological matters and invented an early version of the bicycle much to his father's chagrin, as his son's ingenuity attracted the criticism of some of his parishioners.

It was common for young people from poor families to be indentured to an artisan or craftsman in order to learn a trade or craft such as carpentry, furniture making, blacksmithing, wheelwrighting. The hope was that they might thereby acquire the financial means to obtain a *Wirtschaft* of their own.

Some combined their knowledge of blacksmithing or wheelwrighting with an entrepreneurial spirit and ventured into small-scale manufacturing as a stepping stone into the idealized profession of farming. Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), Lindenau, manufactured wagon wheels and by 1857 was able to take up a full *Wirtschaft* in the newly established village of Kleefeld.

The story of Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) illustrates this process. His parents, Abraham and Elisabeth Reimer, were poor and so Klaas was indentured out at an early age learning a trade as a blacksmith. In 1857 he also moved to Kleefeld and was able to open a small blacksmith shop on his own. He also rented land and through a series of bad crops and misfortunes fell deeply into debt. At this time he and his wife rejoined his parental church. The KG at this time still assumed responsibility for all the debts of its members and his loans were taken over by his uncles Klaas F. Reimer and Peter W. Friesen, Tiede. In 1863 Klaas moved to Markuslandt where things started to turn around. He had a few good crops and wheat prices went up. The plows he built in his smithy were of such good quality blacksmiths from across Russia came to see them. Klaas was able to pay all his debts. By 1869 when Klaas moved to Steinbach, Borosenko, he was able to take up a full *Wirtschaft*, and had a number of servants and maids.

Some enterprise was tolerated in special circumstances. Klaas F. Friesen (1818-71), Neukirch, the Aeltster's brother, ran a small business. Gerhard Giesbrecht (1816-63), Prangenu, was allowed to operate a small business because he was too sickly to farm. The sons of former KG minister Peter Thiessen of Schönau, Peter and Abraham established themselves in Neu-Halbstadt, Peter as the owner of a flour mill and iron and lumber business and Abraham as a grain merchant. The operation of windmills, blacksmith shops, building construction, and other businesses directly related to farming, as in processing, or transporting were acceptable.

But these restrictions changed with the relocation out of the Molotschna and particularly to Borosenko, where goods and related services were not as

readily available as formerly in the Molotschna. There was now an enhanced need for traders, merchants, storekeepers, etc. to provide the goods and services required by over a hundred families most of whom were specialized commercial wheat growers. The move to Borosenko exposed a whole generation of KG-ers to a new paradigm where their own members would need to take responsibility for the provision of such goods and services. Kornelius Loewen and Klaas R. Reimer were two of the men active in the new market place.

Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916), son of minister Abraham, Neukirch, was another enterprising young man. After marriage in 1867 to Katharina, daughter of "Fula" Reimer, they established themselves on a *Wirtschaft* in Rosenfeld, Borosenko, where his parents lived. On January 21, 1872, Abraham sold the *Wirtschaft* in Rosenfeld to school teacher Heinrich Wiebe for 3000 rubles and moved to Steinbach, Borosenko, home of Katharina's parents and siblings. Here the young Friesen purchased and operated a rolling mill and prospered with the continuing growth of the market for wheat. He was also an innovative blacksmith and in March of 1873 built "a big seeding machine" for a customer.

As already mentioned, the KG had allowed business enterprise which was integral to the farming enterprise. One such area was the flour and grain milling business.

Johann Isaak (1809-64), owned a flour mill in addition to his *Wirtschaft* in Schönau. His son-in-law Jacob Wiebe (1829-1901) was also involved in the milling business. Wiebe grew up in Schönau, across the street from Johann Isaak, his future father-in-law. In 1857 Wiebe bought a treadmill and house in Prangenau. In 1863 they moved to Markuslandt (Andreasfeld) continuing to operate a treadmill until they moved to the Borosenko settlement several years later. Wiebe later was a successful farmer and threshing machine operator in Blumenort, Manitoba.

Johann Wiebe (1841-1909) owned a large treadmill in Blumenhoff, Borosenko. It consisted of a large inclined disk (belt) on which many horses were walking. This mill was approximately 25 to 30 feet in height. In 1874 Johann Wiebe was one of the pioneer settlers Steinbach, Manitoba. In 1906 the family moved to Lanigan, Saskatchewan.

Johann K. Friesen (1812-84), nephew of KG Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) was a mill operator, formerly a teacher. After some time he purchased his father-in-law's farm in Marienthal where he had difficulties because of his debts. In 1864 the family moved to Gushofka in the Crimea, where a number of KG families were settling at this time. Here there was a shortage of flour and so Friesen set up a roller mill, which he later expanded.

Jacob Braun, formerly of Schardau, was another member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* who was a mill owner and operator.

Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917) combined an interest in milling with his gifts as a builder and became a reputed builder of windmills in Russia. He owned a large flour mill in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. In 1877 he constructed the new windmill in Steinbach, Manitoba, for businessman and farmer, Abraham S. Friesen. In 1880 he built the first steam driven flour mill in southeastern Manitoba.

Peter Fast (1831-1916), son of Bernhard Fast, purchased the Wirtschaft of his father-in-law, Martin J. Barkman in Rückenau. Son Martin B. Fast related that his parents had a treadmill on their yard and that across the street they had a windmill, where rye and barley were milled. This mill had large steps about 15 feet high, leading up to the bottom floor where the stocks of grain were piled. A winch was used to raise and lower the bags from the wagon below. In 1877, the Fast family emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska

Another common enterprise was that of the teamster. KG-ers such as Peter Toews (1838-82), son-in-law of Abraham F. Reimer, were often on the roads between Borosenko and Berdjansk or Nikopol. Coincidentally, three internationally known trucking firms, Penner International, Southeast Big Freight, and Reimer Express Lines, would arise from Steinbach, Manitoba, founded by the KG in 1874.

Large scale enterprise was actively worked against in the KG with the result that some larger farmers who did not want to scale down when requested joined other churches. Many KG-ers in the Molotschna joined the Neukirch Gemeinde in the 1860s while others such as Jakob Penner, Friedensfeld, one of the largest land owners among the Mennonites in Russia, joined the Brüdergemeinde, the only other Mennonite church in the area.

It was evident that there was a progressive and innovative spirit present within the KG from its very inception in 1812. At the same time there was also a strong reactionary spirit, although less powerful than that within the much larger GG. The forces of economic progress and those who wished to shun the new technology and innovations of the 19th century were in constant interaction, a dynamic tension maintained in relative stability for the most part.



The old school building in the village of Margenau, Molotschna, which was used until 1850. Margenau had a significant KG community and for some years Cornelius Friesen (1810-92) was the school teacher there.

Photo courtesy of Damit es nich Vergessen Werde, page 87.



The new school house in Margenau, built in 1850 according to the new Cornies' plan. Note the angled gables, reproduced in the school house built in Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1880.

Photo courtesy of Damit es nich Vergessen Werde, page 181.

Section 8.11: Servants and Maids.

By the 1830s the grain-raising economy had become established in Southern Russia eventually replacing earlier attempts at commercial farming with sheep and silk production. With the grain growing economy came greater commercialization of the farming operation. Mennonite farmers started to hire labourers to do much of the manual labour.

The emancipation of serfs in 1861 ensured an endless supply of cheap labour thus freeing Mennonite women from farm field work. They still assisted to some extent but because of the abundance of labour the requirements were limited. Women did housework but labour was cheap and readily available in the relatively primitive economy of Russia, perhaps somewhat comparable to the situation of modern-day Mennonites in Latin America where locals line up in the street for opportunities to do any manual work for pennies a day.

Conservative Mennonites were known for their delightful and earthy sense of humour and the KG were no exception. Peter W. Toews, later a wealthy blacksmith in Steinbach, Manitoba, recounted the following anecdote: "Usually the farmers drove to the market in a neighbouring Russian village on Sunday in order to engage the workers who were assembled there waiting for such employment. On one occasion it is to have occurred during the Sunday worship service, that the Vorsänger or Chorister, intoned [Vorgesagt] the song 'Liebster Jesu wir sind hier' (Precious Jesus we are present). As the assembly was only meagre someone from out of the benches is to have remarked audibly, 'And the rest are in Tokmak'"--the town where the Molotschna KG-ers hired their labourers (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 137).

Workers were hired in the Russian village of Sholokhovo, referred to as Scharlach, situated at the confluence of the Bazavluk and Solenaya Rivers, some three miles south of Steinbach. On Sept. 28, 1872, A.F. Reimer recorded that "In Scharlach the annual market took place. Kl. Reimer and Joh. Reimer [later Steinbach pioneers] were there. Many workers were available at low wages." Obviously the availability of cheap labour impacted immensely on the quality of life of the settlers, and particularly, that of women.

Folk historian Johann W. Dueck described the servants engaged by his father, Peter L. Dueck, a school teacher in Friedensfeld, Russia, who farmed on the side: "Father kept a servant, always a Russian, all year round and often also a Russian servant girl. During the harvest time an additional 5 or 6 reapers were hired to cut the grain.... Everything was cut down with a scythe, bundled together, and bound by hand for which work Russian women were hired" (*History and Events*, pages 93-94).

References to the hiring of maids are found in the diaries of Abraham F. Reimer, whose children were in the baby producing stage. On Oct. 21, 1870, he recorded that "Kl. Reimer's servant and maid left." Five days later he recorded that "Kl. Reimer came to Rosenfeld with the new maid to our [Abr. S.] Friesens and took my wife home." On January 4, 1872, son "Kl. Reimer engaged a maid for a 100 rubles, Katharina by name." Whether or not to have a maid was no

luxury for Klaas Reimer given the mental health of his wife. On January 14, 1872, she "...went out into the mud with only her underclothes on, without stockings and without a head covering."

On Jan. 13, 1872, son-in-law "Peter Toews hired two maids for 40 ruble" because his wife was very ill. Even relatively poor people hired Ukrainian or German maids for household work. For example, Abraham and Elisabeth Reimer, who received church charity for many years in the Molotschna, had a maid in 1870 when they lived in Steinbach, Borosenko.

All manner of pedlars came door to door selling their wares, and a variety of itinerant craftsmen and artisans such as watchmakers, tailors, shoemakers, etc. made the rounds from village to village annually. On Jan. 26, 1871, A. F. Reimer recorded that "A shoemaker, a Jew, was here and did some mending." Again on May 8, 1871, "A Greek was here with his goods." These itinerant tradesmen provided some of the specialized products difficult to manufacture in a household economy geared to commercial grain production.

The abundance of relatively cheap labour impacted directly on the lives of KG and other farmers in Imperial Russia allowing them to advance rapidly in the commercialization of their farms. The availability of labour also impacted positively on the quality of life of KG women freeing them from much of the tedious labour which defined the life world of most women in other cultures.

Although the KG was primarily a Vollwirth society, the denomination also included those employed by others as servants and maids. In some cases, outsiders who worked for members also joined the congregation and in some situations, actually married sons or daughters of their employers. This included Lutheran men such as Gottlieb Jahnke, Johann Broeski and Julius Radenzel, who married the daughters of school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-93), Anafeld, Borosenko, later of Blumenort, Manitoba. Another similar situation was Heinrich Wohlgemuth whose parents had emigrated to Johannesthal, Crimea, from Wolle, Poland, 1863. Heinrich later found employment with KG farmers in Borosenko, including Cornelius Loewen (1827-93), Grünfeld, and his future father-in-law Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) in Blumenhoff.

Another example is Jakob A. Wiebe (1837-1921), Margenau, who worked for a prominent member of the KG in the Molotschna as a young man. Later while undergoing severe spiritual trials he returned to members of the KG for spiritual solace and sustenance and eventually joined the denomination, becoming the Aeltester of the Crimean congregation in 1869.

Typically the young teenagers of poorer families were indentured to a tradesman or craftsman to learn a trade. This was illustrated by the children of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer and Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer (see Sections 9.11 and 10.07) who all had to work for others at an early age. The oldest sons Klaas and Abraham were apprenticed out to a blacksmith. Younger son Peter's work experience started at age 14 when he had work out as a menial servant. Later he was apprenticed to his uncle Bernhard Rempel, Lichtsfelde, who was a building contractor, and also learned the art of Mennonite furniture construction.



Margaretha Friesen Harms Brandt (1838-1933), was the daughter of Heinrich Friesen (1815-50), Rückenau, and granddaughter of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Obrloff, second Aeltester of the KG. Margaretha's mother is believed to be Anna Mokofski (b. 1812), daughter of Michael Mokofski, a Russian Catholic, who joined the KG circa 1825, suffering imprisonment for his decision. Margaretha later became a powerful matriarch in Rosenort, Manitoba, serving as midwife, nurse and undertaker, and documenting much of her work in her journals. Photo courtesy of great-great-granddaughter Heide Harms Friesen, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Frequently maids working in KG homes would marry a young man from within the KG community or even their employer's son. Margaretha Friesen (1838-1933), daughter of Heinrich Friesen (1815-50), Rückenau, was employed as a maid at the home of Ohm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, after her father's death in 1850. In 1858 Margaretha married Isaak Harms (1837-66), son of Isaak Harms (1811-91), Lindenau, a prosperous Vollwirt. Sometimes the maids were from the Old Colony as in the case of Katharina Friesen (1848-1900), employed as a maid at the home of Heinrich Reimer (1818-76), Blumenhoff, Russia, in 1871 when she married Peter P. Isaak, the KG folk historian.

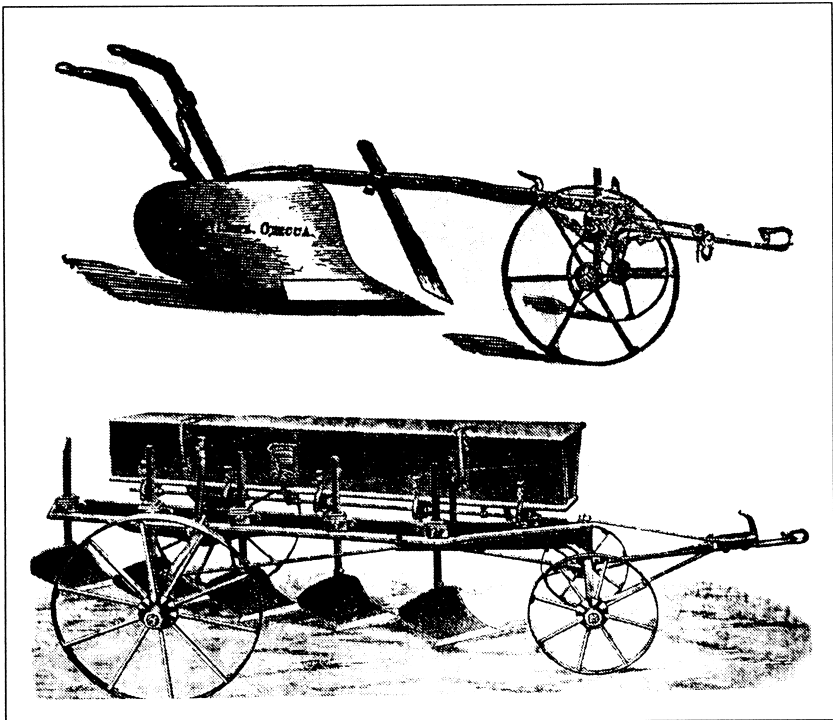
It also happened that disagreements arose between servants and their employers. One such incident arose between Elisabeth Warkentin who was working as a maid for Jakob A. Wiebe, Annenfeld, Crimea. Evidently she became unhappy and terminated the relationship after three months without Wiebe's consent. On March 3, 1867, Wiebe wrote a letter to his colleague Peter P. Toews, Blumenhoff, Borosenko, explaining that he had "...settled with Elisabeth....for which I paid her 6 silver ruble. She was to receive 40 ruble per year." Evidently Elisabeth accused Wiebe of various things, but he was "...afraid that if she is hospitably received there [in Borosenko] that perhaps the Lord's will would not be done."

For Further Reading:

Royden Loewen, *Family Church and Market*



The "Pracha" (beggar) was always part of the village landscape. The dogs got to know the beggars but were nonetheless ill disposed towards them. KG folk historian Johann W. Dueck has written about the beggars who regularly came to their door in Friedensfeld and Blumenboff, Borosenko, in History and Events, pages 95-96. Often they carried barrel organs and played hoping to gain a few kopeks. Photo courtesy Damit es nich Vergessen Werde, page 120.



The traditional single-share plow used by the Molotschna pioneers (top). Later the "Bugger", a five-share diagonal plow (below), somewhat like the North American disk plow, was common. KG entrepreneurs such as Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), became renown for their skills in manufacturing such implements. It was said that blacksmiths from all over Russia came to study his techniques.



Russ. Bauern auf dem Markt zu Melitopol. Photo courtesy of Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten, page 67.



Mennonite women baking. Photo courtesy of Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten, page 78.

Chapter Nine: Women

Section 9.01: Women in Russia.

Two millennia ago, women were an important part of the economic life of subsistence farmers and hunters as their work was essential to the survival of the family or tribal unit. Even the peasant women of the feudal period fulfilled somewhat of a similar role, as the labour of all family members was required for survival. These subsistence farming units were drastically altered by the advent of the Industrial Revolution, where men became wage labourers and women became housekeepers with no input in earning the household income.

By today's standards the lot of women even in advanced countries such as England and Germany was deplorable. Historian Royden Loewen, one of the pioneers in writing about and describing the role of 19th century rural women, has referred to "Eugene Weber's descriptions of French rural women as 'beasts of burden seldom set to rest' or Jerome Blum's depiction of female serfs forced to marry 'to provide the proprietor with a natural increase in his labour force'" (Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, page 39, *et. seq.*) In other societies one hears of seigniorial privileges where the lord of the manor was entitled to the bedroom indulgences of his vassal's wives and daughters. In certain African societies young women were, and are to this day, physically circumcised as a rite of passage into adulthood.

Generally speaking Russia remained more medieval than Western Europe well into the 19th century. Serfdom in Russia was only abolished in 1861 and therefore the situation of women in general was significantly worse. Even today squads of women are seen on the streets of Moscow performing menial tasks such as sweeping.

These descriptions did not hold true for Mennonite women. The first Mennonites emigrated from Danzig, Prussia to Russia in 1789 (Chortitza) and again in 1804 (Molotschna). Since they were invited into the country under a special *Privilegium* they lived within their own communities, sometimes likened unto a "commonwealth" functioning almost like a separate entity within the Czar's Empire. Mennonite communities before and after the emigration from Prussia did not change significantly in cultural terms and presumably the role of women within that context remained relatively constant.

Over the centuries the Mennonite conventicles or *Gemeinden* developed strategies to ensure the conservation of their religious and cultural values in the face of emigrations, and rapid economic and social changes occurring around them. These strategies which focused on the establishment of cultural boundaries, included maintenance of traditional languages and control over education of their children. An agrarian lifestyle was seen as essential to the survival and continuation of the *Gemeinde*, or religious community, and the goal of most family units was to provide farming opportunities to their progeny. Since most families routinely had 10 to 12 children the contribution of the women in the process was absolutely critical.



Katharine the Great (1725-96), Czarina of Imperial Russia. She ruled from 1762-96. Being of German ancestry she invited the Mennonites and other Germans to help Russia settle her newly conquered lands north of the Black Sea. Photo courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 22.

But the role of women in the Mennonite settlements in Russia was affected by the economic achievement of these communities, among the most prosperous in the Empire. The quality of life for the 25 per cent of women in Chortitza and Molotschna who belonged to the Vollwirt class, those who owned land in the *Strassendorf* village system, was reasonably pleasant. The primitive wooden and earthen structures built by the pioneers in 1789 and 1804 were soon replaced by housebarns made of kilned bricks comfortable and relatively spacious for their day.

Of course, the 75 per cent of the Russian Mennonite population who were not land owners should not be forgotten. These were the Anwohner, with a basic cottage and lot at the periphery of the village, who either worked for wealthier neighbours or eked out a living as tradesmen or artisans. The women of these Anwohner households performed the necessary domestic tasks and possibly much of the labour required in a subsistence farming operation, while the unmarried daughters were required to work out as maids

contributing their meagre earnings to the household income. The women (and men) of this group are not much written about by Russian Mennonite academics who prefer to write about 90 wealthy Gutsbesitzer in Russia in 1910 and the grandeur of “the paradise lost”.

The KG in Russia were known for their entrepreneurial abilities. In fact, between one-half and two-thirds of KG families were of the land owning Vollwirt class, well above average among Russian Mennonites. This meant that around ninety per cent must have been from the land owner tradition as the other third consisted of young couples still getting established and/or older grandparents who had already retired. The life quality of both categories was informed by the Vollwirt experience, the young couples were being groomed for their own farm, and the retired couples had made farming their life’s work. In all cases, the experience of women within the KG was largely informed by the Vollwirt life.

An exposition of women’s lives within this context would include the rites of passage and life cycle experiences: birth, education, baptism, marriage, motherhood, grand-motherhood, relationships, Gemeinde, village, etc. It would also encompass all facets of daily life: cooking, cleaning, the various aspects of the household economy from the supervision of domestic and farm servants (at least in Russia), to the planning and operation of the dairy, poultry, garden, orchards, etc.

Section 9.02: Biblical Feminism.

One of the most significant aspects of the traditional culture of the conservative Mennonites was the important role played by women within those communities in Imperial Russia. The women of the KG Vollwirt societies of the 19th century were an integral and essential part of the household economy, typically with responsibility for dairy, poultry, garden and orchard production. These functions were significantly enhanced after the immigration to Manitoba, where the pioneers had to downgrade their farming operations for the primitive economy existing here at the time. This required a restructuring of farming strategies focusing on mixed farming, dairying, poultry, and market gardening, precisely the areas traditionally controlled and managed by women.

In this regard KG and other women within the conservative faith tradition were significantly more empowered than comparable women in other cultures. But what was even more interesting was the fact that this early flowering of female status in Imperial Russia was not based solely on the necessities of running large *Wirtschaften* and of raising families of a dozen and more children.

It seems clear that this early feminism for conservative Mennonites was based on their understanding of Biblical teachings. In a letter circa 1820-30, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, the second KG Aeltester (Section 5.05), justified Mennonite inheritance practices which required strict equality for women to Russian bureaucrats who were so amazed by the practice that they had solicited an explanation. It must be remembered that primogeniture was still the standard mode of inheritance in much of Europe, namely, inheritance through the male line only (see "Woman's Rights 1820s, *Pres.*, No. 8, June 1996, Pt 2, pages 49-59).

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

The development of Biblical feminism among traditional Mennonites in Imperial Russia long before feminism became a household word in Western civilization should not be a surprise. If the very existence of the KG was, in fact, foundationally premised on the restitution of the New Testament church, and therefore, upon a genuine Biblicism, one would expect that its practices would reflect revolutionary teachings and social values, at least to the extent that the

New Testament, and particularly the Gospels, were revolutionary in nature calling for the reformation of all social relationships to a new paradigm based on the Sermon of the Mount. Here in the early formation of Biblical feminism, it is evident that this was precisely what happened.

Women in traditional Mennonite society were protected from abuse by the Gemeinde and the Ordnung. There are recorded instances demonstrating that perpetrators were strictly punished by excommunication, and even shunned, until they were prepared to apologize and rectify their conduct. The unique status of women in traditional Mennonite culture was largely a function of the Gemeinde. As the conservative denominations were weakened by various factors, so was the relative influence of women.

The school laws of the Provincial government in 1916-27 “exiled” many of the more conservative and traditional Mennonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. These actions also weakened the congregations remaining in Canada and fractured the extended family networks essential to the functioning of matriarchies.

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

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

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

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



Russian women at work, presumably preparing manure bricks for heating. In many 19th century cultures, women were little more than chattels, “beasts of burden”.

Photo courtesy of In the Fullness of Time, page 16.

Section 9.03: Matrifocality.

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

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

Matriafocality only flourished in societies which were stable, permanent, conservative and relatively prosperous. For example, sophisticated matriarchies were found within European nobility where many of them exercised extensive power, even to assuming absolute rulership in a number of cases: Queen Victoria and Katherine the Great, to name two prominent examples. Matriarchal networks were a phenomenon of old world cultures and did not exist in newly established frontier settlements which generally consisted of young single men and/or couples out to seek their fortunes and who had immigrated individually from many different places.

The discussion of matrifocality presupposes the existence of a matriarch. What distinguished a clan where the grandmother or great-grandmother was soon blissfully forgotten, from one where descendants applauded her memory even distant centuries later? Anthropologist James Urry has referred to the concept of the reputation of the family clan which would apply equally to the reputation of a matriarch. “Lucky individuals were born into a clan with a good reputation and hopefully with the economic resources to back up this reputation. Reputation was derived from many sources: hard work, intelligence, humour, personal piety, and having supplied political or religious leadership in the past”-James Urry, “Chortitzer, Kleine Gemeinde and Ruszländer: conflicting views of life on the East Reserve, 1874-1940,” in *Working Papers*, page 117.

In the case of the matrifocality the original source of her reputation and influence might have been a patriarch several generations previous, or the wealth of a family properly managed and strategically preserved, or even a powerful matriarchal ancestor who skilfully implemented centuries-old strategies in the furtherance of the family well-being. In some cases the original source of the matriarch’s reputation is still treasured and preserved. In other situations, the existence of a matriarchal tradition can be used in an attempt to determine and reconstruct the source of reputation.

A successful matriarch was one who skilfully managed and enhanced her reputation, whatever the source, made it her own, and used it for the furtherance of her agenda. They preserved and enhanced their power through the implementation of age-old strategies. The ancient matriarchs were often the most

conservative and devoted supporters of culture, tradition and the *Ordnung*, since this was the fountain of their experience and the well-spring of their power. Through extensive networking with family, relatives and friends, matriarchies developed a web of networks which were far reaching in their influence and scope; the more extensive the matriarchal connections, the more powerful the matriarch, and vice versa.

In cases where cultural strategies were successfully employed, a new strain of matriarchy was created in each successive generation as a young bride raised her own family and exerted her influence, adding her voice to that of her mother-in-law and eventually superseding the same. In this way a new layer of matriarchy was grafted into the family by each new generation, novating the existing matriarchy, and typically strengthening and reinforcing the same.

In order to maintain their power, matriarchs supported the continuation, growth and prosperity of the culture and society which was their experiential embryo, the seat of their power and authority. Among the Mennonites the major institution was the *Gemeinde* which defined and gave meaning to most aspects of life for its members. Other institutions such as village and colony government, *Brandordnung* and *Waisenverordnung*, were subservient to the *Gemeinde*.

Like all confessional and political entities of the 19th century, the ancient *Gemeinden* were patriarchal in nature, in polity and governance. Nonetheless, they were founded upon the concept of "one for all, all for one" and therefore served to protect the less fortunate, including the poor, orphans and women. The *Gemeinden* operated as miniature socio-economic entities complete with all social benefits, providing a social safety net comparable to that of the modern welfare state.

The *Gemeinden* protected the interests of women, and therefore were foundational to matriarchal power. For this reason changes in the *Ordnung*--the protocol, or in the way things were done, were frequently opposed by the intellectual conservative women in the community. Conversely the matriarchs encouraged and supported policies which improved the strength of the *Gemeinden*, so that the relative strength of a particular *Gemeinde* might be an indicator of the influence of the matriarchy within that community, and vice versa.

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

But other survival strategies such as kinship networks, matrilocality and marriage patterns were articulated largely by women and are capable of some form of objective assessment. There were some 20 major KG matriarchies whose origins can be traced to the 18th century in the Prussian *Grosswerder*, of which three will be considered to illustrate their scope and operations: the von Riesens, Siemens and Pletts. These matriarchies were chosen on the basis that each to some extent was unique and somewhat representative of a particular type of matriarch.

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

Strategic marriage patterns included marriage of young females to wealthy widowers as well as to eligible bachelors from other associated and/or prominent kinship clans. In other cases, matriarchs encouraged their children to marry back into their kinship circle, at an appropriate degree of consanguinity, usually 6 degrees or second cousins. Although cousin marriages (four degrees) and cousin's children (five degrees) were legal and also considered acceptable, they were generally discouraged. The practice was even clothed with a certain amount of biblical authority, referring to the example of the patriarch Jakob who married his cousin's daughter.

2) **Matrilocality** is an anthropological term defined as being "of or pertaining to residence with the wife's family or tribe." The concept has numerous applications in the present context. It was common for young couples to move in with the bride's parents where the bridegroom would be given work. For example, the leading KG folk historian, Peter P. Isaak, married into the wealthy Warkentin family and relocated to their chutor "Hochfeld" (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 195).

More commonly matrilocality refers to the influence which pioneer women had over important family decisions such as which village they would settle in, etc. In many such cases the decision was made on the basis of matrilineal connections, such as two sisters who wanted to live in the same village or a widowed mother who wanted her children to live near her: for a consideration of these concepts relative to the settlement of Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874 (see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, page 3-4).

By the time of the emigration in 1874 the more established matriarchies had grown so large that sheer size dictated that a dispersal and realignment would take place as one branch moved to Jansen, Nebraska, another to Gnadenau, Kansas., and others to Manitoba, either in the East Reserve or the Scratching River settlement near Morris, while yet others chose to stay in Russia. In each case there were conflicting claims of loyalty and family ties which had to be resolved in one way or another. Some statistics, although only crude, may indicate that these decisions were not necessarily based on matrilocal considerations.

A further dispersal occurred in each area as sub-branches of the matriarchies chose a particular village or another or a village district as their new home. By this strategy the process already started in Borosenko, Russia, where matriarchal clans actually staked out their own geographical territory, became more prominent as many villages were established around individual matriarchs or groups of matriarchs.

3) **Matrilineage** was an important aspect of matriarchal influence centring around "the tracing of lineal descent through the female line." Within most major KG dynasties, matrilineal descent was considered equally important to



Russian women at work, hauling home the straw they used to beat their homes and cook. A typical steppe landscape. Photo courtesy of In the Fullness of Time, page 16.

patriarchal lineage. The children of the 1874 pioneers were proud to use their mother's maternal name as their own second name. This was in contrast to the descendants of those who had remained in Russia, who adopted the patronymic system of their host culture whereby the Christian name of the father became the second name of children, male and female.

Family genealogies called a "Familienbuch" reciting the ancestral pedigree and listing the births, deaths, and marriages of clan members were found in almost all pioneer homes of the KG in Manitoba, Kansas and Nebraska. Sometimes these records and tribal accounts were maintained by women, e.g. Helena Friesen Janhke, "Lineage of my grandparents, Klaas Friesen, born in West Prussia" (Published in *Profile 1874*, pages 209-212). This was especially the case after 1900.

More often than not, it was the women who were interested in the vast family networks extending across countries and continents and who went to great pains to maintain them. This was illustrated by the extensive letter correspondence of Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht (1825-1916) (Section 10.16). Typically it was the women who recounted the family triumphs and tragedies and were the bearers of cultural history and oral tradition. It was the mothers who socialized each new generation in their early childhood by passing on these stories and folklore. Peter P. Isaak, the leading folk historian in the KG, was largely informed by his mother and grandmothers (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 179-224).

Major community events such as a religious schism also created a new matrix of social alignments, the result of which was comparable to emigration in terms of its impact upon matriarchal patterns. This phenomenon is considered part of matrilineage as no physical relocation took place. The classic case was the Holdeman schism of 1882 which split the Manitoba KG down the middle. Again there were conflicting claims of loyalty which had to be resolved by each family and, with surprising frequency, matrilineal connections took precedence.

Section 9.04: The von Riesen Matriarchy.

The most prominent matriarchy among the KG and possibly the entire Molotschna Colony was that of Margaretha Wiebe (1754-1810). In 1779 she married Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810), and their son Peter was born in Tiegenhagen later the same year. It has always been my own supposition that once the genealogical mysteries regarding the parentage of Abraham and Margaretha will be unraveled, the record will show that she came from a prominent family within the Gross Werder.

In 1804 the von Riesens emigrated to Russia pioneering in the village of Ohrloff. The family was wealthy and arrived in their new home in Ohrloff, Molotschna, with four wagons, seven horses and 14 head of cattle, plus the assets of extended family consisting of three well-to-do son-in-laws and one married son.

A massive book would be required to recount all the accomplishments of Margaretha's eight children, 64 adult grandchildren, 232 adult great-grandchildren, spouses, etc. Numerous levels of matriarchy can be observed in this family. The matriarchy of Helena von Riesen, Mrs. Klaas Reimer, for example, was grafted onto that of her mother, Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen, and in the next generation, the matriarchy of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, Mrs. Abraham F. Reimer, was grafted onto that, and so on, until the dismemberment of the matriarchies in the early 20th century.

The von Riesen daughters serve as an example of how matriarchy preserved its power and that of the clan through strategic marriage alliances. All of the von Riesen children married spouses with roots going back to the KG heartland in Prussia: son Peter (1779-1847) married the daughter of a vinegar manufacturer; son Abraham (1782-1849) married Catherina Wiebe, daughter of Heinrich Wiebe. She was the step-daughter of Jakob Dueck, owner of a double Wirtschaft in Ohrloff and host of early GG brotherhood meetings. Abraham was the second Bishop of the KG (Section 5.05); Daughter Margaretha (1784-1835) married Johann Friesen, a widower of Schönau and later Rosenort, already referred to. Margaretha's sons from Neukirch were prominent leaders--Bishop Johann F. Friesen (Section 7.04), Prediger Abraham F. Friesen, and deacon Klaas F. Friesen; Daughter Helena married widower Klaas Reimer, KG founder in 1812 (Section 5.03); daughter Anna married Cornelius Sawatzky, successful Ohrloff Vollwirt; son Johann von Riesen married Maria Klassen, daughter of Johann, a wealthy Vollwirt who settled on a double Wirtschaft in Altona. Klassen's other daughter Susanna was married to Jakob Warkentin, GG Aeltester from 1824-42; son Klaas (1793-1870) married the widow Johann Friesen, nee Margaretha Mathies, and took over her Wirtschaft in Altona (Section 10.06); the youngest, daughter Regina married Heinrich Neufeld, from the prominent Muensterberg Neufelds. Heinrich was an intelligent man and leading GG minister, but not sympathetic to his KG brothers-in-law. Regina's children settled in Inman, Kansas.

Since the von Riesen clan was so extensive, strategic marriages also included marrying back into the clan. Of 63 married grandchildren of the third generation, 12 married first cousins resulting in six sets of married grandchildren. Of 204 married great-grandchildren of the fourth generation, 37 married

von Riesen relatives: usually a second cousin, but sometimes also a cousin or cousin's child or second cousin's child. A small number of these were second marriages.

Two children of Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen were not KG-ers and none of their children married back into the family. Unmarried grandchildren and great-grandchildren were not counted for this example. By deleting the two family branches not KG, the ratio of intermarriage among cousins was 12 over 53 and 37 over 176 among second cousins (21% and 23%, respectively). A number of great-grandchildren married second cousins or some relatives in other family lines, possibly in areas where other matriarchs or other family clans were more powerful.

Most powerful matriarchs succeeded in arranging family marriages for a significant percentage of their children. In the case of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, "matriarch of Steinbach", for example, three of her seven children who remained in the KG tradition married second cousins or similar, and another child, Elisabeth, married a second cousin in her second retirement marriage. A fifth child, daughter Margaretha, married Abraham R. Penner, her second cousin on the Rempel side.

Matrilocality in its traditional sense was evident in 1831 when Jakob W. Friesen, son of Bishop Abraham, purchased Wirtschaft 3 in Blumstein, the parental village of his wife Aganetha Loepp. During the 1840s Jakob served as Schulz of Blumstein.

The 1874 emigration and sheer weight of numbers forced a dispersal of Margaretha's descendants. Each family had to choose to either stay in Russia, or emigrate to North America, and if so, they had to choose the settlement and village where they would live. The data to track these choices are available and should presumably provide some information as to the incidence of matrilocality.

Of Margaretha's 63 married grandchildren 17 (around 25%) remained in Russia, where all contact with their families was lost. This number also included a few who had died young without issue. Of the 44 grandchildren who emigrated from Russia in 1874 and after, 13 (almost 25%) were not KG associated. Of these, three were in Beatrice, Nebraska, one in Gnadenu, Kansas, one in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, one in Bruderthal, Kansas, and seven in Inman, Kansas. Of the remaining 31 KG grandchildren (the numbers are not completely scientific), 20 settled in Jansen, Nebraska, nine in Manitoba (four in the Scratching River settlement near Morris and five in the East Reserve).

In all cases except that of son Abraham, the second KG Bishop, the children of Margaretha's children did not choose the same destination. For example, of the children of daughter Helena von Riesen, son Abraham F. Reimer came to Blumenort, while the other children and their families chose Jansen, Neb. In the case of daughter Margaretha there was even greater dispersal as two sons (or their families) chose the Scratching River, one chose Gnadenu, Kansas, one chose Mountain Lake, Minnesota, one the E. Reserve, and three chose Jansen, Nebraska.

The statistics become less clear in the case of the 174 great-grandchildren who emigrated from Russia in 1874 and after: 69 chose Jansen, Nebraska, 15

Scratching River, 21 the East Reserve, and 57, almost a third, made other choices: two to California (Cornelius S. Harms, who had married his second cousin), eight Mountain Lake, nine Gnadenau, eight Beatrice, one Weatherford, Oklahoma, and 37 to Inman, Kansas--the Neufeld clan.

The apparent convergence on Jansen, Neb., instead of, say, the E. Reserve, is explained by the 1866 division in the KG which resulted in a loss of power for the von Riesen matriarchy and signalled the increasing strength of other clans, such as Loewens, Toewses and Pletts who formed a loose alliance and collectively challenged the von Riesens on the grounds that they were not restitutional enough. Within a few years the von Riesens had successfully regrouped and formed the Heuboden Gemeinde under Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, which settled in Jansen, Nebraska in 1874.

It can be argued that the settlement choice of Jansen was not significantly influenced by the concept of matrilocality. But, this begs the question, since for most families the decision was made in 1869 when they chose to join the family dominated Heuboden Gemeinde as opposed to the Toews, Plett and Loewen dominated Blumenhoff Gemeinde. The relevance of this proposition is demonstrated by the secondary migration of 11 members of the von Riesen clan who had originally settled in Manitoba and moved to Jansen, Neb., within a few years: widow Klaas Friesen and her five children, Johann S. Friesen, Klaas Wiebe, Johann S. Harms, Peter S. Harms, Heinrich B. Friesen, and Peter R. Friesen. These families had already been counted in Jansen for the purpose of the above statistics.

The preponderance of von Riesens in Jansen signalled a family unity far more apparent than real. In fact, there were considerable differences of views among them (there were not really 69 distinct families as many had intermarried). This quickly became evident as many chose to join what later became known as the Brüderthaler, others the KMB, at least one the Herrites, and two, Jakob F. Reimer, and sister Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob J. Friesen, joined a small group of conservatives moving to Mexico in 1926 establishing the so-called "Kaunsas darpa". Rapid dispersal generally occurred as individual families and small groups adopted American Revivalist ideas similar to Separatist Pietist teachings which they had disdained until recently in Russia. These families quickly assimilated and disappeared forever becoming fodder for the American "melting pot".

By comparison the E. Reserve contingent of Margaretha von Riesen's great-grandchildren was only 21 (around 10%). In time, this group would become far more powerful and influential than the others. In large part this can be attributed to Elisabeth Rempel Reimer who married grandson Abraham F. Reimer, and who became the undisputed matriarch of the von Riesen/Reimer clan in the E. Reserve. Her authority and matriarchy were affirmed not only by her own tireless practice as midwife and undertaker, but by the burgeoning wealth of her seven children.

Further distribution occurred in the E. Reserve, as four of Elisabeth's children settled in Blumenort, and three in Steinbach. In Steinbach, it was daughter, Katharina R. Reimer (Mrs. Abraham S. Friesen), who became the senior matri-

arch, while in Blumenort it was daughter-in-law, Maria Plett Reimer, married to minister son Peter R. Reimer. By the next generation, post-WWI, extensive matriarchal power such as this had largely disintegrated. Nevertheless, there were some women of singular authority such as Anna Wiebe, a Chortitzer girl who worked as a maid for Steinbach's pioneer entrepreneur Klaas R. Reimer. She married son Heinrich, who became the local business tycoon of his generation. Within this context Anna wielded exceptional authority and her family came to represent the socio-economic elite in Steinbach and the E. Reserve during the 1920s. This was a singular example of boundary crossings between two distinct denominations and a considerable achievement considering Anna was Bergthaler by birth.

The classic example of matrilineage within the von Riesen dynasty was seen in the case of daughter Margaretha's children, all nine of whom were associated with the KG at some point, notwithstanding that their father was an influential and senior GG minister. In fact, Margaretha's children dominated the leadership of the KG from 1849 to 1866, with son Johann serving as the third Aeltester, son Abraham as a senior minister and son Klaas as deacon. These brothers were relatively prominent within the Molotschna Colony and became known collectively as the "Neukircher Friesens", being the name of the village in which all three lived.

Matrilineage in the von Riesen matriarchy was observed in the 1882 Holdeman schism in the E. Reserve KG. The family of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, as one would expect, held firm, except for one granddaughter, Mrs. Johann W. Reimer. The family of cousin Jakob K. Friesen (1822-75), went completely with Holdeman, possibly reflecting the fact that Jakob had drowned in the Red River in 1875 severing the immediate connection to the von Riesen clan. Cornelius, Johann and Abraham--sons of Prediger Klaas Friesen---all remained KG. Thus although the preponderance of the family had settled in the United States, and particularly in Jansen, Neb., the majority of the von Riesens in the E. Reserve remained with the traditional faith.

Although small in number, the influence of the von Riesen contingent which came to the E. Reserve in 1874/5 in time far exceeded that of those who settled in Jansen, Neb., and the numbers and prominence of their descendants was exponentially greater as well. Undoubtedly part of this success can be attributed to conservative intellectual matriarchs such as Elisabeth Rempel Reimer who supported the continuation of the Gemeinde and nurtured the ancient traditions. They were obviously possessed of great emotional strength and wisdom as they strategically sought what was best for themselves and their families.

Certain sub-branches of the von Riesen matriarchy were continued into modern times in somewhat of their original configuration by aggressive implementation of traditional survival strategies resulting in the emigration of some 100 families of KG to the dry mountain valleys of Northern Mexico in 1948, and, subsequently, a secondary migration to Belize in 1958. Among these families was the matriarchy of my paternal grandmother Elisabeth Reimer Plett, who, herself, had died in 1947, a year prior to the move. An interesting development took

place in Spanish Lookout, Belize, where Susanna Penner Kornelsen (1879-1969), a woman of Bergthaler/Chortitzer roots, became the senior matriarch, emulating the role played by Anna Wiebe Reimer in Steinbach, a half century earlier.



Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911) and her husband Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900) Jansen, Nebraska. They were second cousins, both members of the von Riesen matriarchy. Their son Abramam F. Friesen later served as the first minister of the Brüderthaler Gemeinde (E.M.B.) in Steinbach. Helena's grandmother was Margaretba von Riesen (1784-1835), wife of Rev. Johann Friesen (1763-1830), Schönau and later Rosenort, Molotschna. Heinrich B. Friesen was the grandson of the famed Aeltester Abramam Friesen (1782-1849), Obrloff. Photo courtesy of great-grandson W. A. "Bert" Friesen, Montrose Street, Winnipeg/Preservings, No. 7, page 36.



Heinrich W. Reimer (1864-1941), leading businessman and entrepreneur in south-eastern Manitoba during the first quarter of the 20th century. His 17,600 square foot store in Steinbach was the largest in rural Manitoba for several decades. It was demolished in 1963 after being in business for 77 years. Photo courtesy of Naomi Lepp, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 45/East Reserve 125, page 57.



Notwithstanding that she was of Bergthaler/Chortitzer origin, Mrs. H. W. Reimer, nee Anna Wiebe (1866-1932), was much beloved as the matriarch of Steinbach. It was reported that over 1,000 people, many of whom she had befriended over the years, attended her funeral in 1932. Photo courtesy of Naomi Lepp, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 45/East Reserve 125, page 57.

Section 9.05: The Siemens Matriarchy.

Another important KG matriarch was Katharina Friesen, born 1768, daughter of Jakob, Muensterberg, West Prussia, 1776 census. On October 4, 1787, Katharina Friesen married Claasz Siemens (1758-1834), son of Hans, Neustädterwald, Prussia, 1776 Census. In 1804 the family emigrated to Russia settling on Wirtschaft 15 in Rosenort, Molotschna Colony. The family was well-to-do and had a net worth of 1500 ruble when they arrived. In 1835 the family lived on their Wirtschaft in Rosenort, but Katharina was now a widow.

The Siemens matriarchy was unique as typically there was a prominent patriarch or sons, possibly a Bishop or minister, who established the favourable reputation of the clan. Although Claasz Siemens was a successful farmer, there are no other indicators of particular prominence. The matrilineal connections of Katharina's descendants were also significant because the primary kinship networks within the KG were defined almost exclusively by her four daughters, whose families all achieved a degree of prominence.

The family of Katharina Friesen Siemens (born 1768) was much smaller than Margaretha von Riesen's even though she was only 14 years younger. Two sons, Johann and Klaas, did not continue in the KG tradition and their families remained in Russia where all contact was lost. Son Gerhard Siemens (1805-77) married Gertrude Thiessen (b. 1805) whose family has not yet been identified. The Gerhard Siemens' lived in Grossweide, Mol. and later in Anafeld, Borosenko. The Siemens' only son Gerhard (1834-1908) was a successful entrepreneur, being the co-founder of Steinbach, Borosenko, purchasing a block of land for resale to other settlers. The Siemens', senior and junior, settled in Rosenhof, Manitoba, in 1874. Susanna Warkentin Siemens (1869-1943), daughter-in-law of Gerhard Siemens Jr. later became a wealthy matriarch in Rosenort.

Katharina's four daughters married well. Daughter Elisabeth Siemens (born 1778), married Peter Brandt (1770-1819) of Blumenort, Molotschna, a wealthy young widower. The 1808 Revision showed the family to be prosperous. In 1818 the Brandt family moved to Tiede, Wirtschaft 18. After the death of Peter Brandt, Elisabeth married again to Heinrich Wiebe, a well-established Vollwirt and GG minister. Wiebe moved to his wife's Wirtschaft in Tiede, and subsequently transferred to the KG, demonstrating typical matrilocal behaviour.

The Brandt children continued the tradition. Granddaughter Elisabeth S. Brandt (1813-c.56) married into the von Riesen clan, namely Abraham W. Friesen, son of Bishop Abraham. Her grandson, Jakob F. Isaak (1883-1970) became Bishop of the KG in Meade, Kansas, in 1914. Grandson Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57) was a successful Vollwirt in Tiegenhagen, whose estate amounted to 5500 silver ruble. The emigration dispersed his five children among the four KG associated settlements in North America. Granddaughter Aganetha S. Brandt married David Klassen (1813-1900), later the 1873 delegate to America of the Heuboden Gemeinde. Aganetha became the undisputed matriarch of the Rosenhof village in the Scratching River settlement near Morris, Manitoba. Grandson Peter S. Brandt of Rückenau, Molotschna, remained in Russia where contact was lost.

Daughter Katharina Siemens (b. 1789) married Gerhard Fast, son of KG patriarch Daniel Fast of Tiegenhagen and brother to Bernhard Fast of Halbstadt, founding Aeltester of the powerful Ohrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde in 1824. Katharina stayed in touch with her sisters through letter correspondence. Three of her letters to Sarah Siemens Janzen written in 1871 and 1872, datelined Grossweide, are still extant and are among the earliest known writings by a KG-related woman.

Katharina's son Johann joined the Ohrloff Gemeinde and a grandson entered the Dutch Mennonite Mission in Java in 1888. Grandson Gerhard S. Isaak (1836-86) emigrated to Kansas where his oldest daughters--Susanna (b. 1860) and Elisabeth (b. 1866)--became well-known medical doctors. Katharina's daughter Katharina (b. 1790), married Dirk Wiebe and their daughter Anna (b. 1810) and her husband Peter Reimer, were the great-great grandparents of Major-General Dennis J. Reimer, appointed Chief-of-Staff United States Army on June 20, 1995 (*Preservings*, No. 11, pages 20-21).

Daughter Sarah Siemens (1809-85) married Cornelius Janzen (1812-64), a more recent but wealthy arrival from Prussia. The family owned a Wirtschaft in Neukirch where Cornelius died. At the time of the emigration, Sarah chose to go to Jansen, Nebraska, with three of her daughters, where her progeny was prominent (Section 10.08).

Daughter Helena Siemens Friesen (1812-88) married Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91), of the von Riesen clan. Together with sister Sarah, Helena and her family lived in Neukirch where Abraham had a successful Wirtschaft and served as a senior minister of the KG. The Siemens women were feisty and not afraid to stand up against patriarchal authority and challenge the Gemeinde if necessary to protect the family and its reputation (see Ralph Friesen, "Totally indiscreet and Vain: Helena Siemens Friesen," in *Preservings*, No. 7, Dec. 1995, pages 36-37).

Helena's family included son Abraham S. Friesen, dynamic pioneer entrepreneur of Steinbach, Manitoba. Daughter Helena S. Friesen (1835-1911) married within the von Riesen matriarchy to her second cousin Heinrich B. Friesen (1836-1900). The family lived in Jansen, Nebraska. Several of her grandsons moved to Steinbach from Jansen in 1897 and after, including Abraham F. Friesen, first minister of the Brüderthaler Gemeinde (EMB), Gerhard, Isaak and Johann. Helena later married another second cousin, widower Abraham L. Friesen, Bishop of the Heubodner KG. She did so notwithstanding the protests of her sons who had adopted American Revivalist religious culture and were upset that their mother would marry a conservative Mennonite leader even though he was a wealthy man, very gifted, publisher of books, etc.

Another granddaughter Elisabeth F. Reimer (daughter of Elisabeth S. Friesen) married Heinrich E. Plett, and they were my grandparents and founders of the "Plettenhof" near Blumenort.

Katharina Friesen Siemens had 22 grandchildren from the five known family branches. Only two grandchildren married Siemens cousins, namely, Johann S. Friesen (1852-1920) who married Helena T. Siemens and were subsequently known as "Siemens" Friesens in Jansen, Nebraska, where they lived. Two other



Jakob F. Isaac (1883-1970) and his second wife Maria Dueck Isaac (1898-1975), Meade, Kansas, with sons Levi and Alvin. Isaac was elected Aeltester of the Meade KG in 1914 and served this office until he was deposed by members of his congregation anxious to adopt American Fundamentalist religious culture and language. Jakob F. Isaac was a member of both the Siemens and von Riesen matriarchies. Jakob's mother Margaretha B. Friesen (1848-1920) was the granddaughter of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Obrloff. Maria was the great-granddaughter of Obms Johann Dueck (1801-66) and Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), Muntau. Photo courtesy of Wendy Dueck/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 47.

grandchildren married a cousin's child.

Of the 22 known grandchildren 18 emigrated from Russia in 1874/5. Of the 18, two settled in non-KG areas in Kansas although the Johann Suderman family settled in Inman, generally considered to have been KG-related. Of the remaining 16, five settled in the E. Reserve, three in Scratching River, and eight in Jansen. Matrilocality is not observed in this family other than in Jansen, Neb., where half of the KG-related Siemens settled. In the absence of a certain amount of critical mass individual families evidently drifted into the orbits of other matriarchs.

An interesting factor of the Siemens matriarchy was that no one had ever heard of it until I started collecting information for a genealogy of my great-great-grandmother Helena Siemens Friesen. Any sense of matrilineage apparently dissipated soon after the emigration. And yet, research quickly demonstrated that it was a family of some distinction, held together by a vibrant matrilineal dynasty. Nevertheless the Siemens clan had no family identity in contrast to the Plett and von Riesen matriarchies which had always boasted a pronounced and manifest sense of family connectedness with particular emphasis on matrilineage.

Section 9.06: The Plett Matriarchy.

The Plett matriarchy was unique in several respects. Both Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen and Katharina Friesen Siemens were original 1804/5 pioneers of the Molotschna. They had emigrated to Russia as part of an organized community relocating to another country. Both families came to Russia with extended families intact and with long traditions of association with Mennonite culture and orthodoxy. Both families were well-to-do and quickly established themselves in their new homeland.

The Plett matriarchy within the KG originated with a Lutheran widow nee Esther Smit (1778-1855), who was a generation younger than the other matriarchs. Esther had two children from her first marriage to Kornelius Merkers. Her second husband, Johann Plett (1765-1833) was disassociated from his parents and the Mennonite church. The family lived in considerable poverty (Section 8.08). During this time it was necessary for her step-daughters Elisabeth and Katharina to find employment as maids (see Section 10.13).

After Johann's death in 1833, Esther lived for 10 years in a new house he had built just before his death. Later she lived with daughter Karolina, married to KG prediger Klaas Friesen, a member of the von Riesen matriarchy.

The Esther Smit Plett matriarchy was unique in that all five of her children married strategically within KG circles: 1) Maria S. Plett (1811-95) married Johann Toews, an established widower of Lindenau and later Fischau; 2) Wilhelmina S. Plett (1815-64) married a career school teacher, Gerhard Goossen (1811-54), and later to Heinrich Enns (1807-81) of Fischau, fourth Bishop of the KG (Section 7.05); 3) Anna S. Plett (1813-87) married Johann W. Isaak, a prominent Tiede family, cousin to the well-known historian Franz Isaak; 4) son Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) married Sarah Loewen, daughter of prominent KG deacon Isaak Loewen of Lindenau (Section 10.09); and 5) youngest, Karolina S. Plett (1823-87), married Klaas Friesen, KG Prediger and youngest son of the von Riesen dynasty (Section 10.06).

All but one of the daughters married older well-established widowers and all the bridegrooms had good family roots back to the Prussian Werders. This explained to some extent why there were only 38 married grandchildren in the Plett matriarchy compared to 63 in the von Riesen. While the children of Margaretha Wiebe von Riesen illustrated marriage patterns among the KG people prior to 1812, marriages among the Siemens and, particularly, the Plett family, provided an example of marriages among the first and second generations of KG-ers. The desirability of marriage to another KG-er had now been added to the strategies of previous generations of matriarchs. Since the von Riesen dynasty was one generation older than the Siemens or Plett clans, its higher rate of family inter-marriage, may reflect the fact that the KG was relatively small during the 1830s and 40s, resulting in a limited selection for marriage partners.

Of the 38 married grandchildren there was only one marriage between Plett cousins, namely, Johann P. Goossen, brother to minister Gerhard (1836-72), married Susanna P. Toews (1844-1912), sister to Aeltester Peter P. Toews. This

family emigrated to Gnadenu, Kansas, where they were associated with the KMB. By the second and third generation KG generation, marriage patterns had changed and young women now married young eligible bachelors instead of older wealthier widowers. Matriarchs were evidently comfortable with the notion that inter-KG marriage was sufficient to guarantee preservation of family wealth and the maintenance of cultural boundaries.

By the fourth generation the Plett matriarchy was coming into its own with 187 married great-grandchildren, compared to 204 for the von Riesens. Of the 187, 14 married Plett second cousins or other degree of consanguinity, half of these in one family alone, namely, that of my great-grandparents, Abraham L. Pletts, a wealthy large-scale farmer in Blumenhof. In other words, the rate of inter-family marriage among the Pletts was less than half that of the von Riesens, where 37 among 176 in the 4th generation had intermarried. There were also four great-grandchildren who married cousins or relatives from a different family line.

Of the 37 married grandchildren of Esther Smit Plett, only two remained in Russia, namely: Peter P. Goossen (1838-1922) of Lindenau, and Sarah L. Plett (1846-81), Mrs Jakob J. Thielmann, both of whom eventually joined the Brüdergemeinde. Sarah was ill when her parents emigrated in 1875, and always intended to follow, but died before this happened. Of the remaining 35, 24 settled in the E. Reserve. Of the other 11, two settled in Scratching River, five in Jansen, Nebraska, and four in Kansas--three in Gnadenu. The settlement pattern was normal given that most members of the family belonged to the Loewen, Toews and Plett dominated Blumenhof Gemeinde which had made a corporate decision to settle in Manitoba.

Like the von Riesens, the Plett clan was so large that a contiguous settlement in one area was not feasible. The 24 grandchildren in the E. Reserve located as follows: 1) the Toews family was split with prominent brothers Bishop Peter and delegate Cornelius settling in Grünfeld, and the two daughters with their widowed mother going to Kansas, against the express wishes of the sons; 2) the Goossen/Enns family was split with one in Gnadenu, Kansas, four in Scratching River, and three in the E. Reserve; 3) the Isaak children together with their widowed mother settled in Grünfeld and Schönau, two miles south; 4) the Pletts settled in Blumenhof, a village consisting primarily of the families of Cornelius S. Plett and Johann W. Warkentin, whose wives were Loewen sisters and in themselves an excellent example of matrilocality; and 5) the Friesens settled in Blumenort, but became separated when the widow Karolina moved to Jansen, Nebraska, to marry the widower Isaak Harms (1811-91), taking her youngest five unmarried children with her.

Matrilineage was important in the Plett family. Family historians and grandsons, Johann P. Friesen and Peter P. Isaak, recounted the maternal as well as the paternal lineage in their family genealogies. In fact, Friesen went to great length to document the paternal and maternal sides of his wife's families--the Eidses and Enns', so that both were critical in compiling the genealogies of these extended clans (see *Profile*, pages 247-59). By the next generation the gathering

and dissemination of family records had been largely assumed by women.

The Holdeman schism of 1882 hit the Plett family hard and spilt it down the middle. This was of particular significance as the Loewens, Toewses and Pletts had stuck together during two previous divisions in Russia--1866 and 1869--forming an alliance powerful enough to challenge the von Riesens.

Of some 160 KG families in Manitoba in 1882, one-half joined Johann Holdeman, an American Revivalist preacher. Of 25 Plett grandchildren who settled in the E. Reserve, 13 joined the Holdeman movement, slightly over half. Of the 11 Cornelius S. Plett children, two joined Holdeman, notwithstanding that their father was stridently opposed, to the extent that he disinherited his favourite son, Johann, "forbidding him the door". This was a godsend for Holdeman as Johann L. Plett was the wealthiest farmer in the area north of Steinbach during the 1890s.

An interesting anecdote is related about grandson Johann L. Plett who married his cousin Margaretha L. Warkentin, daughter of Johann Warkentin, wealthy Vollwirt from Blumstein. She was a sister to the wife of Peter P. Toews, the Bishop who led half the KG into the Holdeman camp. Margaretha was a very determined woman and insisted that her husband also join Holdeman. After Johann reluctantly did so, he was apparently told by Holdeman that he had sinned by marrying his cousin and for this reason he would not have any descendants. This also came to pass as none of his three daughters left any issue surviving.

The Goossens and Enns', the Isaaks and Toews brothers in Grünfeld joined Holdeman. However, the family of daughter Karolina remained KG, possibly again reflecting the pull of the von Riesen matriarchy.

The situation of oldest daughter Maria S. Plett, Mrs. Johann Toews, illustrated matrilineal connections in the Plett matriarchy. While en route from Russia to Manitoba in 1875, she and her two daughters abruptly decided to change itinerary and go to Kansas instead. The roots of the decision, as in other similar cases where KG people left the community, lay in a boundary dispute between son-in-law Johann P. Goossen and the village authority in Blumenhof, Borosenko, in respect of which he blamed his brother-in-law Peter P. Toews, the Bishop, for not coming to his aid.

Maria Plett Toews and her daughters settled in Gnadenu, Kansas, where she fellowshipped with the KMB and was persuaded to have herself rebaptised. However, her sons in Canada, and particularly Peter, the Bishop, were vehemently opposed to this, and "condemned this action." But in 1882 when Peter P. Toews resigned and led half his parishioners to join Holdeman, he insisted that his mother follow suit and be baptised for the third time. When she returned to the KMB Church, she was banned by her son's church.

However, Peter still owed his mother a sum of money and was either unable to or else felt he should not have to repay. After various family members had interceded as intermediaries to no avail, Maria finally let it be known, that if payment was not forthcoming, she would report the matter to brother Cornelius S. Plett in Blumenhof, Manitoba, as if this was the worst threat she could imagine (probably with good reason) (biography of Peter P. Toews, see *Leaders*, 819-909).

Maria Toews Doerksen Hildebrandt (1854-1918) was the youngest daughter of Maria Plett Toews (1811-95). She was the grandmother of Gordon Friesen, author of *The Flame Throwers* (Caxton Press, 1936), the first work in the "P.O.'d" Mennonite genre of literature. Another grandson Martin Duerksen, a WWII war correspondent, wrote an autobiography, *Dear God, I'm only a boy*, (Memphis, 1986). Kevin Ens-Rempel, Archivist at M. B. Archives, Fresno, California, is a great-grandson of Maria Jr.

Of the three families under consideration, the Plett matriarchy was the strongest on the E. Reserve and its influence visible the longest. Until recently almost every large farmer in the Blumenhof district north of Steinbach, proudly displayed the middle initial "P" on the side of their farm vehicles, standing for their middle name "Plett". This indicated that their mother had been a Plett and spoke for the preponderance of females among the youngest sons Abraham, David and Jakob L. Plett whose descendants dominated the Blumenhof area from 1900 until the present day. In 1996 the Rural Municipality of Hanover named a 10-mile stretch of road, passing the gravesite and final resting place of Cornelius S. Plett on SW25-7-6E, "C. S. Plett Road" in honour of the family: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 53-56, for a brief biography. The Toews and Isaak clans continue to have a significant presence in Kleefeld, Manitoba, formerly Grünfeld.

In the end the Plett matriarchy also went the way of all flesh. But in a few exceptional cases, careful implementation of ancient strategies such as emigration and nurturance of the Gemeinde, preserved its power. To this very day, one can travel through the jungles of Belize and come across prosperous plantations and dairies, where the largest and most modern 4-wheel drive tractors and radio-dispatched refrigerated tractor-trailer trucks delivering processed foods to market, share commonplace with the happy lilt of Low German in village school yards and bonnet-wearing, black-clad matriarchs singing Reformation tribal chants from the *Gesangbuch*, echoing the migration of 17th century religious values and culture from Tiegenhagen in the Vistula Delta, Prussia to a land where once only the haunting cry of ancient Mayan trumpets broke the silence of the early morning mist rolling in over the azure waters of the Caribbean Sea.



Maria Plett Reimer (1850-1934) was the matriarch of Blumenort. She grew up in Kleefeld, Molotschna, where she excelled in school winning a first prize out of 100 students. Two of her sons became Aeltesten of the KG--Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949) and David P. Reimer (1894-1963), Blumenort, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Preservings, No. 10, Part One, page 11.

Section 9.07: Women's Work.

In the early days in Russia most farmers depended on their own labour and that of their family for the seasonal field work such as harvesting. If sons and daughters were still too small the mother with her babies in tow would take her place in the grain field and work all day, perhaps mowing, but more often following behind her husband tying the grain which he cut with a scythe.

Flax was grown for the linen fibres. "The further preparation of the linen was very tedious, keeping the younger as well as older daughters, under the supervision of the mother, busy spinning the fibres almost the entire winter." These fibres were then used to make the yarn which was woven into linen by weavers. After a long bleaching, the cloth was used not only to make shirts "but also the fine Sunday dresses of the wives and daughters, for which purpose it was dyed brown." In later years cloth was purchased ready made and the women spent their time in tailoring, knitting, crocheting, and sewing: P.M. Friesen, pages 176-182.

The abolition of serfdom in 1861 resulted in large numbers of serfs becoming available to work for the land owners in the region. This development coincided with an increasing need for labour on the farms of Vollwirthen, as they expanded their wheat production in response to a growing demand in the world market place. As a result much of the menial labour of harvesting and cutting of grain, house cleaning, etc. was taken over by servants and maids.

Historian Royden Loewen has written that "women's absence in the fields did not separate them from the farm." Women played a crucial role in assuring the self-sufficiency of the household: "It was their duty to milk the cows, gather and set the eggs, and work the fruit and vegetable gardens." In short, they were responsible for certain aspects of farm production such as dairy, chickens, eggs, vegetables, etc. In this way women controlled the household income which brought with it a degree of economic power while the men controlled field production and its marketing. It was Helena Bartel Loewen (grandmother of "C.T." of Steinbach) who recorded the weekly butter sales in her neat handwriting, whilst her husband Cornelius documented the labourers and maids he hired, the goods and merchandise he purchased, and the loans he arranged and payments made.

Other than the itinerant tradesmen and pedlars referred to, very few household items were available for purchase at this time. Most foods and household goods other than perhaps coffee and salt had to be processed and prepared on the farm and thus a wife who was hard working and a good manager was crucial to the economic success and survival of a young couple. Since many families routinely had 10 and 12 children it was a massive obligation for a husband and wife whose dream was eventually to establish each one of them on farms of their own.

Perhaps the ultimate epitaph for a middle class woman of the 1850s was to see the day when the family unit was able to acquire a full *Wirtschaft* of their own. Folk historian Peter P. Isaak (1846-1923), later of Grünfeld, described the financial achievements of his parents Johann Isaak and Anna Plett of Schönau as follows: "Because he was not afraid of work and saving, with mother also con-

tributing her share of the work without stint, they soon came to a better financial condition” (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 189).



Maria Toews Duerksen (1854-1918), grew up in Fischau, Molotschna. In 1875, she with her mother, Maria Plett Toews (1811-95), and older sister, Susanna Toews Goossen, separated from her brother, Aeltester Peter P. Toews, in Liverpool and went to Gnadenu, Kansas, instead of Manitoba, an example of matrilocality. Maria was a granddaughter of Esther Smit Plett. L. to r.: Peter T. Duerksen, George T. Duerksen, Maria Duerksen Friesen, David T. Duerksen, Maria Toews Duerksen, Jakob T. Duerksen, and Johann L. Duerksen. Maria's father-in-law Kornelius Duerksen (1794-1881) lived in Alexandertbal and is listed in the KG ministerial election of 1846. Her husband had served as school teacher in Rosenort. Maria was the grandfather of Gordon Friesen, author of Flamethrowers, a controversial novel published in 1936. Another grandson Menno Duerksen became a World War Two, news correspondent. Photo courtesy of great-grandson Kevin Enns Rempel, Fresno, California.

Section 9.08: Medical Services and Womens Health.

With one marked exception the life of women among the Russian Mennonites was restricted to the private sphere. The public sphere of church and village governance was patriarchal and controlled by men just like all similar institutions elsewhere in Western Europe. But in the area of medical services Mennonite women entered into the public realm and traditionally played a predominant role. With the exception of a few isolated medical doctors referred to from time to time in contemporary journals, women dominated the field of medical services, acting as *Hebammen* or midwives, undertakers, and even as doctors.

Undoubtedly the most renowned medical practitioner among the Mennonites both in Russia and North America was the famous Dr. Bergensche, nee Justina Loewen (1828-1905). Dr. Bergensche was well-known to the KG people. In 1867, Klaas R. Reimer, later pioneer merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba, took his mentally dysfunctional wife to Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, "to Frau Bergen, she being the best doctor." When Sara Enns Plett (1849-72), daughter of Aeltester Heinrich Enns, Fischau, became sick with pneumonia in 1872, husband Cornelius L. Plett, took her all the way from Blumenhof, Borosenko, to her former home in the Molotschna Colony to seek the medical services of the Dr. Bergensche.

In 1875 Justina married for the second time to Gerhard Neufeld (1827-1916) a well-established widower from Fürstenau, who was also a minister. He was a nephew of Heinrich Neufeld (1791-1865), husband of Regina von Riesen, who was a sister of KG Bishop Abraham Friesen of Ohrloff and KG Prediger Klaas Friesen of Rosenort.

In 1878 the family emigrated to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, mainly at the wishes of Justina. Here Gerhard became the first Bishop of the Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake. As soon as they were settled Justina not only became the medical practitioner for the Mountain Lake area, but also made many trips of mercy to Nebraska, Kansas and Manitoba. On at least one such trip to Manitoba she, among other things, conducted courses in midwifery for three KG women: Aganetha Barkman, Mrs. Johann R. Reimer (1863-1938), Steinbach; Margaretha Loewen, Mrs. Jakob B. Toews (1856-1948), Hochstadt; and Anna B. Toews, Mrs. Peter B. Toews (1868-1933), Blumenort. Chortitzer Bishop David Stoesz has recorded that Dr. Neufeld made at least two trips to the E. Reserve: January 26, 1884, and again May 22, 1892.

The story of Justina Loewen Baergen Neufeld is relevant to the history of the KG as it explains to some extent the almost complete domination of the medical field by women in the early days.

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

The journals of Abraham F. Reimer provided considerable information regarding the health practices and medical services available to KG women during their last years in Russia. It was in Borosenko that his wife Elisabeth carried on a

busy practice as midwife, nurse and undertaker. The following entries are typical of her work as a midwife. Friday, Jan. 2, 1870: "Toward noon they got my wife from Toews to Kl. Reimers. At 4:30 a son, Johann, was born. My wife had the fever." Baby Johann later became the father of John C. Reimer, founder of the Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach. August 12, 1870, "My wife was taken from the senior Penners, Rosenfeld, to our [Abr.] Penners at 6 a.m. At 6:30 she gave birth to a daughter. It took 2 to 3 hours." This baby girl, named Elisabeth after her grandmother, was the great-grandmother of Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair at the University of Winnipeg.

Almost daily, Elisabeth was picked up and taken to the home of one of her daughters or daughters-in-law, and also others, to assist with a delivery, visit or render other assistance. Almost daily she suffered from a fever, a sore finger or leg (diabetes?), with such regularity that her husband almost anticipated her condition: June 19, 1870, "My wife has a heavy attack of fever. She shivered and her speech was incoherent, more so than usually." On occasions, a neighbouring woman in the village, Elisabeth Barkman, Mrs. Peter B. Friesen, acted as a nurse. She tended to Elisabeth in her home on the 17th and 18th. On the 21st, A.F. Reimer again recorded, "My wife had severe fever. She had to be at Mrs. Friesens' from 3 to 6 a.m."

The Abraham F. Reimer journals revealed that other medical practitioners were consulted from time to time, including a Jewish doctor. On March 6, 1870, A. F. Reimer recorded that "The Jewish doctor was here..." And again on March 7, "The Jewish doctor was here again and gave my wife some medicine. She had a fever during the night." Other doctors were available in the area as well. On Oct. 7, 1870, Johann R. Reimer, later the second mayor of Steinbach, Manitoba, "came for Fasma in Blumenfeld to Dr. Loewens." Nov 5, 1870, "My wife's finger was aching very much, so that I had to get up at 2 a.m, and treat it. The Jewish doctor came. At 10 Peter [name not legible], a German doctor, came. He gave at once two different kinds of drops. That eased the pain." Typically the next day Elisabeth joined her husband to catch a ride with son Klaas to go to Rosenfeld to visit "our Friesens" where daughter Katharina lay very ill, but where Elisabeth's "condition improved." There were others as well: On Nov 9, 1871, "A German doctor from Germany was here overnight."

Others such as Abraham's brother Klaas, well-to-do Vollwirt from Marienthal, Borosenko, formerly Tiede, sought medical assistance in Germany, sending his sons Jakob and Heinrich to Breslau, Prussia, for six months in 1874.

Being used to assisting in bringing life into the world, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer was also an active participant in the rituals surrounding its conclusion as an undertaker. Abr. F. Reimer included a record of her service, July 21, 1870: "My wife had to help dress Peter Harms. He was buried at noon." Another example, Dec. 5, 1871: "We attended the funeral at Heinrich Brandt's. In the forenoon my wife had to dress the deceased. My wife had a good deal of pain."

Section 9.09: The Ordnung.

Mennonite writers such as Pat Friesen have railed about the evils of the Ordnung. These were the rules, whether written or custom, regulating the conduct of the traditional Mennonite Gemeinden or religious conventicles and their members. Any human association of two or more people will quickly develop patterns in the day to day functioning of their lives. In time these patterns become social convention, like laws, the totality of which become a protocol. Within the context of Mennonites these conventions have been referred to as the “Ordnung”.

One of the primary benefits of the Ordnung was to protect and safeguard the weak and underprivileged of the community or Gemeinde. Women and children were benefactors of a social safety net provided by the Ordnung at a time when such benefits were not provided by the State. The Ordnung was also a liberating force freeing women from some of the mind-numbing drudgery of 19th century life. The social associations provided via the Gemeinden made their lives easier by a variety of *ad hoc* cooperative activities including coffee klatches, bean picking and linen spinning bees, and a host of well-organized mutual self-help functions such as pig slaughtering, barn-raisings (“bahrungen”), quilting bees, etc.

The ancient Gemeinden practised the Biblical teaching of “community of sharing”, as opposed to “community of property” practised by the Hutterian Brethren. This meant that members could be called upon to share their wealth within the group according to their means in case of need. Under the Ordnung women were supported in the event of poverty, illness or widowhood. In fact, the KG required that the poor not only be sustained in their circumstances but “they were to be provided with the means whereby they could earn their livelihood,” assuming they were healthy and otherwise able to work.

The Ordnung protected the women of the Gemeinde as well as those who were not members from physical and marital abuse. The KG was unique in the 19th century for its sophisticated sense of social justice. Its policies were instructive. Physical and marital abuse was strictly prohibited and quickly punished. On October 5, 1858, the KG brotherhood dealt with “Joh. Friesen from Marienthal as he had been physically hitting his wife. He was dismissed from the Gemeinde.” The strict discipline must have worked as this was the only incident of the like recorded during the 12 years covered by the ministerial journal of Johann Dueck (Section 10.04).

Respect for women extended beyond spouses. The KG protocol dealt harshly with members who physically punished their employees, a rule resulting in discipline on more than one occasion. When Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), Lindenau, “treated an adult servant girl too strictly and had also struck her” in 1849, his father-in-law Isaak Loewen of Lindenau was removed from his office as deacon because he had not informed the Lehrdienst of the event. Evidently Ohm Isaak had felt it was not that important or was too embarrassed. On August 1, 1854, Jakob Fast from Ohrloff was dismissed from the Gemeinde for “unacceptable striking of his step-children and servant girls.”

Certainly situations would arise where the well-being of the community

conflicted with the aspirations of individual members. Natural justice, the law of the jungle and that of civilized countries, recognize the innate moral right of any social organism or society to protect itself by requiring certain conduct from its members. In exchange for the benefits of membership, a member surrendered various individual rights. All communities and associations whether militant feminists, gay rights activists, hockey teams, unions, revolutionaries, etc. require that members subscribe and adhere to their beliefs and values.

The Mennonite Gemeinden were no exception. Other communities such as English Puritans, Scottish clans, and Reformation leaders such as John Calvin, simply exterminated dysfunctional and dissenting members or sent them to penal colonies in Australia or placed them in stocks for dunking and public ridicule. The Gemeinden disciplined their miscreants by excommunication which generally lasted a week or so, or until the individual again acknowledged the moral sovereignty of the community. Disenchanted members were, so to speak, always free to “take their business elsewhere.”

The example of the shunning which sometimes although rarely resulted was mythicized into infamy in the popular 1983 drama by Patrick Friesen. The play could just as easily have been written about any other culture whether Scottish, Jewish, Inuit, or Native, although in the latter cases legal action would no doubt have resulted because of the racist stereotyping involved. Anyone condemning the entire Catholic Church because of sexual abuse at boarding schools or condemning the entire Evangelical movement because of the shenanigans of Jim Bakker, Oral Roberts and Jimmy Swaggart would be considered “off the wall”.

But this is exactly the sort of negative witch hunting which Canadian audiences love to read about minority and ethnic groups, and which quickly vaulted poet Friesen into national prominence. Unfortunately it threw a cloud of ridicule and ignorance over the traditional Gemeinden, subverting serious academic study, and obscuring the fact that 99.99 per cent of the time they served their purposes very well, not only safeguarding the rights of the underprivileged and vulnerable, and, particularly, that of women, but also serving as a model of a caring community, centuries ahead of its time. Evidently writers of the “P.O.’d Mennonite” genre did not wish to clutter up their brilliant social critique with facts nor waste unnecessary time doing boring background research for their “masterpieces.”

By viewing all matters pertaining to the Gemeinde and traditional Mennonite culture as a matter of individual freedoms versus an oppressive community and by attributing only evil and sinister motives to its leaders, Friesen and others in the so-called Mennonite literary tradition are able to dismiss and disparage the millions of instances where deacons, ministers and Bishops and their wives endlessly sacrificed their time, money and energy to visit widows, orphans and other vulnerable individuals, “looking to the necessities of the saints” without remuneration of any kind (and that includes no Canada Council grants), perhaps in the middle of a storm, or in the middle of a harvest when they were critically busy, to help such a person, physically and/or with counsel and encouragement.



Aganetha B. Friesen (1850-1925) and her second husband Peter P. Isaac (1842-1918). Isaac was the son of Diedrich Isaac (1819-79), originally from Fischbau. His mother was Anna Penner (b. 1819), Obrloff, sister to Peter Penner (1816-84), Blumenort, Manitoba. Aganetha was the daughter of Abraham W. Friesen (1812-89), Rückenau, Molotschna. Aganetha was married for the first time to Johann Heidebrecht (1849-97), Blumstein. L.-r., front row: Agnes Heidebrecht Isaac, Johann and Sarah Heidebrecht, Peter P. Isaac; Second row: Lizzie Heidebrecht, Anne Isaac, Margaret Heidebrecht, Katie Isaac, and Agnes Heidebrecht (Mrs. Johann J. Friesen). Photo courtesy of Elda Plank, "Twas Home on the Range, page 7.

Discipline within conservative Mennonite denominations was a measured response to acknowledged and confessed moral lapses, spousal abuse and dereliction of socio-economic obligations to family and neighbours. Such measures were only implemented after due process, in a democratic hearing before the laity, and in the vast majority of cases were successful in bringing a penitent sinner back to God and full fellowship with the community. Such disciplinary measures had nothing in common with the psychological terror used by Separatist-Pietists and American Revivalists, and later Fundamentalists, to implement thought control, reminiscent of the Salem witch trials, which poet Patrick Friesen incorrectly attributes to conservative Mennonite religious culture.

Section 9.10: Property Rights.

The protocol of a community reflected its values and its concept of social justice and equity. This was true in the area of estates devolution or inheritance laws. Many societies in the 19th century such as Victorian England continued to practice primogeniture whereby the firstborn, and specifically the eldest son, inherited the entire estate of the parents thus assuring the continuation of the male line and the integrity of the family wealth. A slightly different system was followed in Russia where the youngest son inherited. To make matters worse the traditional *Wirtschaften* or farm units were not divisible, resulting in one male family member inheriting all or a substantial portion of the family property.

In a February 28, 1998, lecture to the B.C. Mennonite Historical Society, Abbotsford. Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, said Mennonites have an uncommon inheritance tradition developed in Flanders and Friesland. In this system, “both sexes, not only boys, inherited equally,” and farms were partitioned at the death of the first spouse between survivors. “It was uniquely Mennonite in the sense that all Mennonites practised it, Dutch and Swiss, and unique in that only a minority of Europeans, small pockets here and there, did,” said Loewen.

Our Mennonite forebears saw religious and economic issues as inseparable, said Loewen. When Dutch Mennonites moved to Danzig, one of the concessions they received was that “even rented land could be passed on to children and divided into small parcels.” The Russian government offered Mennonites military exemption and autonomous colonies but there was disagreement on inheritance practices. In 1810, the Chortitz colony stated that “the operating principles of Mennonite inheritance are biblically based.” The surviving spouse “retains one half of the estate and the other half goes to the inheritors (children) in equal amounts.”

By 1812 the Mennonite rules of devolution were compiled in written form and known as the “*Waisenordnung*” (literally “orphans regulations”). The *Ordnung* was unique as it was based on a strict protocol that women participated fully in the inheritance process. The bureaucrats of Imperial Russia found it strange that their Mennonite subjects required equal inheritance for females--so odd, in fact, that some time during the 1820s they requested an explanation and justification for this policy. The request may have been channelled via Johann Cornies, the famous social reformer, who, in any event, passed it on to his contemporary and neighbour in the village of Ohrloff, Molotschna, Abraham Friesen (1789-1849), the second *Aeltester* of the KG.

Ohm Abraham’s response sheds some light on the origin and justification for the equal inheritance provisions of the *Waisenordnung*. He explained the Biblical concepts involved by referring to the allegory of Christ and his bride the Church [*Gemeinde*] and that “If the wife according to 1 Peter 3:7 is fully an heir of grace and the promises of life, then the promises just as equally apply to the provision of these [material inheritance] as well as the eternal and future inheritance....In view of the oneness of man and wife, this remuneration can be no less than full equality with respect to the possessions which are entrusted to

our care by the Lord” (Section 9.02).

Although the traditional Mennonite protocol of equal inheritance for females may have seemed unusual for the time it was quite significant. The old saying goes, “thems who pays the piper calls the tune” and so it was also with economic power. Ownership of property and control of financial resources resulted in economic power for women and consequently influence within family, village and church, the paradigms of traditional agrarian life.

The protocol of equal inheritance for women was administered by an arm of the church known as the Waisenamt, “one of the oldest, formalized mechanisms of Mennonite mutual aid.” When a husband died the widow received half of the estate just like when the situation was reversed and for this reason a widow was frequently able to continue operating the family Wirtschaft. The age old practice of appointing a “Gutmann” or counsel for a widow (as well as a children’s advocate for the orphans, the “feahmunt”), signalled that she stood under the protection of the Gemeinde and was not to be taken advantage of or trifled with.

The settling of an estate known as a “Theilung” was an elaborate process with each party or set of parties represented as well as the village mayor and district Orphans’ administrator. After all concerned were in agreement and the issues were resolved, the parties signed a “Theilungs-Vertrag” or settlement agreement. Several examples of “Theilungen” agreements from Russia are extant including two for Peter Penner (1816-84), Margenau. These documents illustrated the involvement of maternal kinship circles in the “Theilung” process as well as the progress Penner was making in his financial affairs (published in *The Golden Years*, pages 117-119). Penner’s descendants would later become one of the prominent entrepreneurial dynasties in the Province of Manitoba.

Historian Hilda Hildebrandt has written as follows about the Bergthaler Waisenamt: “The kind of attention given to the distribution of property reflects the importance the community placed on a consistent community standard for redistributing wealth as well as a strong commitment to ensure that the needs of the more vulnerable members of the community were met and their rights protected. The basic rights of every individual were clearly defined and a mechanism set in place to promptly administer them” (page 158).

Hildebrandt referred to the provisions in place to protect the less fortunate within the Mennonite community: “The Waisenamt...encompassed a wide range of services. They included a highly advanced child and family social service agency, the provision of a financial guardian to protect the property and rights of minors who had lost one or more parents, a protector of widows (at all stages of the life cycle) and their property, a personal savings and loans financial institution, and a public service lending agency” (page 190).

Another important component of the Waisenverordnung was, for example, a detailed provision for “special needs” children. This was illustrated by the “Theilung” for Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57), which designated an additional 408 ruble for son Klaas (1845-1901), later of Rosenort, Manitoba, who was “somewhat crippled”. Klaas R. Brandt received this amount over and above the equal

shares of the residue which came to 2857 ruble per child. These programs were of great significance given the complete absence of any social services in either Russia or Canada at the time of the Mennonite emigration. The KG only established its own Waisenamt in the 1870s after the establishment of the Borosenko settlement.

The Waisenamt was but one means by which the Mennonite Gemeinden fulfilled their social policy objectives. The "Armen Kasse" or deaconry was another arm by which underprivileged in the community were assisted. The KG also had a loans fund from which members could borrow without interest to purchase property or the deal with other needs. Later in Manitoba the KG established the "Hilfs-Verein" out of which evolved the Steinbach Credit Union Ltd., currently the largest single branch Credit Union in Canada.

Property rights were an important factor in defining the life-world of KG women in Imperial Russia and in the relative strength of extended matriarchies. Gender equality as it related to property rights was brought to Manitoba by the conservative Mennonite Gemeinden in 1874 where women of other cultures had no property rights at all until the enactment of Dower legislation in 1918 almost forty years later. The Manitoba Dower Act provided that women were entitled to a third of the estate plus a life estate in the Homestead which constituted up to 320 acres of land, so that even into the 1920s Manitoba women of other cultures were entitled to significantly less than their Mennonite counterparts.

By the 1930s, however, the KG Waisenordnung was amended to bring it into line with Provincial law which guaranteed only a one-third portion of the estate to women. In other words, as conservative Mennonites slowly became acculturated there was a weakening in the mechanisms which had previously protected women and their traditional rights. Dr. Royden Loewen has written: "A new view of women as the wards of men had seemingly arisen."



Aganetha B. Friesen (1850-1925), Mrs. Jobann P. Heidebrecht, and her daughter Katie Heidebrecht, Mrs. Jobann J. Friesen. Photo courtesy of Elda Plank, "Twas Home on the Range, page 7.

Section 9.11: Elisabeth Rempel Reimer 1814-93, Steinbach, Borosenko.

One woman, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer (1814-93) invariably stands out in any study of the KG in Imperial Russia. She was significant not only because more is known about her than practically any other woman of her generation, but more so, because her life's experiences challenged almost every stereotype held of women in conservative Mennonite culture. Elisabeth was also the undisputed matriarch of the village of Steinbach in Borosenko and as such her life and example speaks for many women within the KG and other related denominations.

Elisabeth Rempel was born in 1814, daughter of Peter Rempel (1792-1837) and Catarina Berchen (1780-1831), Reinland, Prussia. The family immigrated to Russia in 1819 acquiring a *Wirtschaft* in Lichtfelde, Molotschna.

Like many later Prussian emigrants to Russia, the Rempel clan had been influenced by Separatist Pietism in Prussia. As a 17 year-old woman Elisabeth had an aunt and two uncles who fell victim to these fanatical beliefs which focused on endtimes prophecies, rejecting of material comforts, etc. Her uncle Johann eventually died from an illness brought on by these practices. The consternation of Elisabeth's parents, as they grieved over the apostasy of their siblings and the heartache and family division it brought, must have had dramatic impact upon her. No doubt Elisabeth vowed never to permit such occurrences within her own family.

In June of 1834 Elisabeth was baptised upon the solemn confession of her faith and joined the KG. A year later she married Abraham, son of Klaas Reimer, Petershagen, KG founder in 1812. It must have seemed like a good choice. Intelligent, witty and the scion of a wealthy family, what woman would not have wanted Abraham. But in some respects Elisabeth's choice turned out to be less than perfect. It soon became evident that Abraham lacked the traits of industry, diligence and hard work which had made his father, the beloved Ohm Klaas, a successful *Vollwirt*, and for which most of his religious compatriots were known.

In 1836 the young couple moved to Rosenort, Molotschna where they established their own home. Records show that the Reimer family relied on the charity of the church to make ends meet. In 1856 they received 561 ruble to build a new house, possibly in Kleefeld, a newly established village. Abraham soon became known by the derisive nickname of "Fula" (Lazy) Reimer. One speculates as to the shame Elisabeth must have felt when they had to rely on charity, given the financial success of her father and uncles Abraham and Bernhard, all *Vollwirts*.

In 1864 Abraham and Elisabeth joined sons Abraham and Klaas to move to a new settlement, Markuslandt. In 1869 they moved to Steinbach, Borosenko, where they had their own *Wirtschaft*. Elisabeth Rempel Reimer was undoubtedly the matriarch of the "old" Steinbach in Imperial Russia; five of her children and their families also lived in the village.

Fortunately for the family, Elisabeth was a resolute woman of great determination and energy. It was not her nature to sit back and brood over the state of affairs dealt by fate. She responded by assuming responsibility for the financial affairs of her family. She was a skilled seamstress and took in work. She set an example of community service as a midwife, nurse and undertaker, who was

called upon at all hours of the day to perform her services. Perhaps this is where her great-great-grandson Ray Loewen of the Loewen Funeral Group gets it from (see *Macleans*, Sept. 30, 1996, page 43).

While all this was going on, her husband Abraham was not only watching the stars but also his wife whom he obviously adored, and whose activities he recorded daily and in some detail. His journals show Elisabeth to have been a woman of incredible energy busy from dawn to dusk, travelling from village to village--now with a son, now with a son-in-law, visiting, helping with birthing and dying, and all the events of the season and life cycle, but above all, nurturing her immediate family whom she gathered about herself in Steinbach, Borosenko, like a clucking brood hen; regularly she was struck down and bedridden by a mysterious illness, but always bounced back, thriving on countless relationships and friendships, fuelling her visions and dreams which germinated and buzzed about in her brain, and guided her family through major life decisions such as the forthcoming emigration.

That Elisabeth could also be vivacious is illustrated by an incident from 1870. After Lazy R. had commented frequently for several months about his wife's poor health and her fevers which restricted her to a sick bed, he recorded on July 3 "that she had gone swimming in the coulee [ritch] for two days now and that she was cheerful like she had not been for two weeks." Unfortunately the swimming may not have been good for her as two days later Abraham recorded that "she was very sick again." It is interesting to picture this 205-pound woman cavorting in the waters of the Bazavluk River in scanty garments, as her maid (in Czarist Russia even poor people had servants) stood watch.

It was Elisabeth who made the major family decisions. In 1874 the entire Reimer clan decided to leave their prosperous farms in Imperial Russia and emigrate to North America. The decision was motivated at least to some extent by a vision which Elisabeth experienced in which God gave her a clear resolve that the move was the correct thing to do. Elisabeth and three of her children settled in the wealthier village of Blumenort, while four of her children, travelling with the last KG contingent to leave Russia in 1874, settled in Steinbach, three miles to the south.

In 1875 the grasshoppers had eaten the first decent crop raised by the Steinbach pioneers. When it was discovered in the spring of 1876 that the earth was filled with grasshopper eggs which would hatch and surely destroy the crop they were seeding as well "the Reimer clan gathered in council on a warm Sunday afternoon in the spacious premises of son Klaas in Steinbach. They were debating a move from Steinbach where only starvation stared them in the face, to Mountain Lake, Minnesota."

The majority assembled in council that day favoured the move. Klaas J. B. Reimer, the community's foremost historian, later described the events leading up to the most important decision ever made in the community:

"After some discussion the elderly ...[Elisabeth] rose slowly to her feet. She pleaded tearfully with her hard-headed sons and sons-in-law to wait another

year. She recalled how unwillingly she had left her cosy home and how, before she and her big family had left for the new unknown land, the Lord God in heaven who had guided her forefathers in their search for homes, had given her a clear vision to trust Him completely. She felt that the plague which had befallen them was only temporary, to test their faith": Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical sketches of Steinbach," page 2.

The result of Elisabeth's tearful plea was that her children relented. Had her sons Klaas and Johann, and sons-in-law Abraham S. Friesen and Peter P. Toews, left as planned, the life of the community would have been stunted and the engine of economic growth undoubtedly would have reverted back to the Schönfeld-Chortitz area, which had the natural attributes to become the region's trade and business centre.

It was in Manitoba that Elisabeth went into her coat and hat-making enterprise on a much more intensive basis. Records show that she was busy from dawn to dusk producing 20 fur coats [pelzen], 100-150 caps and all manner of foundation garments in a year.

Elisabeth was also a risk taker with a heart of compassion. Historian Royden Loewen has described an incident where she took in three drunken natives for night who were out during a storm. She made them lie down on the floor and then sat in watch over them all night. In the morning she fed them breakfast and sent them on their way, rested and sober: *Blumenort*, page 217.

In a letter of 1889 Abraham described his wife's prodigious sewing activities stating that she has already made "21 pelzen [fur coats], many mens' coats, all kinds of foundation garments and many caps [Schilmützen]--in one year she made 150 caps and most years around 100 or 70 to 80 each summer, and during the winter some 70 winter caps." On July 13, 1891, Abraham wrote again, stating, "I am very well but my wife is quite sick so that for three or four years she has not been able to stand very well. But she still sews every day, but she lies down on the settee [Ruh Bank] two or three times a day to rest...."

Elisabeth died in 1893. She had outlived her husband by a little over a year.

It was Elisabeth who--no doubt--frustrated with her husband's lack of diligence, drummed into her children all of these virtues and more, of life's hard lessons for survival. It was a credit to Elisabeth that their children included some of the most successful pioneers and entrepreneurs in southeastern Manitoba. An excellent biography of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer was written by great-great-grandson Royden Loewen in 1995.

While it may be true, as great-grandson Professor Al Reimer maintained, that fiction is more truthful than history, truth is also stranger than fiction, and in this situation, fact has superseded the expectations of fiction. Although Armin Wiebe in his novel, *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, assumed that the woman (Oata) would be the "sensitive artistic soul", in reality Elisabeth thrived on all the stimuli of her harsh pioneer environment, and it was Abraham who was enslaved by the oppressive demands of 19th century agrarian life (see Wilmer Penner, "Armin Wiebe at the HSHS Annual Meeting," in *Preservings*, June 1996, Part One, page 35).

The creations of fiction are only valid and true to the extent that the conceptions of the author were somewhat cognizant of reality. In the case of Oata, the role reversal is not a major problem as Armin did not conceive her as a type for all pioneer women, nor would Elisabeth necessarily be typical. However, there are other cases, such as Pat Friesen's "Shunning" where a single negative incident is cleverly structured to represent an entire cultural experience, with the unfortunate result that a hostile environment is thereby created for all further rational discussion and/or writing on the topic, whether fiction or history.

If one incident or individual is needed to represent historical truth within the KG experience, Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, "pioneer dream maker", is a much more appropriate choice than the pathetic Peter Neufeld of the "Shunning", the truth of whose demise has in fact been recounted in my novel *Sarah's Prairie*. It was Elisabeth who stood out as a heroine and representative of KG women. Like Oata, Elisabeth also had dreams buzzing in her head, but her visions were of an impending doom in Russia and the need to emigrate. A few years later she foresaw a prosperous home for her descendants in Steinbach, and stood alone to make a tearful appeal against moving away, convincing her hard-headed sons and sons-in-law, soon to be counted among the wealthiest men in Manitoba, to sink their roots down deep into the yellow clay under Steinbach's sandy loam. Although older by now and having shed some 40 of her 205 pounds, Elisabeth continued to live life at an unbelievable pace for someone her age.

In another time and place it might well have been Elisabeth who founded Reimer Express Lines and not her great-great-grandson Frank, or it might have been Elisabeth who served as Canada's Health Minister and not her great-great-grandson Jake Epp, or it might have been Elisabeth and not great-great-grandson Ray Loewen who would have founded the Loewen Funeral Group, etc. One of Elisabeth's legacies was the fierce loyalty to family and church which she instilled in her progeny. The perseverance and determination which she demonstrated in gathering her brood and furthering their interests is still impacting on the lives of her 10,000 plus descendants to the present day.

For Further Reading:

Much of the material for Part Nine "Women" was taken from two earlier articles, "Pioneer Women of the East Reserve" and "Matriarchies of the East Reserve," in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part One, pages 1-32.

Part Ten: Meums and Ohms

Section 10.01: Meums and Ohms.

One of the features of conservative Mennonite culture was the respect shown to older people, probably reflecting values common in traditional 19th century middle class societies but certainly unique from the modern-day perspective. KG culture in particular projected great reverence for elders, probably characteristic of their particular historical heritage going back to medieval times when the Low German Hanseatic League dominated commerce and social life around the Baltic Sea, and even earlier, when the freemen of Saxony and Friesland successfully defended themselves against the Roman Legions.

The characteristic respect accorded to elders both male and female in traditional Mennonite culture also reflected the genuine biblicism of the conservative faith tradition, as well as a restitutional vision which saw the elders as a vital and essential link to the saints of posterity, and ultimately to the New Testament church. It has already been mentioned that the KG was the direct repository of these ancient customs and traditions, in particular as practised by the Tiegenghagen Gemeinde in the 18th century.

Separatist-Pietists, in contrast, often showed thinly veiled disdain for elders as demonstrated in numerous situations torturing grandparents on their death beds to recant the traditional faith which was ridiculed and brought into disrepute by lies and untruths. Old people, widows, orphans and mentally weak individuals were seen as vulnerable targets for harassment and terrorizing until they broke down emotionally, a mental condition known as “Seelenangst”. Since Separatist-Pietists were obsessed with millennial predictions, which changed every several years, each generation tended to disparage the previous for having propagated that which had proven to be false.

Older men in the conservative community who received a certain amount of respect were given the honorary title of “Ohm” and older matriarchs were known as “Meum”--as in “Marieche Meum”. Typically Ohms were well-to-do men from the Vollwirt class, with patrician roots back to 19th century Prussia. Meums were generally matriarchs who had developed matrilineal networks in the private domain, a form of power and influence much more sophisticated and subtle than the patrilineal networks which men developed in the public domain (see Chapter 9). Other Meums acquired their name and reputation by practising the ancient healing arts somewhat like the “shaman” women in native cultures.

But the Ohms and presumably the Meums as well were not saintly people, devoid of impurities or failings. The KG were as mortal and fallible as any other community, which makes the story of their quest for redemption all the more significant--like all human beings, they were sinners and saints, both at once. Too often, historians have censured the historical record presenting only the sanitized public faces of communities, in the process losing much of the human interest and realism. Like the fabled gods of ancient Greek mythology, the Ohms

and Meums were fallible and mortal beings with feet of clay and it was precisely their struggle, defeat and ultimate victory over their own mortality, their own realistic recognition that God alone would judge their humble devotion in grace, which made them saints as well as sinners, and worthy of further study and even emulation.

Respect for elders was manifestly evident among conservatives such as the KG. When Klaas Reimer described his spiritual journey he wrote about talking to the older people, and he "...was always glad when ...[he] was able to listen to the elderly people discuss the Holy Scriptures, especially when they talked of the wonderful works of God." On one occasion Reimer started to play cards, when "...an elderly man...approached and stood beside me saying that if I was unfamiliar with the playing of cards, I should not bother to learn, because it was an evil practice." This struck Reimer's conscience and he did not play cards again.

Maria Plett Reimer (1850-1934), mother of two Aeltesten of the East Reserve KG, visited with her aged grandfather Isaak Loewen (1787-1873) as a 21-year-old woman, discussing her spiritual life and concerns about baptism. They exchanged letters in which they elaborated on these questions and expressed their love for each other. It was evident that Maria had great respect for her 84-year-old grandfather. Frequently Ohms and Meums wrote memoirs in the autumn of their lives, which were cherished and revered by their descendants for generations to come.

A number of biographies of Meums and Ohms will be presented to illustrate the respect which elders enjoyed within the conservative faith tradition. The biographies will add depth and dimension to the KG story, adding an element of social history not possible by dealing only with the ecclesiastical and political dimensions. An attempt has been made to be representative in terms of the different age groups and backgrounds, those emigrating to various North American destinations, and of course, a variety of women.

The biographies will speak for the rank and file whose stories cannot be included in an introductory history such as this, although the historical sources for such an endeavour are readily available. A base of information is found in *Profile of the Kleine Gemeinde 1874* which listed all the emigrants to Manitoba and Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874-5, with cross references to various sources.

Biography is a valuable mode of writing history because people find it easy to relate to and understand, without necessarily having extensive contextual and background information. The inclusion of the twenty-two biographies in this section will provide a direct and immediate link to the KG story for thousands of readers.

Section 10.02. Johann Dueck 1801-66, Muntau.



1946. Bernhard R. Dueck (1879-1969), grandson of Johann Dueck (1801-66), married Anna K. Friesen (1882-1948), daughter of Heinrich L. Friesen (1851-1910) and Anna B. Klassen (1855-92). The couple lived in Rosenhof, Manitoba. In 1948 Bernhard and family moved to Jagueyes, Mexico, founding a large dynasty. Photo courtesy of Jakob and Maria L. Dueck, page 241.

Johann Dueck was the son of Klaas Dueck (1743-1826), Fürstenaerweide, Prussia. In 1824 Johann married Helena Loewen (1806-79), daughter of Jakob Loewen (b. 1774), Muensterberg. The young couple lived in Fischau for a number of years and then in Muntau for 40. Johann Dueck "...was said to have been a fairly large man with a big build. By comparison, grandmother was only a small person and was fairly plump." He was elected as a deacon in 1848 and as minister in 1849. He was keenly interested in the history of the church and was credited by Peter P. Toews, as one of five Ohms whose writings he used to compile his documentary collection in 1874.

Johann Dueck's extant "Ministerial Journals" for 1848 to 1865 provide a valuable record of marriages, deaths and other events. They chronicle the endeavour of the KG to implement an ancient yet genuine understanding of Christian truth within the community of the saints.

Heinrich Reimer wrote as follows regarding friend, Johann Dueck: "And in his sickness this Ohm [Johann Dueck] has very earnestly counselled our Aeltester [Johann] Friesen that he should but work so that he might once again reunite all the minds that are separated and to build up again the house which is fallen. Alas, my beloved brethren, I do believe that all of us could well apply this counsel to ourselves, since all of us must take some of the blame."

The Christian zeal and devotion of Johann and Helena Dueck was affirmed by their children who served the Church: Jakob and Johann were ministers, Abraham was Aeltester of the East Reserve KG, Bernhard served as deacon for the Brüdergemeinde, Peter was a teacher, oldest daughter Anna was married to KG deacon Johann Loewen, and daughter Helena married Jakob Penner, Friedensfeld, one of the richest Mennonite landowners in Russia in his time. After the death of Johann Dueck in 1866 his widow married for the second time to Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) of Muntau (see Section 10.18).

The journals of Johann Dueck (1801-66) have been published in *Leaders*, pages 449-98, and in *Storm and Triumph*, pages 59-62.

Section 10.03: Klaas Friesen, 1793-1870, Rosenort.

Son **Klaas Friesen** (1793-1870) was the son of Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810), formerly of Tiegenhagen, Prussia. After the death of his parents, Klaas lived with older sister Helena and husband, Klaas Reimer, Petershagen. He came to regard them as second parents. Klaas married the widow Johann Friesen, nee Margaretha Mathies, daughter of Jakob Mathies (1760-1804) who emigrated to Altonau, Molotschna in 1804. The couple farmed on a *Wirtschaft* in Altonau.

Klaas was elected as a deacon in 1824 and as a minister in 1838. He assisted older brothers Peter and Abraham in the publication of the Menno Simons books in 1833. He carried on a letter correspondence with brother Peter in Prussia. In a letter of 1834 he reported “that a son had been born to them December 8, 1834, whom they have given the name Abraham.” The birth had been a difficult one but his wife was okay, “Yes, may God be thanked, for His grace and support, which He continues to allow us to enjoy.” He related that daughter Elisabeth had died on January 17 at 2 o’clock in the morning “after a five-day-long very severe sickness and coughing, and which death is extremely painful for those of us who remain; and yet, we want to say that what God does is done for the best.”

In 1838 sister Regina and her husband Heinrich Neufeld were leaving for Prussia to visit brother Peter. Klaas quickly wrote a letter which he sent along with them writing that “brother-in-law Klaas Reimer has died, which death is extremely painful for us.” He “hopes and trusts that he [Reimer] has now found rest from the labours and work with the *Gemeinde* of which he had much.” “But,” Klaas wrote, “the office of Ohm Reimer has fallen upon our brother Abraham Friesen, and who must now take over this difficult task.”

In 1843 Klaas Friesen remarried to Karolina Plett, daughter of Johann Plett (1765-1833), Sparrau, 1835 census. On August 23, 1843, Klaas wrote a letter to brother Peter in which he mentioned that “brother Abraham was sickly for a time but is well at present as is also my wife.” When his brother Peter died in Prussia in September of 1847 his children gave “uncle Claasz” their father’s fur coat (“*Stadtpelez*”), indicating their esteem. In 1844 Klaas Friesen sold the *Wirtschaft* in Altona and purchased another in Rosenort. Karolina’s mother, nee Esther Smit, stayed with the family during her sickness and died there in 1855. Margaretha Friesen (later Mrs. Isaak Harms and Mrs. Klaas Brandt) was employed with the family as a maid.

By the 1850s Klaas Friesen had become a senior minister often responsible for the instruction of baptismal candidates and officiated at many weddings. A number of his sermons were preserved by son Johann P. Friesen, Rosenort. A sermon on Luke 18:9-14 written in 1863, just before his retirement from the ministry, was published in 1993. Klaas Friesen was historically inclined and documented various events. He was well read and his library included works by Dutch writers such as Claus Ganglofs. He encouraged learning and reading and his sons all received a good education.

Klaas Friesen became totally blind in 1863 and remained so for the last seven years of his life. Unfortunate differences between Klaas and the KG arose

in the twilight of his career with the result that he was removed from his position “by a majority of votes on the 16th and 23rd of February, 1864.” Ohm Heinrich Reimer, Muntau, wrote that these matters were largely brought on by the blindness of Ohm Klaas, and that in his view these difficulties were very much out of character for Friesen.

Klaas survived all his siblings by 13 years. As the last member of an ancient generation he served as a role model for a large number of nephews and nieces and was known affectionately as “Ohm Claasz.” He had a busy family and social life as was to be expected in the circumstances. e.g. In 1866 brother-in-law Heinrich Enns of Fischau wrote that “Our in-law from Rosenort [Klaas Friesen] was also here together with one of his sons and one of his daughters. His wife and her daughter have driven somewhere, but if it is possible they want to visit us during the holidays. They are all well.” Klaas Friesen died on October 12, 1870.

Widow Karolina and the unmarried children moved to Blumenhoff, Borosenko, settling next door to her nephew Aeltester Peter P. Toews. Their farm at this point consisted of 140 acres. Karolina continued farming together with her family. Certain business had to be attended to and on Sept. 20, 1873, “the old Kl. Friesensche accompanied Abr. Reimer, Abr. Penner, and Pet. Kroek. to Katrinoslav.” Prior to emigrating to Manitoba, Karolina disposed of her late husband’s books and gave them to her nephew, Peter P. Toews, including a copy of *United Undivided Church of God* by Ganglofs, which was to have far reaching consequences for the KG.

In 1874 Karolina Plett Friesen emigrated from Russia arriving in Manitoba with the first contingent of settlers on August 1, 1874. They settled in Blumenort, where Karolina took out a homestead, SW 27-7-6E. In 1877 Karolina remarried to Isaak Harms (1811-91), Jansen, Nebraska. She moved to Jansen, Nebraska, together with her younger children, where she and her second husband lived in the so-called “Harms” village in the northwest corner of Cub Creek Precinct. Karolina died in 1887.



*1903. Martin K. Friesen
(1881-1976) son of teacher
Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-
99), Blumenort, Manitoba,
and grandson of Ohm Klaas.
He was my grandfather.
Photo courtesy of Pres., No.
8, Part Two, page 57.*

Section 10.04: Peter W. Friesen 1815-92, Tiege.

Peter W. Friesen was the son of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, second Aeltester of the KG. Peter W. Friesen married cousin Helena F. Reimer, daughter of KG founder Klaas Reimer. The family lived in Tiege. They did well financially so that Ohm Peter was able to help his nephew Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) with credit and loans during the 1850s. Peter was elected as a minister of the KG in 1861. When Aeltester Johann Friesen excommunicated him in 1868, he joined with nephew Abraham L. Friesen also of Tiege to form what became known as the Heubodner KG. Mrs. Peter Friesen died on January 18, 1870, and was buried on the 23rd.

Shortly thereafter Peter Friesen moved to Kramido near Nikopol. The village was also known variously as Neu-Marienthal and Marienthal. Brother-in-law Abr. F. Reimer recorded various activities of the Peter Friesen family. On Sept. 6, 1873, "Peter Friesens went to the Molotschna..." and returned on the 14th. March 29, 1870, "Peter Friesen visited..." the home of Abr. F. Reimer, Steinbach, Borosenko. April 21, 1870, Abr. F. Reimer visited the "Neu-Ansiedler [new settlers] Pet. Friesen and Martin Barkman." Jan. 2, 1871, Aeltester Abr. Friesen and brother-in-law Pet. Friesen, Neu-Marienthal were here...", at home of Abr. F. Friesen. May 30, 1870, "Pet. Friesen, Molotschna, visited..." Abr. F. Friesen. April 17, 1873, "Pet. Friesen and 2 youngest married children visited..." cousin Abr. F. Friesen.

In 1870 Peter W. Friesen married for the second time to Elisabeth Fast, widow of Johann Krause from Ladekopp. She was a sister to Johann Fast (1813-92), who settled in Marion County in 1873 as well as to Bernhard Fast (1809-78), KG school teacher in Rosenort. In September of 1871, Peter I. Fast, Rückenau, made a journey to Borosenko, to visit relatives. Fast reported that on Sept. 23, he "...went along with Koop to Marianfeld, and walked to Pet. Friesens, my aunt. Friesen and Barkman had gone to Odessa to settle the last of their debts on the land they had bought."

In 1874 the Peter W. Friesens immigrated to America and settled in Jansen, Nebraska, "Russian Lane"--village of Rosenort, north side, east end. Peter W. Friesen was a well-established farmer. At the time of the 1880 property listing for Cub Creek he already had 100 acres cultivated land, a farm property worth \$2000, 5 horses, 14 head of livestock and a line of farm machinery. According to the land ownership map of 1880 Peter W. Friesen was the only KG farmer with a full section of land.

Peter W. Friesen served his church as a loyal and devoted servant of the Gospel, travelling frequently in the course of his duties. In a letter of November 7, 1880, Johann S. Harms, Jansen, Nebraska, reported that Mrs. Peter Friesen had "...suffered a stroke and is confined to bed." In 1886 Peter Friesen travelled to Manitoba on a ministerial journey and presented a moving sermon at the worship house in Steinbach on September 26. Peter W. Friesen maintained an active letter correspondence with relatives and co-religionists in Manitoba and elsewhere. He was historically inclined and composed and collected a number of writings pertaining to the history of the church.



Abraham M. Friesen (1834-1908) son of Obm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870). Abraham was a diligent young lad and compiled a prayer book between the ages of 10 and 17. He married Margarettha P. Isaac, and settled in Blumenort in 1874. He served at least one term as the village Schulz or mayor. In 1894 the Friesen family moved out of the village settling on SW35-7-5E where "K.K.Penner Tires" is located today. Abraham M. Friesen was a learned man who served as a teacher and maintained a valuable journal. Photo courtesy of LaVerna Klippenstein, Winnipeg/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 48/East Reserve 125, page 67.



Jobann S. Friesen (1853-1937), Steinbach pioneer and Abram Plett Isaac (1852-1938), Schönau, near present-day Kleefeld. Friesen kept donkeys and was known as "Asel" Friesen. He was the grandson of Jobann von Riesen (1789-1840), who had taken over his father's Wirtschaft in Obrloff. Abraham Isaac was appointed teacher examiner by the Provincial Government in 1879. Photo courtesy of Roger Penner, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Pres., No. 12, page 69.

His descendants included son Peter R. Friesen, well-to-do farmer in Jansen, Son Klaas R. Friesen, who kept a journal of the emigration journey of the Heubodner group which travelled through New York in 1874, and daughter Margaretha married to Heinrich F. Loewen (1860-1935), who later became a large scale farmer in Meade, Kansas, with a section of land.

Section 10.05: Isaak Friesen, 1834-98 Fischau.

Isaak Friesen (1834-98) was the son of Jakob Bernhard Friesen (born 1783), Wirtschaft 15, Fischau, 1835 census. Isaak was a brother to Heinrich Friesen (1822-1903), Nikolaidorf, and later Inman, Kansas, married to Aganetha Bergen (1822-95), granddaughter of Heinrich Bergen (b. 1746), Leske, 1776, resident in Kronsgarten in 1811. Aganetha's older brother Isaak (1821-75), was the first husband of the renowned "Dr. Bergensche" of Alexanderwohl, Russia, and later Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

In 1863 Isaak Friesen married Maria Toews, daughter of Jakob Toews (1805-73), Prangenau, Molotschna, uncle of Peter P. Toews, later Aeltester. Maria and Isaak Friesen lived in Fischau briefly and then moved to Markuslandt, village of Friedrichsthal.

Isaak Friesen was elected as a KG minister in 1864 for the Markuslandt congregation. He appears to have taken on this responsibility with great energy and determination. In early 1865 Ohm Isaak Loewen (1787-1873) of Lindenau, Molotschna extended to him the following words of encouragement: "And to you, my beloved Ohm Isaak Friesen, I must include a special greeting. I inform you, first of all, that deep down in my heart, I feel very thankful toward you. Being absent from you, I am mindful of the discussions we have had together, as you will recall. Secondly, I must also mention the following, that I am overjoyed within my heart for your attitude which I sensed within you, when I was with you, and that you have retained the same unchanged until now, which I believe is the result of the love of God. I am pleased that you have accepted the responsibility to remain with the little flock which God has entrusted to you, and to which, in my opinion, you have been appointed as its watchman and shepherd through the holy counsel of God. As He has promised, the Lord will surely want to grant you, by means of His Spirit, wisdom, comfort and power, and an irrepressible courage to feed the souls entrusted to you with the Word of life. For this is the true nourishment for the soul, which will refresh and satisfy. As a most unworthy being, I wish the above unto you, that you may fulfil the office to which you have been appointed by the Lord, unto the end of your days, out of love for the Gemeinde, and for the glory of the Lord and our beloved Saviour. May God grant you His grace to this end! Amen!"

But the KG congregation at Markus was undergoing various difficulties at this time. Isaak Friesen struggled valiantly to shepherd his flock but not without discouragement. In a subsequent letter of July 21, 1865, Isaak Loewen noted that Ohm Isaak Friesen had been expected for the "next Sunday. It has been reported here, however, that no one came to you there [at Markus] at the time, as he was discouraged. Thus it could be six weeks....before you will have any services with him to share the word of life..." By this time Isaak Friesen had moved on to the village of Blumenhoff in the new KG settlement of Borosenko, northwest of Nikopol. In his letter Loewen quoted Peter P. Toews as saying that Ohm Isaak Friesen "went from Friedrichsthal to Borosenko much too soon." Isaak Friesen felt bad about this decision and some time earlier he had told Isaak Loewen "...that it had not been his wish to leave the majority of brethren and sisters and

that this was very hard for him.” In defense of Friesen, Isaak Loewen mentioned “the fact that he seldom travels to Markusland has much to do with his weak physical condition.” Loewen encouraged the brethren in Borosenko to assist Friesen by providing him with transportation when he wished to go to Markus.

On February 10, 1866, KG Aeltester Johann F. Friesen in Neukirch, Molotschna, wrote Isaak a long letter defending his actions relative to the division in the KG at the time. On occasion Isaak Friesen returned to the Molotschna on church business or to visit relatives and friends. In a letter of August 1866, Heinrich Enns mentioned that he has just run into Isaak Friesen at his neighbour’s place in Fischau. On May 16, 1869, Friesen was in the Molotschna and attended a church service in Kleefeld where a general reconciliation was achieved between the Blumenhoff KG and a part of the Gemeinde of Johann F. Friesen. In 1872 Isaak Friesen ordered two copies of the *Martyrs’ Mirror* at a cost of 5 ruble a piece.

Isaak Friesen was removed as a minister of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde on April 25, 1870, “for carelessness in allowing his cattle to stray and other similar incidents, so that the confidence in him diminished.” He resigned from the Gemeinde on September 14, 1873, in response to appeals to the membership to be generous of their means in order that the poor in the congregation would also be able to emigrate from Russia.

In 1874 the Isaak Friesen family emigrated from Russia travelling together with the Heubodner KG on the S.S. Hammonia. But the Friesens did not settle in Jansen, Nebraska, and instead went to Gnadenu, Kansas, where Jakob A. Wiebe and the Krimmer were settling. The Friesens established themselves on farm number 18 at the east end of the village. According to the “Gnadenu Gemeindebuch”, Isaak Friesen and his wife were rebaptized into the KMB in 1874 presumably upon their arrival in Gnadenu. In early 1875 he wrote his wife’s brother in Blumenort, Manitoba, saying that they were expecting the Martin Klassen family shortly.

Granddaughter Marie Zacharias recorded some of the family’s subsequent experiences: “In 1884 they [the Isaak Friesen family] moved to Tampa [Kansas], then to Abiline, Texas, in 1892. The agent had them plant cotton on the land he had cleared and they all had to work hard outside. Maggie told me he made lots of money and wanted them to stay. But they didn’t feel they could clear that land so they came back to Kansas in 1893.” In May 1894 Isaak and Maria Friesen moved to Oklahoma where they settled on a farm five miles southwest of Weatherford. They became members of the Corn KMB Gemeinde.

Granddaughter Marie Zacharias writes that “they lived five months in a covered wagon with Peter and John. On October 3 they moved into a dugout.” Isaak Friesen died here in 1898. Marie Zacharias recalls that “he was sickly with heart trouble and short of breath. He was in bed 12 weeks before he died. . . . I was a little over two years old but I cried so loud when they put grandpa in the ground that Daddy had to take me away.” Marie Zacharias remembered her grandfather fondly; “I remember one occasion driving with him to his farm in a buggy

with one horse. I was under two years old but I was proud to ride with him.”

Maria Toews Friesen lived for about ten years in her widowhood. She stayed at the home of her youngest son Johann until she died. The following tribute was written by granddaughter Maria Buschman Zacharias: “She had lots of sorrow, they were poor and finally had more. They moved up and down a lot and had many a cross to bear. The last remarks she could give were that she had the hope of eternal life....She was sick for one and a half days. I, Marie Buschman Zacharias, combed her hair the last time. My mother was sick and we got grandma to help us on the farm. At noon mother was able to come to the table but grandma felt bad. When mother went to see about her she was on the stool very ill. We called Dr. Gaede and he came but she lived only a short while--at 1:30 she was gone. She spit up black stuff and suffered very much. Uncle Johnny who she was staying with on the place they homesteaded just north of our eighty...came over when we called him and after she died he was out in front in a carriage and he cried so very hard. They had been together all his life. Two months later he was gone....She [mother] is buried on the Kroeker farm, her husband Isaak Friesen is buried at the Corn cemetery.” Much of the information for the biographies of Maria Toews and Isaak Friesen was gleaned from various newspaper clippings, obituaries and other sources gathered by Jo Ferguson, Midwest City, Oklahoma.

A number of the children of Maria and Isaak Friesen settled in the Corn and Weatherford, Oklahoma, area. They were the grandparents of Gordon Friesen (born 1909), the author of *Flamethrowers*, a controversial novel of a Mennonite settlement in Kansas.



Abram T. Friesen (1852-1916), was the son of KG deacon Klaas F. Friesen (1818-71), Neukirch, Molotschna. Abram T. Friesen married his second cousin Margaretha Thiessen (1848-1905). In 1874 they settled along Russian Lane in Jansen, Nebraska. Abram owned a half section of land, and later acquired another half. They joined the Reformed Mennonite Church. Photo courtesy of Mildred Ediger, "Thiessen and Friesen Families," Sanger, California.

Section 10.06 Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht 1825-1912, Prangenau.

Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht was born in Neukirch, Molotschna in 1825, daughter of Jakob Thiessen and Anna Enns, Wirtschaft 20.

Neukirch had a substantial KG community which has already been mentioned. Some of Aganetha's cousins were associated with the KG: Maria Enns married Jakob L. Friesen, later of Jansen, Nebraska; Peter Enns (1822-96) lived for a time in Steinbach where his daughter married Johann T. Barkman (1862-1900), and daughter Anna Enns married KG school teacher Abraham Harms (1833-1909), later of Gnadenau, Kansas. Anna's sister Katharina married three times, to Peter Warkentin, Rev. Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), Steinbach and, Cornelius Loewen (1827-93), Grünfeld.

Aganetha Thiessen was baptised on confession of her faith in 1844. In 1847 she married Gerhard Giesbrecht (1816-63), whose first wife Eva Ratzlaff died earlier that year. Gerhard was the son of Jakob Gerhard Giesbrecht (b. 1787), Wirtschaft 17, Muntau. Gerhard's sister Elisabeth was the first wife of Jakob M. Barkman who would later marry Aganetha's sister Katharina.

Aganetha and her husband lived in Prangenau. Gerhard was a sickly man and so the church allowed him to carry on a small business so he could earn his livelihood. The children were forced to work out at an early age, and son Wilhelm later reported that he had learned the trade of shoemaker at this time.

Evidently Gerhard's earnings from his business were not sufficient and the family received assistance from the church treasury. According to deacon records a total of 658.58 ruble banko were advanced to the family between 1848 and the time of his death in 1864. Gerhard died February 27, 1863, leaving Aganetha, age 32, with five children between the ages of 15 and two. In many such circumstances, children were taken from their mother and put into foster homes. But Aganetha was a determined woman able to muster sufficient resources to meet the needs of her young family.

By the late 1860s Aganetha's children were getting married and established. Several of the children took advantage of the KG resettlement program whereby young landless families were established on their own farms in new settlements such as Borosenko. Aganetha continued to reside in her home in Prangenau. On February 4, 1873, daughter Aganetha, Mrs. Jakob T. Barkman, Rosenfeld, wrote, "Receive a sincere greeting beloved mother... you are often in my thoughts, especially when I am alone with the children...." She referred to her mother's illness and the uncertainty of life. Bishop Peter Toews "...has promised to stop by to see [you]". Aganetha was planning to hold an auction sale and a previous letter had inquired about "...selling the tables and benches". The response being it was probably best to sell them, "...for if the emigration should come to pass, our experience will probably be similar to when they came here from Prussia... I would wish that you would also come if we should move from here."

After her auction sale in 1874, Aganetha emigrated to Manitoba together with son Wilhelm. They travelled with the first contingent of 65 families who arrived at the confluence of the Rat and Red Rivers on August 1, 1874.

Aganetha and son Jakob, age 13, settled in the village of Lichtenau, 1 1/2 miles west of Steinbach, where daughter Elisabeth and son-in-law Gerhard E. Kornelsen, later the Steinbach school teacher, also settled. Daughters Aganetha, Mrs. Jakob T. Barkman, and Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob S. Friesen, and step-son Gerhard R. Giesbrecht were among the 18 pioneer families in Steinbach. Son Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht initially settled in Grünfeld, but moved to Steinbach in 1879. Aganetha now had her whole family living nearby.

Aganetha took out a homestead in Lichtenau, the NW 22-6-6E, 1 mile south and 1/2 mile west of Steinbach, filing on September 2, 1876. She must have been a strong and courageous woman to homestead on her own. She farmed together with bachelor son Jakob. Aganetha's farm was located where John F. Wiebe lives today. Possibly Aganetha also lived for a time in Steinbach as Gerhard G. Kornelsen has written that a house was built for her on the Kattstelle of son-in-law Jakob T. Barkman's property in Steinbach in 1877.

Aganetha and son Jakob farmed in a small way more or less to look after their own needs. On April 24, 1880, her buildings were insured for \$375, her equipment and inventory \$75 per category. The R.M. of Hanover tax records for 1883 show that she had 80 acres of land, 2 oxen, 2 cows, etc.

The peaceful lifestyle surrounded by family and friends which Aganetha no doubt had longed for was not to last. In 1882 the American Revivalist minister John Holdeman came to Steinbach, believing that the KG was in need of renewal. Although he was able to convince Bishop Peter P. Toews of the necessity of rebaptism, his arguments rang hollow for many of the older people who had already survived several similar endeavours in Russia.

The Giesbrecht family was divided on the issue: children Wilhelm and Margaretha and step-son Gerhard joined with Holdeman in 1882. In fact, Wilhelm was to become a leading evangelist of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman). Anganetha preferred to remain with her faith once received as did daughters Anganetha, Elisabeth and bachelor son Jakob.

Aganetha Giesbrecht was a vivacious woman with a genuine interest in life. She valued her extended family network highly and corresponded with relatives back in Russia and elsewhere. Her letters tell us a great deal about the matriarchal networks in the KG and how they functioned. They open a window on the mind of an important pioneer matriarch. Aganetha was a conservative intelligent woman who knew no other way than to live a holistic faith which informed every moment of her life. Extracts of her letters and a more detailed biography were published in *Preservings*, Issue 10, Dec. 1997, Part Two, pages 19-23.

Section 10.07: Anna Klassen Goossen 1839-1927.

Anna Klassen was the daughter of Franz and Anna Klassen of Neukirch, Molotschna, owners of Wirtschaft 18, 1835 census. Anna “had five sisters and one brother named Peter. Peter Klassen was forced to serve as a wagoner during the Crimean War in Russia in 1855. He was quite ill when he returned and shortly passed away. Grandfather Franz Klassen had also died and both of them were buried the same day. Mother’s sisters were Aunt Schellenberg, Aunt Ens, Aunt Epp, Aunt Fedehrau, and Aunt Baergen”: Johann K. Esau, *Profile 1874*, 201.

In 1857 Anna married Gerhard P. Goossen, son of Gerhard Goossen (1811-54), a career school teacher. Gerhard Jr. was a teacher in Paulsheim, Fischau, Liebenau and Lindenau (see Section 8.07). In 1866 Gerhard was elected as a minister, serving with dedication and vigor (for a detailed biography and translations of 20 letters, see *Leaders*, pages 707-740). In November of 1868 the Goossen family moved to the village of Grünfeld, 30 miles north of Nikopol. Here Gerhard turned his hand to farming and continued his active ministry.

Gerhard P. Goossen died a premature death on September, 1872 (see Section 12.04). Gerhard’s death was hard on Anna. She was not left a wealthy widow, nor was she very well physically. As a result other people took care of her children; daughter Katharina was in the care of the Gerhard K. Schellenberg family; daughter Maria was in the care of the Isaak L. Warkentin family, and son Franz K. Goossen was with the Johann P. Isaak family.

On September 24, 1873, Anna Klassen Goossen held an auction sale selling her “cow, hogs and things, for which she received 350 ruble”.

In 1874 Anna Klassen Goossen immigrated to Manitoba with the rest of the KG and settled in the village of Grünfeld. On December 7, 1874, Anna wrote a lengthy letter to Aeltester Peter P. Toews, Blumenhoff, Russia. In this letter Anna expressed her love for her Saviour and her loneliness and concern for her children who could not live with her. In particular she referred to her daughter Mariechen who was a foster child with the “Dr.” Isaak L. Warkentin family who had stayed in Russia for an additional year. The letter served as a sample of the circumstances of women in the very first pioneer years in Manitoba.

Anna’s loneliness was alleviated in 1876 when she married for the second time to Johann Hiebert (1816-90) of Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, and later Grünfeld, Manitoba. She had three children with him.

After Johann’s death in 1890 Anna married for the third time to Johann L. Warkentin, a wealthy farmer from Blumenhof, Manitoba, who had been married for the first time to her sister-in-law, Maria P. Goossen (1848-88). By 1896 Johann L. Warkentin had moved to Kansas, where they lived in Hillsboro. She died in 1927 and was buried in the Alexanderfeld cemetery, two miles southwest of Hillsboro. The Johann L. Warkentin family belonged to the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

Anna’s children were well known in Steinbach and Rosenort, Manitoba. Sons Peter K. Goossen and Gerhard K. Goossen married daughters of Franz Froese, Rosenort, where many of their family live to this day. Daughter Maria K.



Maria K. Goossen (1868-1954), daughter of Anna Goossen, married Johann K. Esau. Photo courtesy of Clarence Hiebert, The Holdeman People, page 144.



1900. Rev. Gerhard F. Giesbrecht (1878-1967), later Holdeman minister in Steinbach, was a grandson of Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht. Photo courtesy of daughter Anna Giesbrecht Penner, Steinbach/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 24.

Goossen married Johann K. Esau (1867-1946), Grünfeld, author of "The Esau Family Tree 1740-1933," in *Profile*, pages 193-202. Son Franz K. Goossen was a school teacher in Hochstadt, near Kleefeld. In 1902 they moved to Canada, Kansas, and back to Manitoba in 1906. They purchased the Alex "Sandy" Adams farm (NW7-7-7E) where they farmed until 1916 when they moved to Littlefield, Texas. After a year they came back and retired in Steinbach, purchasing the old Heinrich Brandt property, formerly Wirtschaft 4.

Section 10.08: Sara Siemens Janzen 1809-85, Neukirch.

Sara Siemens Janzen (1809-88) was the daughter of Claasz Siemens (1758-1834), a wealthy Vollwirt and owner of Wirtschaft 15 in Rosenort, Molotschna. Sara was part of a large KG matriarchy (see Section 9.05). In 1832 Sarah married Cornelius Janzen (1812-64), son of Johann Janzen (b. ca.1777), and Barbara Fast (d. Oct 5, 1818), Reinland, Prussia, the widow of Bernhard Rempel. Johann Janzen and his family immigrated to Russia in 1818 together with his step-sons Peter (1792-1837), Bernhard (b. 1794), Abraham (1798-1878), Johann Rempel (1799-1831). The extended Rempel/Janzen family settled in Margenau, Wirtschaft 39.

Sara and her husband Cornelius Janzen soon acquired a Wirtschaft in Neukirch where Cornelius was listed in the KG ministerial election of 1837. Neukirch had a large and influential KG community. Cornelius died in 1864.

By 1871 Sara was living with her children in Steinbach, Borosenko, where her sister Katharina, Mrs. Gerhard Fast, wrote her three letters. On June 24, 1873, Sara was accepted into the Blumenhoff Gemeinde, an indication that she may have previously belonged to the Gemeinde of Aeltester Johann Friesen.

In 1874 Sarah immigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, with daughters Katharina, Mrs. Jakob Classen, Sarah, Mrs. Cornelius L. Friesen, and Aganetha, Mrs. Heinrich Ratzlaff. In the years following Sarah wrote letters to her daughter Elisabeth, Mrs. Isaak W. Loewen, Rosenort, and son, Johann S. Janzen, Blumenhof, who had chosen to settle in Manitoba.

On December 23, 1875, Sara wrote a letter to son Johann S. Janzen, living in Rosenort, Manitoba, at the time. She mentioned that her children had gone visiting in Heuboden and that she was alone. She expressed concerns about interest on the money she had lent Johann. She also inquired about dearly beloved friends from Russia, such as the indomitable Elisabeth Rempel Reimer. She was extremely curious as to how her grandchildren were doing, asking, "What are you doing? are you all learning?" On June 26, 1881, Sarah wrote another letter to her "beloved children" stating that her "health is relatively tolerable..." She mentioned that "Ohm [Cornelius] Plett had visited the Jansen settlement and that "...it was truly a great encouragement and joy for me." "Most important..." to her "is that the loving Heavenly Father, could be gracious and redeem us." Sara was always mindful of her beloved grandchildren and admonished them to "be obedient to her parents, which is the first commandment."

Sara Siemens Janzen's letters dated December 23, 1875 and June 26, 1881, were published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 78-79, and in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, page 18.



Helena von Riesen Jansen (1822-97) was the mother of Peter Jansen (1852-1923) who met personally with U.S. President Grant in 1873 and was elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 1898 and to the State Senate in 1910. Helena was closely related to many in the KG. Photo courtesy of The Cornelius Jansen Family History 1822-1973 (Berlin, Ohio, 1974), page 9/East Reserve 125, page 9.

Section 10.09: Helena von Riesen Jansen 1822-97, Berdjansk.

One of the interesting women of the von Riesen matriarchy was granddaughter Helena von Riesen (1822-97), daughter of Peter. Helena married Cornelius Jansen and in 1849 the family immigrated to Russia, evidently because Helena missed her many relatives in the KG. The Jansens settled in Berdjansk near the Molotschna Colony where he became a successful merchant and also Prussian Consul. In the 1870s Jansen became the most prominent instigator of emigration, writing and publishing various booklets and advocating the cause. So successful were his efforts, he was exiled by the Imperial Czar in 1873. The family eventually settled in Beatrice, Nebraska (for a biography see Reimer and Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar*, 1956, 205 pages).

Helena Jansen was an influential woman in her day whose story is significant to the E. Reserve. On May 15, 1874, Helena wrote a long letter to Bishop Peter P. Toews. According to historian Royden K. Loewen this letter may have been influential in the decision of the Blumenhof KG to settle in Manitoba as opposed to Nebraska. This letter was translated and published in 1990: *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 17-18.

Helena had a number of cousins in the E. Reserve including Abraham "Fula" Reimer, Abraham M. Friesen and his half-brother Cornelius P. Friesen in Blumenort. On June 22, 1875, Helena wrote a letter to cousin Abraham M. Friesen, Blumenort, Manitoba, which illustrated these connections. She refers to another cousin Jakob K. Friesen who has just drowned in the Red River near Winnipeg. The letter also referred to another cousin Abraham F. Friesen, father of Steinbach pioneer Abraham S. Friesen, who, together with her son Peter, was on a trip to Wisconsin where they had purchased 4 rail cars full of sheep for the KG in Nebraska. This letter was translated and published in 1986: *Storm and Triumph*, pages 77-78.

Section 10.10: Abraham Klassen 1828-1906, Prangenau.

Abraham Klassen (1828-1906) was the son of Johann Klassen (1785-1841), Tiegerweide, who served as Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony from 1827 to 1833. Abraham's mother, Aganetha Regier Klassen (1793-1863), was the granddaughter of Aeltester Peter Epp (1725-89), Danzig, and a niece to Maria (1760-1806), first wife of KG founder Klaas Reimer, and sister to Katharina (1800-66), wife of Martin J. Barkman (1796-1872), Rückenau, father of Steinbach minister Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), who drowned in the Red River, Manitoba, in 1875. Abraham's brother-in-law David A. Friesen (1807-93), served as Molotschna Oberschulz from 1848 to 1865.

Abraham Klassen (1828-1906) married Helena Martens (1833-1894) born in the village of Blumenort. She was a sister to Gerhard Martens (b. 1829) who died in Oklahoma.

Abraham Klassen worked for some years in Blumenort, and then started his own lumber yard in Neukirch where he prospered. He lost much of his business due to a sickness. Consequently the family moved to Prangenau in 1866 where he took over a Wirtschaft.

At this time of despair he joined the KG. In 1869 he was elected as a minister in that denomination.

Peter Fast (1831-1916) mentions that he went to the auction sale of Abraham Klassens in Prangenau on February 14, 1874. That same spring the family emigrated from Russia settling in Rosenort, Manitoba. The next spring Abraham went to visit in Kansas and returned to Manitoba, having decided to move there as well. In the spring of 1875 the family settled in the village of Alexanderfeld, Kansas, two miles southwest of Hillsboro, sometimes referred to as a Kleine Gemeinde village, but in actual fact, the home of a Holdeman congregation.

The Peter Toews Collection contains many letters written by Abraham Klassen some of which have been translated and published in the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series.

Abraham Klassen was the great-great-grandfather of Matt Groening, originator and director of "The Simpsons", a popular T.V. cartoon show.



Aganetha Klassen Groening (b. 1868), and Abraham Groening (1866-1949), Hillsboro, Kansas. Aganetha was the daughter of KG minister Abraham Klassen, Alexanderfeld, Kansas. She was the great-grandmother of Matt Groening, originator of "The Simpsons". Photo courtesy of Peggy Goertzen, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas/Groening-Wiebe Family, page 46.

Section 10.11: David Klassen 1813-1900, Margenau.

David Klassen was the son of Abraham Klassen (1766-1813), of Tiegerweide, Prussia, where he was born 8 months after his father's death. His paternal grandfather was Abraham Klassen (1739-1817) listed in Tiegenhagen in the 1776 census.

But it was on his mother's side that David Klassen was related to the KG. His mother Maria Klassen was the daughter of David Klassen (1740-1804) listed in Petershagen, Prussia in 1776 and for whom he was named. David's great-grandfather was David Klassen (1700-80), listed as a wealthy farmer with a male servant and a female servant, in Fürstenwerder, Prussia, in 1776. Fürstenwerder in 1776 was also the home of Hans Plett, another well-to-do "Groutbua", ancestor to all Mennonite Pletts in the world.

Maria had two brothers who had emigrated to Russia, namely, Peter Klassen (1789-1862) who acquired a Wirtschaft in Rückenau, Molotschna--whose granddaughter, Margaretha Klassen was the third wife of Steinbach pioneer merchant Klaas R. Reimer, and brother Jakob Klassen (1792-1869) who acquired a Wirtschaft in Pordenau, Molotschna--from whom are descended the KG Classens in Jansen, Nebraska, and later Meade, Kansas. Carl Doerksen, former Commercial Loans Manager, Steinbach Credit Union Ltd is a great-great-grandson of Jakob Klassen.

Another brother Dirk Klassen (1765-1843) was a minister in Fürstenwerder, Prussia, whose daughter Margaretha married Klaas Epp, a fanatical Separatist-Pietist. Her son Klaas Epp Jr. (1838-1913) was the famous leader of a group of radical separatist-pietists who went on the infamous trek to East Asia in 1880 pursuant to the "eastward" millennial teachings in vogue among the Russian Mennonites at the time.

But there was no religious fanaticism in David Klassen. He was a quiet, hard-working, sober-thinking, and humble man but he was also determined and could make difficult decisions. He was quite tall, more than six feet in height. The story goes that he rode a stallion to Russia when he emigrated from Prussia in 1833 leading a group of immigrants. The story creates an image of a take-charge, man of action.

The influence of his mother's family is evident by the fact that he first settled in Rückenau, Molotschna, the village where his uncle Peter had already established himself. In 1825 David married Aganetha S. Brandt, daughter of Peter Brandt (1770-1819) a well-to-do Molotschna pioneer of Blumenort and later Tiege.

By 1850 David Klassen had acquired a Wirtschaft in Margenau, Molotschna, where he was known as a successful farmer.

David was said to be a man of strong opinions. During the 1866 division he was a strong supporter of his son-in-law Johann Friesen and evidently said of Heinrich Enns, "That he was lying in the dirt."

By the late 1860s he had moved to the village of Heuboden, Borosenko, 30 kilometres northwest of Nikopol, where he established a new Wirtschaft and planted a beautiful orchard.

In 1873 David Klassen was elected by the Heuboden branch of the KG as a



1918. David B. Klassen and second wife, Catharina Friesen, Beaver Flats, Saskatchewan. David B. Klassen (1845-1919), was the son of David Klassen (1813-1900), formerly Margenau, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Furrows in the Valley, page 446/Pres., No. 11, page 96.

delegate to scout for new settlement opportunities in America. In 1874 he served as co-leader of the first group of 65 Mennonite families who arrived at their new homes in Manitoba on August 1. He convinced his Heuboden group and some others to settle in the Scratching River settlement, now known as Rosenort, causing considerable controversy at the time.

Together with his immediate family and some others, David established the village of Rosenhof, two miles south of Rosenort. He served as Brandaeltester or manager of the local branch of the KG mutual insurance system from 1875 until 1881 when his son-in-law Heinrich L. Friesen took over the position. David also served his community as a facilitator with various government officials.

David Klassen was an articulate man who could express himself well. Eight of his letters have been translated and published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 105-113.

David and his wife, Aganetha, had 10 children, five of whom died before they left Russia. They farmed their homestead at Scratching River steadily until his retirement. Then they went to live with their son, Jacob who farmed nearby, while another son, Abraham took over his father's original homestead. David lived until 1900 and his wife survived him by four years. Today their descendants number in the thousands and are scattered all over the world.

David Klassen was a leader when his people most needed someone whose judgement they could trust. He typified those qualities which distinguish the Mennonite people - co-operation, hard work, democracy, service to others and, above all, the values of their religion.

Section 10.12: Katharina Barkman Koop 1832-1923, Mariawohl.

Katharina K. Barkman (1832-1923) was the daughter of Jakob J. Barkman (1794-1875), Rückenau, Molotschna, who had served as village Schulz. Her mother was Gertrude Klassen, daughter of Peter.

Katherina's brother, Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917), was the founder of Steinbach Flour Mills, see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, No. 9, Part One, pages 41-46 for a biography. Sister Aganetha K. Barkman (1828-99) married Peter W. Toews and they founded a dynasty: including son teacher John B. Toews, son Peter B. "Groute" Toews, and daughter Aganetha, mother of Martin M. Penner of Steinbach.

Katharina K. Barkman was baptised upon the solemn confession of her faith in 1850 and became a lifelong member of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG).

In 1853 Katharina K. Barkman married Johann M. Koop (1831-97) from Muntau, Molotschna, where his father and grandfather before him had owned Wirtschaft 14 (see Section 8.08): "New Years Wish of Johann Koop, Muntau, 1808," *Preservings*, No. 3, Jan 1994, page 8. It was through the Koop family line that Katharina's descendants were related to John Denver (1943-97), the famous American folk singer.

By 1854 Katarina and her husband were living in Margenau, where his mother had moved after marriage to Abraham Rempel. By 1858 the family was living in Mariawohl, where they were listed as living on Wirtschaft 14 in the school attendance record of 1861/2. In 1871 the Wirtschaft in Mariawohl was sold and Katharina and her husband purchased a tract of land in the Borosenko area, northwest of Nikopol where they, together with half-a-dozen other families, established a settlement called Neuanlage. Their premises were large enough to accommodate worship services when they were held in their village.

Oral tradition holds that the Koop family had many servants and maids in Russia. Evidently Katharina Barkman Koop and her husband were known for their humane treatment of employees so that harvesters and other servants preferred to work for them if given a choice. Katharina was concerned about the poor treatment accorded the workers by some Mennonite employers.

In 1874 Katharina Koop and family emigrated from Russia. The family was among the first group of 65 KG families to arrive at the confluence of the Red and Rat River on August 1, 1874. "It took 3 days to move all the chests and baggage to the 6 miles distant emigration houses for which William Hespeler had hired Half-breeds." Katharina and her family decided to settle in Blumenort together with 22 other families. In 1879 six Wirthen or farmers, including the senior Koop, two sons and two sons-in-law, established their own village two miles to the southwest of Blumenort, again called Neuanlage.

According to the 1883 assessment records, Johann Koop was the wealthiest farmer in the Blumenort area north of Steinbach, cultivating 80 acres. Katharina and Johann Koop assisted their children in their farming operations and gave son "Jakob a team of oxen yearlings" prior to his marriage while he was still working at home. Jakob later sold these oxen "for \$115.00 and used the money

to buy a team of horses.” The family continued to engage various domestic and farm labour. In 1883 their kitchen maid, Helena Nickel, married son Jakob B. Koop.

Katharina was no stranger to large-scale farming coming from a Vollwirt background herself. She was a slight woman of medium build, about 5'6. Before her husband died in 1897 he left each of their eight children a \$500 inheritance on the understanding that they would look after their beloved mother.

During the last years of her life she made her home with daughter Gertrude, Mrs. Abraham L. Plett, where she had two rooms on the main floor. Periodically Katharina would stay with one of her other children for a few weeks but most of the time she stayed at Abraham Pletts. For the most part she remained in her own room during her older years.

She enjoyed telling stories to her grand and great-grandchildren. Great-grandson Martin P. Penner remembered a story told by Katharina to his father, Johann R. Penner. It had occurred one day that the Johann Koops sent word to Abraham Penners Sr. in Blumenort that they were coming for a visit, but they had not given their names. The Penners, apparently, assumed they were receiving some important visitors and hurried to make special preparations. But when the guests arrived, they had apparently been disappointed because “it had only been the old Johann Koops”. The story reveals a great deal about Katharina’s indomitable spirit as well as her down-to-earth nature and sense of humour.

When daughter Maria, Mrs. Jakob L. Plett, died during the influenza epidemic of 1918, the coffin was brought to the Abraham L. Plett home so that her mother could see her once more. When Katharina saw her daughter’s body lying so peacefully, she was to have remarked that it was unfortunate that she could not have died instead of her daughter who still had a young family to look after.

Great-grandson Peter S. Koop of Steinbach later remembered the occasion in 1920 when he and his siblings Jakob, George and Tien met Katharina Barkman Koop. She was lying on the “Schloape baenk” at his grandparents’ Jakob B. Koops where she was staying at the time. After the children had all been introduced their great-grandmother rejoiced that she had met them. She reached under her comforter and pulled some peppermint candies out from under the blanket and gave one to each of them.

My mother Gertrude Friesen Plett frequently remarked that her great-grandmother Katharina had no grey hair, a trait which she herself shared. Even at Katharina’s death at the age of 91 in 1923, hardly a grey hair was visible as she lay at rest in her coffin.



LEFT: Katharina Barkman Koop's brother Jakob (1820-1902), a wealthy merchant in Waldbeim, Molotschna. Jakob's daughter Elisabeth (1841-1917) married Peter B. Friesen (1838-1900) and settled in Blumenort, Man. in 1874. Another daughter Gertrude married Peter Rempel (1844-1915), and their son Peter taught at Tabor College in 1908: see Preservings, No. 8, June 1996, pages 45-46. Jakob K. Barkman photo courtesy of Gertrude K. Plett (b. 1900), Steinbach, Man., 1980, photo identification courtesy of Anna Barkman (1887-1986), Steinbach, 1981/Pres, No. 9, Part One, page 41.

RIGHT: Katharina's brother Peter K. Barkman (1826-1917) in his retirement years, 1915. The Barkman siblings were all born in Rückenau, Molotschna where their father Jakob had served as Schulz. Peter had a 9000 ruble wind mill in Rosenfeld, Borosenko, and built the Steinbach steam flour mill in 1880. Peter's great-grandson now owns "Barkman Concrete", a national manufacturer of paving stones. Photo courtesy of Genealogy of Peter K. Barkman, page 1.



1936. Three Koop sisters, daughters of Katharina Barkman Koop: Mrs. David L. Plett, nee Helena B. Koop, Mrs. Abraham L. Plett, nee Gertruda B. Koop, and Mrs. Peter B. Klassen, nee Katharina B. Koop. Today the great-grandchildren of Gertruda and Helena produce in the range of five per cent of Manitoba's milk, as well as other farm commodities. The sisters would joke and laugh so hard when they got together, their stomachs would shake. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 99/Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 23.

Section 10.13: Isaak Loewen 1787-1873, Lindenau.

Isaak Loewen (1787-1873) was the grandson of Isaak Loewen (1735-97), Tiegenhagen, Prussia, 1776 census. Isaak (1787-1873) married Margaretha Wiens (1790-1861) in 1813. They took over his parent's *Wirtschaft* in Lindenau, where they raised 13 children. In 1837 Isaak Loewen was elected as a deacon of the KG.

Like his father, Isaak was active in silkworm farming. An article in the *Unterhaltungsblatt* in 1850 written by two German agricultural students cited Isaak Loewen of Lindenau as a 'Lehrmeister' or master teacher in the field.

Isaak served as deacon until 1848, when he was removed from office for complacency regarding the unscriptural conduct of son-in-law, Cornelius S. Plett, who had treated his adult servant girl too harshly. Isaak Loewen accepted this admonition and was able to strengthen his Christian walk. Like other Vollwirthen, Isaak engaged various servants and maids. On June 17, 1851, the ministers Enns and Dueck visited the Loewens "...regarding the misdemeanour of their servant girl."

Mrs. Margaretha Loewen, nee Wiens, died July 29, 1861.

Shortly thereafter Isaak held an auction sale. The *Wirtschaft* had already been taken over by youngest son, David (1836-1915). Prior to retirement, Isaak assisted his children with loans. He lived with various of his children, including daughter, Sarah, Mrs. Cornelius S. Plett, in Kleefeld.

Isaak Loewen was concerned over the state of affairs in the KG during the 1860s and became involved with the reform group under Aeltester Heinrich Enns. Aeltester Johann Friesen came to Loewen's home on New Year's Eve, 1865, to consult regarding a proposed resolution of the impending division.

Isaak Loewen was a respected Ohm in the Gemeinde and wider Molotschna community. Folk historian Peter P. Isaak (1846-1923), referred to the drowning of Mrs. Johann Brandt in the Molotschna River as follows, "If I could have asked the aged grandfather, Isaak Loewen, long ago deceased, in Lindenau, he could have given me a more detailed account of the accident which overtook this great-aunt Katharina."

Isaak Loewen had a love of history. His own letters reveal an intelligent and spiritual man; reflective, somewhat maudlin, perhaps, but sensitive by nature. Loewen modestly claimed to have only a limited education, but was articulate in German and translated from Dutch. He had a sound knowledge of the seminal writings of the faith.

Isaak Loewen carried on an active correspondence. His letters were written with a view to inspiring and enriching the Christian life of the recipient. His greatest concern was that all his children find salvation and live a life of discipleship.

Isaak Loewen died on June 21, 1873, at the home of daughter, Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob Friesen, in Heuboden, Borosenko, where he was living at the time. He was buried two days later. Presumably he was buried in the village cemetery, a half-mile east of the village.

Isaak Loewen achieved a life span of 85 years, 11 months and 11 days. "He

died old and at a peaceful age. He was tired of living. The Lord had finally provided his release for which he....was truly longing from the heart. They have gone unto their rest in the true land of freedom and are now enjoying the blessed peace on the right hand of the Saviour in the eternal blessed fatherland where they will nevermore weary.”



Jakob Loewen (1820-1901) and Anna Penner Loewen (1822-1907), Gnadenu, Kansas. They were the grandparents of the well-known Dr. Sol Loewen, Hillsboro. Jakob was the son of Isaac (1787-1873). The Loewens in all three major KG settlements in North America: Jansen, Nebraska, East Reserve and Rosenort, Manitoba, are descendants from Isaac. Anna, Jakob, and Peter Penner were children of KG minister Peter Penner (b.1799), Prangenau. Photo courtesy of Jakob Loewen Family book, page 17/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 27.



Peter Penner (1826-94) and Elisabeth Loewen (1829-1906) family, Friedensfeld, Russia, daughter of Isaac Loewen. Circa 1880. From left to right: First couple - Peter Funks, father to John Funk, San Jose, grandfather to Peter J. Funk who worked for the Mennonite Brethren Board of Trustees and lived in Hillsboro, Ks., at one time; second Couple - Peter Penners; third couple - Franz Peters; Grandmother Penner, nee Elisabeth Loewen, and daughter Lena; Grandfather Peter Penner and son Jakob; fourth couple - Abraham Thiessens; fifth couple - Philip Isaacs, parents to Mrs. Penner, 47 Broadway, Chilliwack, B.C.

Section 10.14: Esther Smit Plett 1778-1855, Sparrau.

Esther Smit Plett was raised as a Lutheran. She was married for the first time to Cornelius Merkers, and had two children with him. In 1808 she married Johann Plett (1765-1833) (Sections 8.08 and 9.06). Esther's story is unique among women of her generation as considerable information is available about her, most of it from the book by grandson Peter P. Isaak, KG folk historian.

The early years of Esther's marriage were marked by poverty. They lived in Danzig during these years and experienced the seige of Danzig and famine. They tried to eke out a living by weaving baskets. Having no bread they ate only potatoes. Esther's step-daughters, Katharina and Elisabeth, were sent out to earn their own keep. When Katharina was mistreated, beaten and forced to sleep in an unheated room in winter, she complained to her stepmother. But Esther merely beat her as well, and told her to go back and serve her time. A few days later Katharina came home again, complaining that she had been beaten and mistreated. Again Esther beat her and told her to go back "and not to come home again to complain." Katherina did as she was told, but never returned home again.

In 1820 the family emigrated from Danzig with the intention of settling in Russia but because of problems with "their passports, they could not get any further than Poland, and lived there for eight years." Her oldest son Johann died in 1827. In 1828 they were finally able to obtain the right passport and managed to emigrate to the Old Colony where they lived in the village of Schönwiese for a year. Twenty year-old daughter Helena died here in 1829 after drinking cold water when coming in hot and overheated from working in the fields.

In the same year the Pletts finally arrived in the Molotschna Colony where they were among 28 emigrant families to take up a *Wirtschaft* in Sparrau, a village established in 1828. Johann Plett died in 1833 from a cold he caught while building a new house. Esther lived in this house for ten years as a widow, and at times had her youngest daughter Karolina living with her, "that is when she was not in service elsewhere." In 1843, soon after Karolina married, Esther lived with her children.

As an older woman, and possibly influenced by strict KG protocols regarding such matters as child abuse, Esther came under severe conviction and anguish regarding her mistreatment of her step-daughter, Katharina. Esther went to incredible lengths to find some trace of her, making extensive inquiries of all people arriving from Prussia. When Esther realized that all her efforts were for naught, she experienced a severe anguish of the soul and came under heavier and heavier conviction, "so that God had to say as he did of Job, 'But spare [her]...life'." A maid working at the home of her daughter Karolina, where Esther lived during some of her last years, later reported that at the worst Esther "came into such desperate anguish that she bit pieces of flesh out of her arms." God did relieve her of her distress and she found peace for her soul--Margaretha Friesen (1838-1933) quoted by Peter P. Isaak, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 212-14).

Esther was baptised in the KG November 1, 1854, only a few months prior to her death. This seemed odd given the incredible loyalty to the KG of her children and grandchildren. One might have expected that she would have



LEFT: Esther's grandson Abraham L. Plett (1859-1934), Blumenbof, Manitoba, large-scale farmer and accountant. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page viii/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 56.

RIGHT: Esther's grandson David L. Plett (1863-1953), Blumenbof, Manitoba, large-scale farmer, thresherman and songleader. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page viii/Pres., No. 9, Part Two, page 56.

wanted to join upon arrival in Russia or, even possibly, been pressured into such a decision.

Esther's other stepdaughter, Elisabeth Plett (b. 1790), emigrated to Russia as a young woman of 14, possibly with her aunt Margaretha Plett (b. 1771), married to Jakob Wiens of Wernersdorf. At the time of the 1808 Revision, Elisabeth was living with her uncle Michael Plett, Wirtschaft 1, Halbstadt. Two years later she married Johann Harder (1789-1847), and they took over his father's Wirtschaft in Blumstein. It was said that Elisabeth was a "kind and merciful person. One day a poor woman came to her door and complained about her need for clothes....[Elisabeth] took her underwear and gave it to the lady. Earlier in life, ...[she] knew what it meant not to have enough clothes."

In 1811 Elisabeth gave birth to Johann Plett Harder (1811-75), Blumstein, who was to become the Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde in 1860 and one of the most universally admired church leaders among the Russian Mennonites.

Section 10.15: Maria Brandt Plett 1843-1927. Tiegenhagen.

Maria R. Brandt (1843-1927) was the daughter of Klaas S. Brandt (1815-57) and Maria Reimer (1814-51), who farmed on their Wirtschaft in Tiegenhagen. As a young woman of 17 years of age, Maria received a devotional book, *Die Wandelnde Seele*, as a gift from her grandfather, Heinrich Reimer, Muntau, possibly in honour of her baptism in 1861. In 1863 Maria married Isaak L. Plett (1844-71), son of Cornelius S. Plett, Kleefeld, Molotschna, and later Blumenhof, Manitoba.

Maria and her husband settled in Friedensfeld north of the Borosenko settlement where they had a successful farming operation. Her husband died there in 1871 of typhoid fever. After Isaak's death she relocated her farm to Neuanlage, although the presently available information is not totally clear. February 15, 1873, Abraham F. Reimer from the neighbouring village of Steinbach recorded that Maria Brandt Plett "from the Neuen Anlage had leased out her buildings (Feuerstelle) and sold her cattle and equipment which had brought in over 1,000 ruble."

In 1874 Maria Brandt Plett immigrated to Canada. At this time she had sufficient means left over to lend the KG \$600.00. In 1874-5 she lived in Blumenort, where her only son Isaak was attending school. According to several sources she was engaged to be married to Heinrich Wohlgemuth in the winter of 1874, but the marriage never materialized.

In 1875-76, she lived in Steinbach, where Isaak was listed as attending school. In 1877 she purchased an Anwohner property in Steinbach, Manitoba, which was entered in the Brandordnung for \$100.00. In 1883 she purchased Feuerstelle 17 in Steinbach from Johann S. Friesen. By 1884 she owned 320 acres of land of which 35 acres was cultivated, buildings valued at \$500.00 and furniture worth \$100.00. They had 2 horses, 3 oxen, 3 cows, 4 yearlings and 2 pigs. They had a grass mower, a plow, 1 wagon, 1 rake and a sleigh.

Steinbach historian Gerhard G. Kornelsen has written that Maria Brandt Plett farmed together with her son and "with toil and thrift soon had a debt free home." Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that he "could well remember that the plums in her front garden, near the street, tasted especially good." In her last years Maria lived with various relations. During the last months she lived with the Isaac R. Reimer family in Landmark.

Maria's only child, Isaac B. Plett operated a steam engine threshing outfit and lived an interesting but not exemplary life. His son Abraham founded Westfield Industries in Rosenort, Manitoba, a large farm machinery manufacturing enterprise which is still owned and operated by the family.



1905. Isaac B. Plett (1867-1933),
Steinbach, Manitoba. Thresherman, inventor,
adventurer and raconteur.
Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part One, page 79.

Section 10.16: Sarah Loewen Plett 1822-1903, Kleefeld, Molotschna.

Sarah Loewen Plett (1822-1903) was the daughter of the Isaak Loewen (1787-1783), Lindenau (Section 10.13).

Sarah Loewen was baptised on confession of her faith in 1841. Later the same year she married Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), son of Johann, Sparrau (Section 8.08). Assisted by her father the couple started out building wagon wheels on an Anwohnerstelle in Lindenau, near her parents. By 1848 they were doing well enough to have a maid. Cornelius had the misfortune that his actions were scrutinized by the church leadership, when he had "treated their adult serving girl too strictly and had also struck her."

Nevertheless, the family fortunes continued to improve and by 1854 they took up a full Wirtschaft in a new village Kleefeld, established that year. During the 1860s they also rented additional Crown land and by 1871 they had 270 acres in wheat crop alone. Their's was apparently an exceptionally successful enterprise and created the environment for Sarah's life world. Obviously she was a busy woman, dealing with domestic servants, harvesters, socializing her large family of twelve children--the Biblical dozen--and managing the traditional part of the household economy.

Sarah and husband, Cornelius S. Plett, enjoyed travelling and were frequently seen on the roads linking Annafeld in the Crimea with the Molotschna and Borosenko, located in yet another direction, westerly, past the Old Colony. It seems clear that she had an expansive world view, in terms of dealing and interacting with the wide range of ethnic groups and cultures found in that part of Imperial Russia.

In 1945 Bishop David P. Reimer, Blumenort, Manitoba, gave his grandmother Sarah Loewen Plett the testimony that she had conducted herself in a calm and peaceful manner during her life's journey so that her descendants could remember her as the likeness of Sarah in accordance with 1 Peter Chapter 3.

Sarah must have enjoyed writing and reading. In a letter of March 18, 1926, daughter Maria Plett Reimer waxed nostalgic when she thought back to her mother and her childhood days: "But I am so weak and I still miss so much and long to return to all that which once was mine. When I think of that which I had and my family; oh how dearly I would once again long to sit at the writing table where Mama's books would still all be lying."

In 1985, great-granddaughter Sarah Doerksen Penner (1892-1994), described Sarah as not very big physically, and Cornelius as somewhat stout but not fat. In their senior years, Sarah and Cornelius were known as the "old grandparents" to distinguish them from their children, who were already grandparents many times over as well.

Sarah was resembled by her daughters Maria (Mrs. Peter R. Reimer) and Margaretha (Mrs. Franz M. Kroeker), remembered as attractive and intelligent women. A photograph of Maria, the mother of two East Reserve Bishops, shows her to be a slight woman, about 5' 6" in height, with a rounded face, an expansive gentle smile. In 1981 someone else reported that Sarah had a wide mouth

and pleasant smile.

Sarah's personality stands in interesting contrast to that of Elisabeth Rempel Reimer, an extroverted and outspoken person. Where Elisabeth rushed to and fro, her insatiable curiosity never quenched, Sarah was more the quiet intellectual type. She was happy to allow her husband to take centre stage, but nonetheless orchestrating her life-world and that of those around her according to ancient ways and traditions which she preserved and managed carefully and strategically. Sarah would have been quiet and contemplative, but one who knew precisely what was going on in her domain, and who had a sense of historical consciousness, committed to preserving the social constructs of the past which had served well her mother and mother's mother before her.

It was clearly Sarah that the strong writing tradition among her children came from and not from her husband, Ohm Kjnals, who had grown up in some poverty in Danzig and had experienced lack of stability in his childhood, and presumably little or no formal education. He might well have been one of the best wheat producers in the Molotschna Colony, but it was Sarah who grew up in a stable environment in Lindenau, Molotschna, socialized by her father who loved writing. Sarah's daughters Margaretha (Mrs. Franz M. Kroecker), Steinbach, and Maria (Mrs. Peter R. Reimer) both maintained journals--Margaretha's being the oldest journal by a woman in the East Reserve KG, and Sarah's sons Cornelius, Abraham, David and Jakob all maintained significant journals and/or letter correspondence.

The Plett family was well-to-do and brought a number of material culture items along with them to Manitoba in 1875, where they settled in Blumenhof, three miles northeast of Steinbach. Several of these items have survived as valuable family heirlooms including a copperware cream pitcher, a pottery cream pitcher, a dish and a 1872 edition of the *Martyrs' Mirror*. The transmission of material culture within the conservative tradition informed their posterity about the cultural values and aesthetic views of their maternal ancestors since what was preserved and handed down, or taken along in one migration or another, was largely a matriarchal decision (see *Preservings*, No. 12, pages 96-99).

It is unfortunate that so little information is available about pioneer women such as Sarah Loewen Plett, who played an indispensable and vital role in the development of our Province and Nation. Let us all remember it as a solemn duty to preserve and document the memory of our mothers and grandmothers, that in the future they might receive the recognition which they so richly deserve.

Section 10.17: Abraham F. Reimer 1808-92, Kleefeld.

Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92) was the son of KG founder Klaas Reimer. Abraham grew up on his father's prosperous Wirtschaft in Petershagen but did not inherit his financial acumen. He married Elisabeth Rempel in 1835 (see Section 10.07). In 1836 they moved to Rosenort, Molotschna. Here the family received financial assistance from the Gemeinde from 1847-58.

The Reimers moved to Kleefeld, Molotschna, possibly with sons Klaas and Abraham who moved there in 1857 to start a blacksmith shop. Abraham F. Reimer encountered controversy with Margaretha Friesen, daughter of neighbour and cousin, Jakob F. Friesen. Reimer had difficulty paying his debts, something unacceptable in the KG which assumed full responsibility for all debts of its members. In 1859 he was called before the brotherhood "because he had not kept his word regarding payment of debts". He was also admonished for "his daughter's embellishments with her clothes", possibly Elisabeth, age 16, later Mrs. Peter P. Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

In 1860 Abraham "was dismissed" by the brotherhood. After expressing repentance and a desire to improve those separated for relatively minor offenses were typically taken back the following Sunday. Abraham F. Reimer learned from these experiences, as no record of any subsequent discipline has come to light, as surprising as this may be considering his unorthodox lifestyle and attitude.

In 1864 the Abraham Reimers moved to Markuslandt living with son Abraham and family. In 1869 they moved to Steinbach, Borosenko. Abraham was interested in astronomy and other intellectual pursuits, acquiring the derisive nickname "Stargazer" Reimer. His journals are filled with observations, calculations, facts and figures. They provide valuable information about life in Russia during the 1870s and the pioneer years in Manitoba. Abraham had a fine ear for the voices of those around him and the realities of social relationships, the mundane details of day-to-day living, household chores, and of course, recording the far more prestigious career of his vivacious wife, Elisabeth.

In 1874 Abraham and Elisabeth immigrated to Manitoba. By this time, he had acquired a new nickname, "Fula Reima" ("lazy") Reimer, which speaks for itself. The appropriateness of this nickname is illustrated by the story of how his insatiable curiosity caused him to miss a train connection during the immigration, "Fortunately, though, he was able to catch up with the others by taking the next train." John C. Reimer once related to me that Abraham also did some selling for son Klaas, when he started his pioneer store in Steinbach in 1878.

Three letters written by Abraham F. Reimer shortly before his death are still extant. In an 1888 letter to his very beloved friends and acquaintances in Russia, Abraham wrote that "he has gained about six pounds and that his wife has lost about the same amount, but that notwithstanding she works as hard as her strength allows her to." Abraham then gave a lengthy report of the journey from Russia to Manitoba in 1874.

In a letter to brother-in-law Martin Barkman, Jansen, Nebraska, dated June 26, 1889, Abraham asked about cousin Abraham W. Friesen formerly from Rückenau



Klaas W. Reimer (1864-1944), grandson of Abraham ("Fuella") Reimer, with his wife Maria Brandt, daughter Maria (Mrs. J. R. Friesen), daughter Anna (Mrs. John R. Toews), and son Henry B. Reimer. In 1889 Klaas W. Reimer built and operated the first cheese factory in Steinbach in conjunction with a general store. Within a few years he added two cheese factories in Kleeefeld and Blumenort. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches"/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 8. Klaas' granddaughter Bev married Jim Penner of the Penner Foods chain, Steinbach.



Abraham ("Fuella") Reimer's grandson Peter W. Reimer (1868-1946) and wife Gottliebe Schrien, a German immigrant girl from Poland. In the 1890s Peter established a livery barn and cordwood business on Elgin Avenue, Winnipeg. Later he expanded into a lumber and cordwood business with operations in the Sandilands. He also served as a Justice of the Peace. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches"/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 8.

who has died. He requested a favour of his relatives in Nebraska that they should buy him a German gardening book if they had occasion to go to the city. He also wrote of two species of rare flowers he found and which he had grown, "...the one he gave to Abraham Friesen in Steinbach who has planted it in his garden." Abraham F. Reimer was also a basket weaver in his senior years. Abraham died in 1892 and was buried in Blumenort.

Abraham was an extremely intelligent man, totally unsuited for the drudgery of life as a 19th century dairy and grain farmer. In another time and place, he would, no doubt, have been a Doctor of Philosophy, perhaps in Astronomy, or even a Professor of English, like great-grandson Al Reimer, one of Canada's foremost Mennonite novelists.

Certainly Abraham was eccentric and a non-conformist and if the conclusions of the "Shunning", written by Patrick Friesen, were anywhere near to reality, he would have been excommunicated and shunned a hundred times over. But to the contrary, the structures of the Gemeinde gave him the freedom so that like Oata, in Armin Wiebe's novel, *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, he could indulge in his stargazing and recording the feverish activities buzzing all around him.

Section 10.18: Heinrich Reimer 1791-1884, Muntau.

Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) was the son of Arend Reimer, Petershagen, Prussia, 1776 census. In 1813 Heinrich married Maria Fast (1795-1859), daughter of Abraham Fast (born 1760) and Elisabeth Barkman (born 1771), Tiege. On April 1, 1815, they took over the Feuerstelle which they had purchased from Abraham Neudorfs, Muntau

Heinrich and Maria Reimer took in two orphan foster children, Justina and Elisabeth, daughters of Jakob and Justina Wiebe, Schönau, who died of influenza after the Crimean War. Mrs. Heinrich Reimer, nee Maria Fast, died March 31, 1859.

Between 1845 and 1850 Heinrich Reimer made advancements by portion giving each child 50 ruble banko, making the capital of his children 312 ruble each, for a worth of 3126 ruble. Heinrich Reimer farmed in Muntau until 1858 when he sold the Wirtschaft to youngest son Jakob for 3700 silver ruble. He also sold livestock, farm implements, and various goods for 1249 ruble. After 1858 Heinrich Reimer lived with various of his children, paying room and board.

Heinrich Reimer loved the writings of the faith and gave copies of these books to his children and grandchildren as gifts. In 1863 he purchased 20 copies of the *Kleine Martierer Buch* published by the KG in that year, thereby assisting its publication.

In 1865 Heinrich Reimer moved to the home of his daughter Elisabeth in Paulsheim where he invited his children to a grand "love meal", apparently an ancient custom. In 1866, Heinrich made another advancement by portion among his children of 1500 silver ruble. In 1866 Heinrich Reimer remarried to the widow Johann Dueck, nee Helena Loewen. In 1869 he wrote Peter P. Toews and the brothers and sisters at Borosenko, encouraging them with respect to the proposed reunification of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde with part of the Friesens' Gemeinde. In 1875 they immigrated to Manitoba, Canada, settling in Gruenfeld, later Kleefeld, together with four of Mrs. Reimer's sons, two of whom--Abraham L. Dueck and Jakob L. Dueck--were married to Heinrich Reimer's granddaughters. The couple had a married pair of children together, Margaretha Reimer (1836-66) and Johann L. Dueck (1833-94), Grünfeld.

Heinrich Reimer was a dearly beloved Ohm in the Gemeinde although he never served in any particular office. His second wife died in Grünfeld in 1879. Heinrich Reimer died in 1884. The remains of Helena and Heinrich Reimer were buried in the old Grünfeld cemetery located at the intersection of P.T.H. 52 and P.R. 216. Veteran teacher, Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-92), Blumenort, composed a 25 stanza poem for the funeral. The "Familienbuch" of Heinrich Reimer is a classic example of the genre.

The estate of Heinrich Reimer consisted of \$47.35 per child, of which three shares went to Russia, namely, Isaak Friesens, Jakob Reimers and grandson Abraham Heinrich Reimer.

Section 10.19: Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg 1819-1905, Ohrloff.

The story of Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg starts with her grandfather, Cornelius Warkentin, a wealthy farmer in the village of Halbstadt, Prussia, in 1776 (see Section 5.02). Son Cornelius Warkentin became a prosperous Vollwirt in Blumstein, Molotschna. "After a big fire destroyed all his buildings he was able to rebuild them with the insurance money he received. He took great pride in his well-kept land and fine structures." He was a great horse lover and the breeding of spirited horses lay particularly dear to his heart.

Apparently Cornelius had been very disappointed by the death of two young sons in Prussia. He was proud of his two daughters Liesjche and Auhnjche but still they were only girls. Nevertheless he raised Auhnjche, and presumably Liescjhe as well, as the sons for whom he had yearned.

The daughters of Cornelius Warkentin were raised under the eye of a strong willed but loving father. Anna became known for "her fearlessness, her love for horses and her ability to tame even the wild ones...[which made] him proud of her and she became her father's favourite. She was also headstrong like her father and his father before him; in other words, she was a genuine 'Warkentin'".

Elisabeth was a woman of talent and intelligence. In 1841 she drew a beautiful book plate for her *Gesangbuch*, which she coloured and illustrated. This artwork was featured in the book on *Fraktur* art by Elizabeth Ethel Abrahams.

Elisabeth was a reflective and intellectual young woman. She read the old books of the faith which her grandmother had insisted Cornelius Jr. take along to Russia which she retrieved from the dust-covered and long forgotten chest in the attic. As a conservative intellectual she was searching for a holistic faith which informed each moment of her life and which was not merely an emotional high or the following of some legalistic formulae relative to her personal piety.

It is written that "... [Elisabeth] was open to the teachings of Klaas Reimer and despite her father's opposition...she left the Grosse Gemeinde and joined the Kleine Gemeinde". She was baptised on June 2, 1840, at the age of 21 years, presumably in the KG although this is not necessarily the case. The KG recognized the baptism of all churches, if the faith commitment had been genuine and sincere and so it is also possible that Elisabeth was baptised in the Grosse Gemeinde and transferred her membership later.

In any case, it was a step which took a lot of courage. Her father's response was to disinherit his daughter. Elisabeth was a sensitive and respectful young woman. She did not fight back or disparage her father. She was strong willed in her own way and it appears that she moved out of the parental home at this time, a difficult thing for a young woman to do at the time. Cornelius forbade Anna to visit with Elisabeth and made Anna his sole heir. Anna "had no quarrel with her sister, neither did she have much use for her piety, humility and simplicity."

Soon Anna came to the age where she considered being baptised and joining the church, presumably the GG to which her father belonged. She enjoyed memorizing the Catechism, Scripture verses and songs out of the *Gesangbuch*. While Anna was undergoing these instructions, she came under spiritual convic-

tion, becoming aware of her sinfulness. She had no one to talk to about her feelings and remembered her sister Elisabeth. She remembered that Elisabeth had found spiritual contentment, but that she had also suffered the consequence of her strong minded resolve. Anna decided to visit her sister to “find out for herself.”

“One day, late in spring when her parents were not at home Anna hitched up a team of young horses and prepared to go to Elisabeth’s village. But before she was ready to leave, much to her dismay, she saw her father walking across the yard. As she had expected there was an angry confrontation. He was furious about her intended visit but calmed down finally when he realized that Anna would not back down to his demand. In fact, he liked her best when her stubborn Warkentin nature asserted itself. As she started off with a jolt, she heard his admonishing but kind reminder that she must not let the horses get too hot.”

Anna had not gone too far before her cart overtook a hot dusty, weary traveller, plodding along the dusty way and wiping the sweat from his brow. Gratefully he accepted her offer for a ride. When she told him she was going to visit[her sister Elisabeth], he remarked, “You must be from the Kleine Gemeinde.”

“Oh, no, I’m not,” she remonstrated, “but ...[Elisabeth Warkentin] is my sister.”

Her traveller concluded from that, that at any rate they must be on good terms with one another. And Anna did not tell him that this was her first visit to her sister’s farm....”

Once again Anna felt as though she had been struck by a lightning flash, but this time it was the power of God’s Word that struck her. Suddenly she knew she was saved through Christ Jesus and a beautiful peace flooded her soul. She lifted her apron and wept for joy. Anna never did discover who her messenger of peace was.”

Elisabeth was, indeed, surprised at her sister’s unexpected visit. Seeing her sister’s tear-stained face she thought there must be some trouble at home. Anna reassured her and then told her of her experience along the way and her new-found happiness.

Pleased that Anna had recognized her sinfulness, Elisabeth was nevertheless uneasy about this very visible and apparently superficial joy. She maintained that only after death could one know whether one was acceptable before God. Though Elisabeth saw that Anna had indeed experienced something, she warned her that her happiness was a fleeting thing. Instead she urged her sister to read *Die Wandelnde Seele* (The Wandering Soul) a popular book with her denomination....

At home Anna was not questioned by her father. She was happy she had visited her sister and she conveyed Elisabeth’s greetings to her father. There was now a bond between them and she visited her sister frequently after this.

Anna began to look forward to her baptism with keen anticipation and diligently studied the catechism lessons. Her sister had told her to study the old books they had at home. She dusted off the old volumes her grandfather had insisted should go to Russia and poured over their contents. Soon she was familiar with the writings of Menno Simons and the stories of faith in the *Martyr’s*

Mirror. But both of these consistently pointed to God's Word and, thus, the Bible became her source book as well.

Anna Warkentin (1824-1910) was baptised and joined the GG. She also received a marriage proposal from a widower, Heinrich Willms. They made their home in Tiede where Heinrich served for some time as the village Schulz or mayor.

In this position Heinrich carried out the edicts of Johann Cornies. Tiede had a strong KG fellowship and because they were known as successful farmers and cooperated eagerly with Cornies, they were given exemptions from some of the regulations, such as the requirement to build fancy cornices on their buildings, and were allowed to paint their premises in more subdued colours such as blue.

By now Cornelius Warkentin was "old and sick." Anna discovered to her dismay that her father had made a will leaving his entire estate to her. She admonished father to remember his daughter Elisabeth, whose patience and long-suffering had won her heart. "How could he come before the throne of God if there was no forgiveness in his heart towards Elisabeth."

The result was that her father tore up his will. After further discussions he agreed to apologize to Elisabeth for his shunning and harshness toward her. "Elisabeth was sent for, and humbly her father asked to be forgiven for the years of harshness and separation that he had inflicted."

Cornelius Warkentin died soon afterwards on October 14, 1847. When his estate was divided daughter Elisabeth was also included.

Anna continued to have some leanings favouring the religious culture of Separatist Pietism. No doubt Anna's respectful relationship with her older sister Elisabeth and other members of the KG were important stabilizing influences in her life whereby she avoided the fanatical excesses of the movement.

On December 25, 1847, some two months after her father's death, Elisabeth married Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), son of Gerhard Aron Schellenberg living on Wirtschaft 18 next door in the village of Blumstein. Apparently Elisabeth had not seen her way through to marrying against her father's wishes and respectfully waited until after his death.

Elisabeth was eight years older than Gerhard. One can only speculate over the reasons for the match.

Elisabeth and Gerhard lived in Ohrloff where they were neighbours to Jakob A. Wiebe, later Bishop of the Crimean KG, and Gerhard's brother Aron. Ohrloff was an important village in the Molotschna and home of moderate pietist influences such as seen in the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde. The fact that Elisabeth was not taken in by these alien beliefs demonstrated a sound knowledge of biblical truths and speaks for her faith and personal courage. Neighbours, Jakob A. Wiebe, and Gerhard's brother Aron, were not so fortunate.

Elisabeth was knowledgeable in medical matters and may have served as a midwife. In 1863 she started her own book of medical remedies and prescriptions to which she added new recipes during the years. The booklet included folk remedies such as treatments for great thirst, jaundice, rheumatism, snake

bite, headaches, coughing, to name a few. Elisabeth's continued interest in art is revealed by the sketch of a Red German cow which she drew on the back page of this booklet.

In 1864 Gerhard and Elisabeth became members of the KG by transfer of membership. In 1866 when the KG divided into the "Friesens" and Reform Gemeinde, Gerhard Schellenberg chose to remain with the congregation of Bishop Johann F. Friesen.

In the same year, the Gerhard Schellenberg family moved from Ohrloff, Molotschna, to Rosenfeld, Borosenko, 20 miles northwest of Nikopol. On November 23, 1866, Gerhard was elected as a minister of the "Friesens" congregation of the KG.

In 1874 they moved to Manitoba where they were one of six pioneer families in the village of Rosenfeld, west of Steinbach. This biography is based on one published in *Preservings*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 67-70. See also David K. Schellenberg, "Gerhard K. Schellenberg 1827-1908," in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec. 1996, Part One, pages 37-40, for the story of the Schellenbergs' emigration and subsequent life.

Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg was a woman of courage and vision. She pursued her spiritual journey within the context of her ancestral faith, influenced no doubt by the large KG fellowship in her home village of Blumstein, Molotschna.

For some bizarre reason Mennonite historiography--certainly in the case of Russian Mennonites--has almost exclusively celebrated those who abandoned their historic faith in favour of the endtimes fantasies and legalistic "salvation plans" of Separatist Pietism. Very little has been written about the women who chose to remain true to their traditional faith and culture and who were the backbone of the Mennonite people and the Church of God throughout the centuries.

In the course of her spiritual quest Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg had to take a stand in the face of her father's strong opposition as well as to her sister's enchantment with these fanatical teachings. Elisabeth's patience, forbearance and love, testify to profound courage and emotional strength.

The remarkable impact which her quiet testimony had upon her father, sister Anna, and others around her, speaks volumes for the veracity of her beliefs. The story of her spiritual integrity and loyalty to a faith once received speaks well for all KG women of Imperial Russia. Elisabeth's *Fraktur* art symbolized the quiet testimony and beauty of her steadfast faith.



Elisabeth's sister, Anna Warkentin Willms and her husband Heinrich Willms of Tiege. Photo courtesy of Full Circle, page 193.



Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg had only one child who married and raised a family, namely, Gerbard Schellenberg Jr. (1858-1938), Grünfeld, Manitoba. Gerbard Jr. was married to Anna Toews Regebr (1852-1932), niece of Aeltester Peter P Toews. The Kleefeld Schellenbergs are their descendants. Photo courtesy of Henry Fast, Steinbach/Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 70.



Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), Conteniusfeld, Imperial Russia, and Jansen, Nebraska. Thiessen later moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, believing that the church here was less susceptible to outside teachings. Photo courtesy of great-granddaughter Mildred Eidiger, "Thiessen and Friesen Families," Sanger, California/East Reserve 125, page 40.

Section 10.20: Johann W. Thiessen 1813-88, Contentiusfeld.

Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88) was the son of Klaas Thiessen (b. 1790), stepson of Jakob Baerg, an estate owner who settled in Rosenort, Molotschna, in 1805. Johann's mother Elisabeth Wiens (b. 1793), was the aunt of Ohrloff minister Franz Isaak (1816-99), Tiege, frequently mentioned in this work.

In 1833 Johann W. Thiessen married Anna, daughter of Johann Friesen (1763-1830), Rosenort. In 1843 Thiessen remarried to Katherina M. Friesen (1820-84), daughter of Ohm Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, Molotschna. In celebration of their betrothal he gave her a beautiful valentine (see Section 8.06).

The Johann W. Thiessen family "lived in Rückenau for five years and then in Contentiusfeld for twenty-four." According to the ministerial journal of Ohm Johann Dueck (1801-66), Thiessen had various dealings with the ministerial and brotherhood of the KG during the 1850s. On October 11, 1870, Abraham F. Reimer recorded that "Johann Thiessens from the Molotschna attended the worship service in Rosenfeld." In late 1870 Peter I. Fast recorded "that my Vetter-Onkel Johann Thiessen sold his establishment."

The family emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, in 1874. He had sufficient money to purchase all of section 23 and half of Section 22 establishing the village of Rosental together with several of his children. A few years later he deeded 120 acres to each of his children.

In 1885 Thiessen moved to Manitoba where he married for the third time to the widow of teacher Abraham R. Friesen of Lichtenau, nee Agatha E. Kornelsen. Apparently Johann was displeased that so many of his grandchildren were leaving their parental church to join the newly formed KMB. As a result Johann wanted to move to Manitoba where the KG continued to practice traditional evangelical beliefs. Just prior to leaving for Steinbach, Manitoba, Johann W. had a portrait picture taken and gave a copy to each of his children as a remembrance, probably the oldest KG photograph extant.

On Saturday, Sept. 26, 1883, brother-in-law Abraham M. Friesen, Blumenort, reported that "Brother-in-law Thiessen from Nebraska, arrived here." Wednesday, Sept. 27, 1885, "worship services were held in Steinbach, Manitoba, H. Ratzlaff and Cor. Friesen preached. Brother-in-law Thiessen had Verlobung in Lichtenau with the widow Abr. Friesen." On April 25, 1886, Johann W. was entered in the Brandbuch for Steinbach with coverage of \$350.00 for dwelling, \$150.00 for livestock and equipment and \$75.00 for feed and inventory. On Wednesday, Dec. 4, 1886, "the aged Thiessen departed from Niverville by train for Nebraska." Monday, Aug. 20, Abr. M. Friesen reported "The brother-in-law Joh. Thiessen went to sleep Sunday night and has not woken since then and died at 9:30 p. m. namely, he slept for 24 hours before his death. He reached the age of 74 years, 7 months and 21 days." On Wednesday, August 22, "... drove to Steinbach, the brother-in-law Thiessen was buried" indicating that Johann W. Thiessen was buried in the Pioneer Cemetery, Steinbach (A biography of Johann W. Thiessen was published in 1994 in *Historical Sketches*, pages 649-663).

Section 10.21: Cornelius P. Toews, Grünfeld.

Cornelius P. Toews was the son of Johann Toews (1793-1873) and Maria Plett Toews (1811-95), Fischau, Molotschna (see Section 10.05). According to his own writings, Cornelius lived a wayward youth, writing "My composition and inspiration from the years of my youth was evil so that together with David I was convicted to plead, 'Ah Lord, do not remember me after the sins of my youth, but deal with me according to your compassion and the goodness of your will.'" In 1857 Cornelius was baptised and joined the KG. Shortly thereafter Cornelius came under the ban because of a moral indiscretion. He soon repented and was reaccepted into the Gemeinde.

In 1857 Cornelius P. Toews married Elizabeth L. Friesen, daughter of Klaas Friesen and niece of Cornelius F. Friesen (1812-93), veteran Molotschna school teacher. Cornelius Toews and his bride established their home in Hierschau. Son Johann F. Toews has written that "By profession Cornelius was a saddle and harness maker." Johann added that his father "...did not make the breechings or wheel harnesses, the use of which was forbidden in the Kleine Gemeinde to which my father belonged."

In 1863 the family moved to the village of Friedrichsthal in the new KG settlement of Markuslandt. "Here Cornelius and his brother-in-law built themselves an earth hut called a "Semoljenko" in Russian....On one occasion it occurred that wolves descended upon the roof of our miserable dwelling place whereupon they taunted [the residents] with their howling and growling. Presently, Father and Uncle armed themselves with pitchforks and carefully stepped outside in order to chase them away."

Cornelius' first wife died in 1864. Cornelius married for the second time to Anna Bartel, daughter of Peter Bartel. She was a widow Friesen from Hierschau. One beautiful winter day Cornelius Toews and a number of men had ridden on horseback to Einlage, a village on the west bank of the Dneiper River, some 15 kilometres away. On the way home the ice broke under the horses hooves so that "father only escaped death by valiant exertion."

In 1867 the family moved to Grünfeld north of Borosenko. On January 6, 1868, at a ministerial election held in Grünfeld, Cornelius Toews was elected first as deacon with 17 votes and thereafter as minister with 18 votes. His election caused a certain amount of dissatisfaction because of an earlier excommunication when he was still a young single man. The KG had a protocol that a member who had previously been excommunicated could not serve ministerial office even though the member had been forgiven and reaccepted into the Gemeinde. The result of this controversy was that Cornelius voluntarily relinquished the position, and explained his actions in a letter to the Gemeinde dated March 1868.

On December 29, 1871, Abraham R. Reimer, Steinbach, Borosenko, recorded that his son-in-law "Toews and Korn. Toews, Grünfeld, travelled to the Molotschna and Tiege." In 1873 Cornelius P. Toews served as the delegate to America for the Blumenhoff KG. The delegates had a harrowing experience when they were attacked by a group of half-breeds at a post some 30 miles west of Fort

Garry, now Winnipeg.

In 1874 the family immigrated to Manitoba where they settled in the village of Grünfeld, now Kleefeld. Son Johann F. Toews writes that the pioneers found it difficult to adjust to the cold winters: "Our dwellings were truly not warm enough for the cattle which really had to suffer on account of the cold, indeed, some were actually felled by the cold. There were many grasshoppers the summer following that first winter. One could not walk in slippers, for many the only available footwear, since one's feet squashed all the grasshoppers entering therein, making the soles so greasy that the feet continually slipped out. We were freed of this plague only after all the grasshoppers had hatched out and flown away."

In the winter of 1876 Cornelius Toews bought a small windmill and moved it from the Red River near Winnipeg. Many men from the village went with him to dismantle the mill and move it to Grünfeld. During the time the men were in Winnipeg, on March 16, 1876, his Wirtschaft, buildings and contents, were destroyed by fire. "Everything went up in flames, even some cattle. The family got away with no more than their lives. When Uncle Cornelius came home, he found everything in ashes." Cornelius received an insurance settlement of \$668.33. Unfortunately the fire also destroyed his historical documents and records. Later in 1876 Cornelius completed his windmill, one of the first in the East Reserve. According to the "Brandordnung" records, his windmill was insured for \$300.00 on August 21, 1876. The insurance was cancelled on December 21, 1878. "That very same winter logs were hauled in and a log house built which was insured for \$200.00 and in 1880 they added a new barn insured for \$200.00.

In 1885 the Cornelius P. Toews family moved to Steinbach, Manitoba, where they settled on the SW26-6-6E, establishing a small hamlet called "Fischau". Grandson Henry E. Toews has written that they "farmed [here] until approximately 1898-9, when they moved to Greenland to retirement. His mental facilities gave out, but physically he did not suffer too long and too severely." Cornelius P. Toews died at his home in Greenland, Manitoba. He is buried in the Greenland cemetery. Evidently he had Alzheimers for the last years of his life, and by the time of his death, his mental facilities had failed completely.

On November 24th, 1908, Peter I. Fast, formerly from Rückenau, Molotschna, wrote the following eulogy for his friend Toews: "Greenland has to grieve over the death of another one. This time it is the old Ohm, Cornelius Toews, who is known to many readers here as well as in Russia. He died with the assurance of Jesus as Saviour and His reward. He was 71 years, 8 months and 10 days. He was one of the deputies and one of the last still remaining. He and a few others were sent here from Russia to investigate land and government here in Manitoba. Through the influence of the deputies, including that of Mr. Toews, it was decided to put Manitoba under an agriculture plan. His trip and other minor things helped to make an memorable beginning..."

A number of letters written by Cornelius P. Toews between 1868 and 1875 have been published in "The Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series" in 1986 and 1990.

Section 10.22: Johann Toews 1793-1873, Fischau.

Johann Toews was the son of Cornelius Toews (1766-1831), Tiegenhagen, Prussia. His mother was the daughter of Johann Loewen and Anna Siemens, Tiegenhagen, 1776. The Cornelius Toews family immigrated to Russia in 1803, settling in Lindenau, Molotschna Colony. In 1814 Johann was baptized. In 1816 he married Elisabeth, daughter of Johann Harder (1764-1826), Blumstein, the aunt of Johann Harder, Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde.

Johann Toews evidently served as a school teacher as a younger man. In a letter of August 21, 1876, Jakob Wölk, reminisced about starting his career as a young inexperienced teacher in Fischau, and how grateful he was for Johann Toews with whom he “was able to discuss many a problem, and who endeavoured so earnestly to be a support at ...[his] side with advice which came from his own experiences, and with which he encouraged me with respect to the many problems which arise in a school.” After he was married Johann Toews pursued a trade as a carpenter, cabinet maker and wheelwright.

In 1830 they bought an Anwohnerstelle in Schönau. In 1835, Johann Toews married for the third time to Maria Plett (1811-95), daughter of Johann Plett (1765-1833), Sparrau, Molotschna, 1835 census. In 1838 Johann Toews bought one-half of Wirtschaft 9 in Fischau for 1100 ruble banko. In 1844 they bought the other half for 900 ruble banko. He was a successful farmer and in 1850 he was mentioned in the *Unterhaltungsblatt*, for achievements in the silk industry. Johann worked hard to plant orchards and shelter belts around his Wirtschaft and son Peter later referred nostalgically to “the woods which my father had planted in his time.”

Johann Toews became grievously ill in 1850. He wrote a booklet entitled *Das Wachsame Auge Gottes* (“The Watchful Eye of God”) published by son Peter in 1908. The booklet described how God protected him during a number of life threatening experiences including the accident claiming the life of his father-in-law in 1827.

Johann’s library included *Der Kleine Menno*, *The Wandering Soul*, and *Ausgewählte Schriften* by Pieter Pieters. Son Peter P. Toews has written that his father was one of five revered Ohms in the KG whose collected writings were sources of primary material for his *Sammlung zur Historie der Kleine Gemeinde* which he compiled in Blumenhof, South Russia, in 1873. The other four were Isaak Loewen, Heinrich Reimer, Johann Dueck and Klaas Friesen. Johann Toews was a poet and a number of his poems were published in 1993. In 1865 he wrote an eleven stanza poem expressing concern regarding the “landless”.

Nephew Peter P. Isaak later wrote about Maria and Johann Toews, “I remember them very well since they often visited my parents. Until the time when my father died [1864], they alternatively helped each other butcher hogs every fall.”

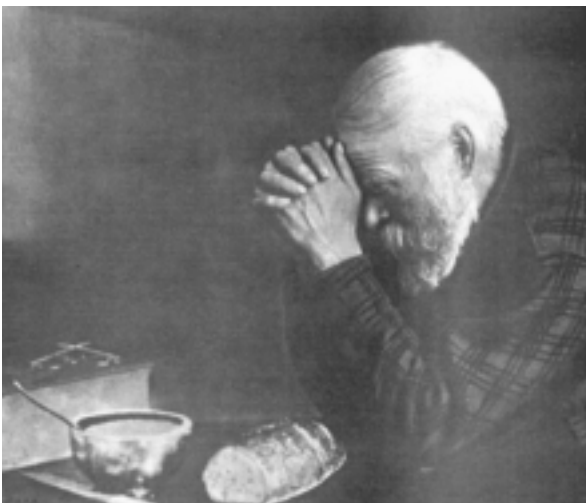
In 1864 Johann and Maria Toews sold their Wirtschaft in Fischau and together with sons Johann and Cornelius they moved to Friedrichsthal in Markuslandt “by Harms” renting a smaller property of 33 1/3 desjation. Johann and Maria “...moved to the place of their children, the Johann Goossens.”

In 1865 Johann Toews went visiting the Molotschna where they looked up an old friend, Isaak Loewen. They stopped in Prangenau and then at Franz Kroekers in Kleefeld where Ohm Isaak was staying, where they hand delivered a letter from son Peter. Subsequently Ohm Isaak replied to Peter giving a testimony of Johann Toews: "Do also greet your beloved parents from me. Your aged father is my bosom friend, with whom I have stood in loving harmony, although in weakness, since the time of our youth. I am always reminded of him when I walk by his former property in Fischau. I also give thanks for the greeting to me, from your father, which I read in his letter to in-law Plett, and from which I could perceive that he still thinks of me. I suppose that our friendship will soon come to an end, as we are both fragile, old and aged. We need not place much expectation that either of us will be here much longer. But the day and the hour are not revealed to us, as this is known to the Lord alone."

Some time prior to 1870 Johann and Maria Toews moved to the village of Blumenhoff, in Borosenko, northwest of Nikopol, living with daughter Susanna. Johann Toews was active even as an elderly man. On Sunday, March 1, 1870, Abraham F. Reimer recorded in his diary that Mr. and Mrs. Toews came to visit them on their sleigh. On November 1, 1871, Reimer and the "old J. Toews were visiting at Hein. Reimer Sr. where they were slaughtering swine." April 17, 1873, the "old" Joh. Toews visited the home of Abr. F. Reimer in Steinbach, Borosenko, for dinner.

Johann Toews died May 15, 1873, at the home of son-in-law Johann P. Goossen, Blumenhoff, and is presumably buried in the village graveyard. A biography of Johann Toews and an English translation of his writings was published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 591-611).

In 1875 widow Maria Plett Toews immigrated from Russia moving to Gnadenu, Kansas, with her children Johann P. Goossens, and single daughter Maria. Maria Plett Toews died at the home of her daughter, Susanna Toews Goossen in Kansas in 1895. They were the parents of Cornelius and Peter P. Toews (see Sections 10.19 and 12.06).



"Man shall not live by bread alone," Matthew 4:4. Drawing of Johann Toews' grandson Cornelius W. Toews (1871-1946), Greenland, Manitoba, more aptly than any words express the deep and genuine faith and abiding piety of the family forebears. Artist unknown.

Part Eleven: Community Ethos and Social Justice

Section 11.01: Books and Publications.

What were some of the salient issues and events which speak for the KG experience in Imperial Russia and define it? Was there any distinct historical ethos? Was the KG unique only in that it forbade wagons with springs and elaborate cornices on their housebarns? This section will outline KG policy and experience in a number of areas relative to these questions.

The translation and publication of Anabaptist devotional literature by the KG was one of its most important contributions to the Russian Mennonite experience. It was the only Mennonite denomination in Russia whose very purpose for existing was stated to be the restitution of the “Anabaptist vision”. The KG was committed to propagating these ideas, and the result was a significant publishing and book distribution program. Therefore it was not surprising that the “little” KG would be the publisher of the first books to be published among all the Russian Mennonites and, in fact, the only publisher of books in the canon of the conservative faith tradition.

By the end of the 18th century most of the books in the canon of Mennonite devotional literature were out of print. Many of these works had never even been translated into German. In the view of the KG it was desirable that these works be available in German for those among the Russian Mennonites who might be interested. As already mentioned, the canon included Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, the *Martyr's Mirror*, George Hansen, Hans von Steen, Isaak von Duhren, Jan Schabaelje, Peter J. Twisck, Pieter Pieters, and others (see Section 1.07).

Pieter Pieters, in particular, was a perennial favourite, translated from the Dutch original, much loved and frequently published by the KG. The *Spiegel der Gierigkeit* (“Mirror of Greed”) by Pieter Pieters and translated by Abraham Friesen became the first book to be published by the KG in 1827. It was also the first book published from among all the Russian Mennonites. The book warned against the evils of greed which stood in contrast to the conservative Mennonite teaching of community of sharing (see Section 11.02).

The next book published by the KG, and in particular, by the brothers Peter von Riesen, Rosenort, Prussia, Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, Russia, and Klaas Friesen, Altona, Russia, was the “Foundation of Christian Doctrine” by Menno Simons, in 1833 in a three-volume set (Vol. I, 335 pages; Vol. II, 278 pages; Vol. III, 414 pages). The formal title was *Die Fundamente der seligmachenden Lehre unsers Herrn Jesu Christi, aus Gottes Wort kurz zusammengefasst von M.S.* (“The Fundamentals of the Salvation Yielding Doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ, briefly composed from the Word of God by M.S.” (Danzig, 1833). In Dutch and Low German the book was referred to as the “Fundamentabuch”. The work was originally published in Dutch by Menno Simons in 1539.

Selections of Menno’s writings had been published in 1758, in the so-called Deknatel edition. It was also known as “Der Kleine Menno” and consisted

of pietistical selections of Menno's writings. Notwithstanding that the Prussian Mennonites had completed the changeover from Dutch to German by the end of the 18th century, the main core of Menno's writings were only available in Dutch. Although many KG read Menno in the ancient Dutch editions, they saw it as a travesty that these writings were not available in German as most Mennonites no longer read Dutch.

The translation of Menno's *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* from Dutch to German was completed by brother Peter von Riesen. He was also in charge of having the books printed in Germany in 1833 as no German printers were available in southern Russia.

The publication of the first German edition of the "Foundation book" ("Fundamentabuek") did not meet with approval among the Prussian Mennonites. They were scared that these writings would create hostile feelings among other religious confessions against the Mennonites, many of whom were desperately trying to shed their theological distinctives and mainstream into Prussian society by adopting Separatist Pietist beliefs. As a result the Prussian Council of Mennonite Bishops had the newly printed Menno Simons books confiscated. Peter von Riesen was summoned twice before the Council and threatened with excommunication if he did not immediately surrender the books. After an intense personal struggle and out of concern for his family Peter finally agreed to deliver up the books which were stored in the attic of the Tiegenhagen Mennonite church where they were exposed to great damage from moisture, mould and mice.

After further lobbying the Prussian Bishops finally allowed some of the books to be released for shipment to Russia. Here they were distributed by the KG, from whence some of them found their way to America where they are now treasured holdings in various archives and private collections.

Unfortunately, the reading of the "Foundation" books was not supported in the wider Mennonite brotherhood in Russia. At a meeting between KG leaders and the Aeltesten of the Gemeinden in the Molotschna Colony, Jakob Warkentin, Aeltester of the Grosse Gemeinde, "expressed his dissatisfaction regarding the Menno Simons books in the presence of four other Aeltesten at the home of Klaas Reimer. He went on to say that he had never read the books and that he would also make sure that he would not do so in the future"--(*Golden Years*, page 277).

This view was also echoed among pietist Mennonites, although for different reasons. In 1910, Peter M. Friesen, the leading historian among pietist Mennonites in Russia, wrote, "On the whole, Menno's polemical writings do not belong to those that one reads with spiritual pleasure, indeed one cannot read them without a feeling of spiritual uneasiness"--(P.M.Friesen, page 18).

Instead P. M. Friesen, and many leading clergymen, including evangelist Bernhard Harder (1832-84), endorsed and propagated the premillennial teachings of Separatist-Pietism such as the writings of Heinrich Jung-Stilling. Jung-Stilling held that the Second Coming would occur in the East (Russia) which would also be the refuge of the "true" church during the coming tribulation, and that the Czar would be the saviour of the church during the end times. The date for the second coming was initially set for 1881. This explained why so many

pietist Mennonites did not emigrate in 1874 when they had the chance and why they ridiculed those who did depart for America (Urry, *None but Saints*, page 227).

But this was not the end of the story. A response to Peter M. Friesen's comment was published in 1911 by Bishop Peter Toews, formerly of the KG and by now leader of the Canadian Holdemans. The response came in the form of a small booklet entitled *Eine Seltsame Begebenheit*, written to answer an inquiry by Professor Mannhardt of Danzig and with the encouragement of Nebraska State Senator Peter Jansen and Steinbach flour mill owner Johann I. Friesen, grandsons of Peter von Riesen and Klaas Friesen, respectively, two of the principals involved. In the little booklet, Peter Toews told the story of the publication of the Menno Simons "Foundation Book" and how the despised little KG had defied the Mennonite establishment of the day, to bring to light some of the finest Christian literature of all time.

The 1845 "Einfache Erklärung" written and published by Aeltester Abraham Friesen has already been mentioned. It served as a brief touchstone of several KG points of faith and practice and defended against various false accusations and gossip circulating in the Molotschna. Abraham Friesen had an abiding concern that Mennonites would read the writings in the canon of devotional literature and wrote, "Therefore I do bid each and everyone, who has love for his own salvation, to read these books, to study them and take them to heart. I trust that these writings might still be able to help many come out of their dreams, as matters here for some time have been so discontented, unsettled and disputative.... Oh! If only one could allow the numerous books by the advocates of foreign faiths to remain in their place, and instead, as Solomon says, to take heed against such writings...Ah, my beloved reader, I have no doubts that if it would be your earnest desire, your would quickly find edification, comfort and revival for your soul in these books.....In his writing, Menno Simons also provided very fine and righteous teaching with respect to the raising and rearing of children and concerning how one is to live and conduct oneself here in this life....Overall these are excellent teachings which are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures."

Abraham Friesen felt strongly about those who were turning to the religious books of other confessions for their spiritual inspiration, usually in complete ignorance of the teachings of their own faith. In a letter of 1824 Friesen referred to the Separatist-Pietist books published by the Berliner Verein, "I find it hard to believe that the books from the Verein contain such teachings ...[which]...speak of faith in Jesus...We are very well aware that many of the books which they publish do not have the spirit of Christ and instead are of the world. Therefore we should not receive their fine books, which they have filled with sweet words and magnificent speech, in order that we would not mislead the innocent hearts by so doing....And Christ spoke saying, 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.'" Abraham Friesen advocated instead that those thirsting for the word of God should come to the fountain of truth, and even offered to give the books for free to those who were financially unable to purchase them.

The death of Abraham Friesen seemed to be the end of the KG publication effort as his successor Johann Friesen was not known to have shown any particular interest. However, the work was taken up and promoted by Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau, who would become the fourth Aeltester of the KG in 1866. Enns initiated a publishing program which resulted in a series of three books of devotional literature being published, commencing with the *Wandelnde Seele* ("The Wandering Soul") in 1860, *Das Kleine Märtyrer Buch* ("The Abridged Martyr's Mirror") in 1863, and *Ausgewählte Schriften* ("Selected Writings") by Pieter Pieters in 1865. Parts Three and Four of the Pieter Pieters book were translated by KG pedagogue Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94), Lichtenau, Molotschna.

The books were often printed without covers and then sent to the book binders for binding as required. They were usually bound in three quarter leather, in a matching set. The distribution scheme included the purchase of several, and sometimes, several dozen, copies by members of the denomination which were distributed as gifts to children and grandchildren, and also sold to neighbours and friends. In the process, the KG left another rich legacy, that of the devotional books owned by members and passed on to their families as treasured keepsakes, often with moving memorials written in the title pages, or places of residence, etc.

The KG also distributed Bibles obtained from the Evangelical Bible Society in Petersburg. Starting in 1872 Aeltester Peter P. Toews corresponded regularly with publisher Johann F. Funk, Elkhart, Indiana, U.S.A. Numerous copies of the recently published *Martyr's Mirror*, the unabridged 635 page 1870 edition, were shipped and sold to the KG in Russia as well as other devotional literature such as *Ebe der Christen, Hoffart und Demut* by Brenneman, a church history by Eby, and *The Complete Works of Menno Simons*. The KG also disseminated their teachings by countless hand written copies of sermons, monographs and letters which circulated around the Molotschna Colony and elsewhere.

The final and concluding chapter of the KG publishing program in Russia was the publication of *Das Friedensreich Christi* ("The Peaceable Kingdom of God") by the "Hard Frisian" Aeltester P.J. Twisck in 1875, just as the denomination was leaving Russia for ever. This small work was an exposition of the conservative Mennonite interpretation of the 20th Chapter of Revelations (see Section 11.04). Peter P. Toews was assisted in the publication by Ohrloff Aeltester Johann P. Harder (1811-75), Blumstein, his cousin.

Books and publications clearly were among the most significant contributions of the KG to Christendom in Imperial Russia. In addition to the seven publications attributed to the KG itself must be added the four booklets published by Abraham F. Thiessen, the Mennonite revolutionary, already referred to in Section 7.06.

The KG came to Canada and the United States in 1874 with a significant print culture tradition. A total of 48 publications including theological, family, historical, institutional and songbooks were published by the KG and KG associated individuals in Nebraska and Manitoba from the time of emigration to 1930. There were also newspapers such as the *Botschafter der Wahrheit* of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, co-founded in 1897 by Peter P. Toews (1841-1922),

the first denominational paper among all the Russian Mennonites. Another important paper was the *Steinbach Post* founded in 1913, by Jakob S. Friesen (1862-1931), Steinbach, also a member of the Holdeman church. The *Steinbach Post* became the newspaper for the Russian Mennonites in Manitoba and eventually all over North America as well as Mexico, Paraguay, etc.

For Further Reading: "Print Culture in the East Reserve," in *MQR*, October 1994, pages 524-550, and in *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*, pages 686-715.



Copy of title page and fly leaf of Menno Simon's Foundation of Christian Doctrine ("Fundamentabuek"), third volume, published by the KG in 1833. Shows the inscription of its first owner, "Maria Penner, Prangenau" [1848] and then in a different handwriting, "1863 Franz Froese Ruderweide." The last inscription is that of "Peter B. Froese Rosenort, Manitoba, 1911." Franz Froese (1825-1913), owner of this volume, originated in Ruderweide, Molotschna, and came to Rosenort, Manitoba, in 1874. Photo courtesy of Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba/Pres, No. 11, page 98.



1985. Delbert Plett, John Goossen and Bob Frey (l-r), examine the 240-year-old Martyr's Mirror belonging to Rev. Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91), Neukirch, Molotschna. Frey, right, is holding one of Abraham ("Fuella") F. Reimer's detailed journals. The picture illustrates how massive these ancient tomes were, and how difficult it must have been for KG emigrants to preserve their libraries. The Martyr's Mirror was inherited by Ohm Abraham's son, Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916), Steinbach entrepreneur, and then by his daughter Helena R. Friesen, Mrs. John D. Goossen. Photo courtesy of Carillon News, May 14, 1986, page 2A.

Section 11.02: Community of Sharing.

Ample primary source material is now available and published enabling the analysis of KG views and policies on a multitude of issues, be it baptism, footwashing, cultural distinctives, community of sharing, social justice, millennialism or nonresistance. It is possible to take one area such as community of sharing and to research the thread of theology and church practice through the writings of Klaas Reimer, Abraham Friesen, etc. from the beginning of the 19th century to the end, observing how views changed regarding certain points and how they did not change with respect to others. Such an exercise also highlights the great wealth of excellent writing and Biblical exposition available on a myriad of issues to be found in the KG "Schrifttum".

The concept of community of sharing was articulated by writers in the canon of conservative devotional literature in the 17th century, particularly Pieter Pieters (1575-1651), Aeltester of the Waterländer Gemeinde in Holland. His writings were much loved and frequently published by the KG (see Section 1.07). In 1827 Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) translated and published *Spiegel der Gierigheid* by Pieters, which was taken to represent an authoritative exposition of scripture regarding the thinking and desires of a Christian in the socio-economic life.

The Gemeinde was seen as a socio-economic unit where the resources of one individual were to be available for the benefit of the entire community, a form of Christian communism. Pieter Pieters wrote: "In the first place we must see to it that we do not take ownership of temporal possessions, which have only been lent to us by God....which the Lord wants to have used in accordance with his will, and to be applied to the necessities of the poor..."

Pieters continued by quoting an ancient minister of the faith who set forth three guidelines regarding a Christian's private ownership of goods, "Firstly, that we do not consume any part of the possession which we occupy other than for our necessities. Secondly, if we are aware of another good-hearted human who is in want and lacks for something, that we would transfer it over for his necessities as freely as if it were his own possession, and so desire it as much for him as we would for ourselves. Thirdly, that if we lose all our possessions, we continue to remain at peace with our disposition and ourselves, as if we had never owned or occupied the same. If we truthfully have these three characteristics about us, then we are also truly poor in spirit and therefore the possessors of the entire Kingdom, etc."

Pieter Pieters used the analogy of the communion wine and bread to symbolize the concept of community of sharing, "For the true believers who evidence themselves as brethren in the Holy Spirit are partakers of one bread and accordingly they are truly one bread and one body. The foregoing is a true example of true Christianity. For in one bread, the fat and lean kernels are crushed and ground together without distinction, they disperse themselves one among the other, are bonded together with water, and baked together in the fire. Similarly the true Christendom is also baptised into one body, blended and kneaded

into one dough which is then baked into one bread in the fire of love.”

In his “Sermon on the Wheat and the Tares”, Klaas Reimer provided helpful exposition regarding the Gemeinde at Jerusalem, explaining that the true meaning was not community of property, rather that “no one had need because those who had land sold it and laid the money at the Apostles’ feet, and then they distributed it according to everyone’s need.” Reimer expanded on the obligations of Christians one toward another, “If there are those in need, then the other one who can give, shall help and give freely in love and with a willing mind... and if it is thus among us, I hope that love and peace will flourish, ...for thereby the people shall see that we are the Lord’s disciples.”

In his 1848 letter to the Hutterian Brethren who had settled in the village of Hutterthal near the Molotschna Colony in 1842, Aeltester Abraham Friesen counselled them regarding their dispute regarding the implementation of community of property. Friesen submitted to them that community of property was not necessarily a requirement of the New Testament church and referred them instead to the teaching of community of sharing based on Matthew 25, “Namely, when we take note of the teachings of the apostle and consequently are obligated for the necessities of the saints.”

For a further exposition of what these necessities were, Friesen turned to Romans 13: “These are the following: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, be hospitable to your visitor, clothe the naked, visit the sick and so on.” (See also the writings of Heinrich Balzer, Section 8.10.)

These teachings were implemented in the KG in various ways. A statement of the denomination’s policy regarding treatment of the poor was made by a resolution of the Blumenhoff congregation on July 29, 1873: “That the policy of the Gemeinde with respect to the general treasury be continued as has been the practice in the past, namely, that financial support was not only to be given to the poor individuals after they are completely penniless, but rather prior to this in order that he would also be able to carry on his gainful occupation--provided of course that an individual is otherwise healthy. And that such support was only to be considered a loan later when the individual was better established, after which the support received was to be returned to the Gemeinde treasury to be used for the support of other poor people.”

The KG also had a policy whereby the congregation assumed responsibility for the loans of all the members. Loans from the church treasury were also supposed to be available to young families. A clarification of these policies was adopted at a brotherhood meeting held on May 6, 1873, by the Blumenhoff congregation: “It was discussed that it was not wrong to require a [guarantor] and to act as a guarantor where monies belonging to widows and orphans were involved: and that if anyone did not have sufficient credit his closest brother would be his guarantor, or the Gemeinde. The same was endorsed by the Gemeinde. As a result everyone shall have credit.”

The policy referred to enabled young families within the Gemeinde not fortunate enough to have parents who could assist them, to purchase land to

start farming on their own. During the 1860s the KG also had an active program of purchasing and/or leasing large tracts of good quality land in settlements such as Borosenko which enabled most, if not all, of its young people to acquire their own farms (see Section 7.02). It is worth noting that the policy of providing land for less fortunate members was adopted in the face of considerable debate and opposition within the congregation.

Isaak Harms (1811-91), Lindenau, has been acknowledged in this regard, having been one of the primary motivators of the Markuslandt settlement in 1863. Some of the wealthiest farmers and businessmen in southeastern Manitoba, such as Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), got their start through these policies. At the same time, the policy of underwriting the loans of members also meant that no one could arbitrarily start a new farm or venture without the consent of the Gemeinde.

The KG also provided aid to poorer members from the church treasury. After the division of 1866, the two Aeltesten, Heinrich Enns and Johann Friesen, decided that the loan accounts would be taken over by the congregation to which the individual belonged. The funds in the church treasury were donated by more prosperous members of the congregation, whose wealth was subject to call of the community in times of need. Frequently money was required for a specific purpose and the collection on a specific Sunday would be designated for that cause, and the membership encouraged to donate accordingly.

According to the "Gemeinde Account Book" of Blumenort deacon Peter Wiebe (1835-1902), various families were supported financially during the 1840s and 50s. The best-known example was the family of Abraham F. ("Fula") Reimer, Kleefeld, Molotschna, already mentioned (Section 10.07). Between 1847 and 1862 the Gemeinde advanced a total of 1200 silver ruble for various purposes including the purchase of a cow, house repairs, house construction in 1856, for straw, pipes and money for insurance premiums. Another well-known example was that of Gerhard Giesbrecht (1816-63), Prangenu (see Section 10.15). A total of 658 silver ruble were advanced to the Giesbrecht family between 1848 and 1868.

Other loans were made to school teachers Cornelius W. Fast (1841-1927) and Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92); to Johann Toews (1826-95)--brother to Aeltester Peter Toews; to Peter Friesen and his widow, Hierschau. Some small loans were also extended to Gerhard Siemens of Prangenu, later one of the co-founders of the village of Steinbach, Borosenko. A loan was also made to David F. Thiessen (1834-1906), one of the wealthier farmers in Blumenort and later Rosenort, Manitoba.

There were other similar instances the details of which are no longer available. Peter Wiebe (1835-1902), elected as deacon in Markusland in 1864, reorganized the deacon accounts at some point after coming to Manitoba, listing mainly the items of interest to the East Reserve. As a result advances of monies that had already been repaid in Russia or advanced strictly as charity would not have been transferred to the new account book. It is instructive that no interest was charged on these accounts and that they were cancelled in 1908 on the grounds that the KG "was in no financial need."

The KG also sought for a high standard of moral conduct for its members and the records of the ministerial are filled with examples of their endeavours in this regard. In fact, the highest standard was exacted from the ministerial itself as they obviously set a benchmark for the rank-and-file. Over the years, various ministers and deacons were defrocked for a variety of reasons, including not being observant enough regarding how a son-in-law treated his maid, irregularities with accounts, over-stepping a boundary line, and allowing cattle to stray unattended.

The emigration was obviously a very critical test of faith and practice in this regard. Congregational collections were held to cover the costs of various delegations such as the Peter P. Toews' journeys to Petersburg and Yalta, for the cost of Cornelius P. Toews' delegation journey to North America, and for the costs of providing passage and sustenance for those in the Gemeinde without means.



Circa 1900. Isaak Harms (1859-1916) grandson of Isaak Sr. (1811-91), and wife Anna F. Dueck (1863-1935), Rosenort. She was the daughter of Peter H. Dueck (1837-1931), Rosenort, whose mother, Anna Harms (1808-74), was the sister to Isaak Harms Sr. Anna Harms Dueck later remarried to Heinrich Ratzlaff (1810-64). She was the first adult among the KG to die in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Gateway to the Past, page 14.

Section 11.03: Social Justice.

The printing and publishing program of the KG made a tremendous impact upon the Molotschna Colony and beyond and was probably its most visible legacy. But it is equally hard to imagine the Russian Mennonite experience without the KG testimony for social justice. Such a statement should not come as a surprise, for if the KG was truly restitutional and represented a genuine Biblicism, it was to be expected that its spiritual ethos would include revolutionary social concepts, at least to the extent that the New Testament and, particularly, the Gospels, represented a genuine restructuring of human relationships based on the paradigm of the Sermon on the Mount.

How were the teachings articulated by the Aeltesten Pieter Pieters and Abraham Friesen reflected in the actual day-to-day faith and practice of the KG? A number of areas will be considered: church discipline, treatment of employees, treatment of women and children, charity to others in need, and the landless struggle.

The intervention of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, on behalf of Anna Thiessen and her father, Franz Thiessen, Schönsee, in 1820 has already been mentioned (see Sections 4.04 and 5.05). Anna and her father had been imprisoned “in Orechov where they languished in terrible conditions”. The conditions were so bad that Franz Thiessen, in fact, died in prison. Notwithstanding that the despised “little” KG was itself still in danger of being exiled to Siberia, Friesen interceded powerfully on behalf of the Thiessens, using all his connections although to no avail. In 1824 Anna was exiled to Siberia where she eventually married and never returned. The Anna Thiessen incident was one of the more dramatic instances of KG religious principles at work and spoke eloquently for its beliefs.

The KG view of social justice for employees and servants was that they were to be treated fairly and with dignity. In his *Spiegel der Gierigkeit*, Pieter Pieters had warned about individuals who “...tightfistedly seek to beat the labourer out of his remuneration even though he very well knows that it is impossible to subsist from such a miserly wage.” Pieters was of the view that “Those who increase their empire in [by taking advantage of servants]...are eating the flesh of the poor” quoting James, chapter five, “...Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.”

Unfortunately, these teachings were not adhered to in the wider Mennonite community. The incident related about pioneer Aeltester Jakob Enns who physically beat his own servant, unfortunately set the standard for treatment of employees in the Molotschna. In comparison, KG founder Klaas Reimer refused to complete the private purchase of the Volenko estate when he found out that it came complete with serfs, as he viewed the ownership of one human being by another as a direct and unequivocal conflict with his confession of faith. Klaas Reimer referred to a letter of March 30, 1782, of his father-in-law Peter Epp, Aeltester in Danzig, to Heuboden in which Epp stated that a minister who had physically struck his servant was not only “...incapable of serving the Gemeinde, but has earned the punishment of the Gemeinde. For hereby he has clearly and

unequivocally conducted himself contrary to the teaching of Christ and his apostles, who have taught us to love our enemies and to do good unto them and not to beat them." The servant "was a human being with a free will" and to be treated with respect.

KG policies regarding the treatment of employees were illustrated by numerous recorded decision of the brotherhood. On March 7, 1848, deacon Isaak Loewen (1787-1873), Lindenau, was defrocked for being too complacent about the unscriptural conduct of his son-in-law Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), who treated his adult serving girl too harshly. August 1, 1854, Jakob Fast, Ohrloff, "was dismissed from the congregation for unacceptable striking of his step-children and servant girls." On September 11, 1854, the brotherhood "dealt with the matter of Wiens from Marienthal regarding the exercise of revenge against his servant. He was dismissed." On June 20, 1866, the prosperous Vollwirt Abraham Rempel (1798-1878), Margenau, was disciplined by brotherhood "...for having struck his herdsman". Rempel confessed and was forgiven. A similar incident occurred on June 24, 1866, when Cornelius Fast of Mariawohl also confessed that he had once struck his herdsman.

More subtle measures were encouraged for the discipline and admonition of employees. Brothers Abraham R. Reimer (1841-91), Blumenhoff, Borosenko, and Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906), Steinbach, Borosenko, sons of Abraham "Fula" Reimer, were masters of psychology and their penchant for making money was certainly enhanced by their ability to motivate employees with means other than physical force. The story is told that one of Abraham's employees was a "trustworthy and willing worker until one day in Abraham's absence he was placed at the head of the table for the noon meal. Occupying this place of honour affected the servant adversely and[Abraham] soon noticed that his loyalty and service were not as in former days....One day when both master and servant were working side by side in the blacksmith shop, Abraham was busy and bid his servant to place the anvil upon the workbench. The servant tried hard but the anvil was too heavy and he was unable to lift it. Whereupon,...[Abraham] with his one free hand, lifted the heavy anvil and placed it upon the bench. After this incident, the loyalty and respect of the servant towards his master were again restored."

Mistreatment of women and children was also forbidden in the KG, more than a century before concepts such as child and spousal abuse were even recognized in Western Europe and North America. Since his father died when Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) was only a boy, he was socialized largely by his mother, nee Aganetha Epp. He experienced first hand the importance of the protection put in place for orphans and widows within orthodox Mennonite religious culture.

Klaas Reimer's sympathetic views towards women were demonstrated soon after he became a minister in 1801. Franz Fast, a handsome wealthy man in the congregation, impregnated his step-daughter. Fast was able to persuade the senior ministers to accept the girl's explanation that she did not know who the father was even though her life was ruined by his action. Klaas Reimer was abhorred when the senior ministers conspired to keep Fast's secret. Reimer advo-

cated on behalf of the young woman, but was unsuccessful.

These same attitudes were revealed in another incident dating to 1820 when Reimer's co-founder Cornelius Janzen (b. 1780) "... had forcibly committed his shame [with a young women]...on the open steppes." When she talked to Janzen, he told her "he had committed the matter to God and that she should do likewise." But eventually the woman was convicted so that she confessed to Klaas Reimer's neighbour, Johann Dueck. Since Janzen had already left the KG, Dueck decided to keep quiet about it. But later in spring he "could no longer carry this burden within himself" and confided it to Reimer. Reimer told his brother-in-law Johann Friesen, a Grosse Gemeined minister, with the result that Janzen was removed as a minister and also banned for three or four days.

Reimer, evidently, was willing to countenance censure and disrepute to the ministerial and Gemeinde rather than to see an injustice being done to the woman.

Traditional Mennonite protocol regarding mistreatment of children and women were firmly entrenched in the KG. This can be demonstrated from the journal of Ohm Johann Dueck (1801-66), Muntau, Molotschna.

On October 11, 1853, "Heidebrecht was dismissed from the fellowship because of improper child disciplining." On November 20, 1855, "The brotherhood meeting dismissed Margareta from Muntau ...because of fornication with a soldier. Her father [Isaak Harder] who had beat her in anger was also dismissed from the Gemeinde." Two weeks later both father and daughter were reaccepted back into the fellowship. A one or two week period of excommunication was fairly typical punishment where the disciplined party was genuinely remorseful (see Section 9.09). The fact that Abraham F. Thiessen "...has recently also beaten his maid servant" was a major concern for the reformers in the KG during the 1866 division.

A Gemeinde founded upon the paradigm of the New Testament was also concerned about needs outside the community. In 1848 the KG made a contribution of 483 ruble to the Russian government for the support of lawful authority and order. The total contribution from all the Mennonites enabled the Imperial government to purchase 130 horses. At 20 ruble per horse, the KG contributed much more than its share. Aeltester Peter P. Toews later made the point that the KG had not known that the money would be used to purchase military horses.

During the Crimean War the KG held another collection for the nursing care of wounded soldiers. KG-associated individuals such as Anna Wiens Groening Wiebe (1810-76) became "...deeply involved in nursing wounded soldiers in her own home" in Margenau while her 17-year-old son Jakob "...did his duty transporting supplies to the front...and bringing the wounded back for treatment. His mother's home nursing ministry became so burdensome at time that she told her children that she would give her farm to any who could relieve her of these duties." A decade or so later her son Jakob Wiebe became the Aeltester of the KG congregation in the Crimea.

On April 10, 1849, the KG received a commendation from the Supervisory-Committee, "...regarding grain which was provided to the Jews."

In 1852 the KG conducted a collection for the Holstein Gemeinde, presumably in the Luebeck area, which had been devastated by war. Another example of this type of aid occurred during the emigration to Manitoba in 1874 when the KG provided a loan of \$600 to the Bergthaler Gemeinde, reported to be in greater need. Most acts of kindness were done on a private basis among family members and to complete strangers and have passed into the darkness of unrecorded history as their donors would have wished. During the 1890s the Dueck family in Grünfeld collected money and sent it to Russia so that their cousins, the children of Jakob Penner, Friedensfeld, once among the richest Mennonite landowners in Russia, but subsequently bankrupted, could come to Canada. The *Mennonitische Rundschau*, a German language newspaper published in Goshen, Indiana, included numerous reports of funds being collected by members of the KG and the KG itself, to send to impoverished Mennonites in Russia.

In 1860 KG Aeltester Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, interceded on behalf of the infant Brüdergemeinde, withholding approval which might have resulted in the institution of various civil punishments as well as their exile to Siberia.

One of the most extreme situations of injustice in the Molotschna Colony was the “landless struggle” during the 1860s when the landless workers in the Colony united to lobby for the distribution of the colony reserve lands, which were rightfully theirs but were being rented cheaply and used for private gain by large land owners (see Sections 6.04 and 7.06). In this instance, a member of the KG, Abraham F. Thiessen (1838-89), became involved as an advocate for the oppressed workers and small farmers. Thiessen made numerous trips to Petersburg and elsewhere to lobby government ministers and other influential individuals on behalf of his cause. In 1873 his enemies were able to get him arrested and in 1874 he was deported to a labour camp in Siberia. In 1876 Thiessen was able to bribe his way out of prison, and escaped to western Europe over the Austrian border with the secret police on his tail. In 1886 Thiessen returned to Russia to once more take up the cause of the oppressed workers but this time he was exiled.

Abraham F. Thiessen became a controversial figure among the Russian Mennonites, significant, first of all, by virtue of the fact that he was hardly mentioned or not mentioned at all, by prominent historians such as Franz Isaak, who was typically quite balanced in his interpretation.

The coverage accorded to Thiessen in Russian Mennonite historiography becomes even more intriguing when one examines the work of Peter M. Friesen, the Separatist-Pietist historian. He made the assertion that Thiessen “...was driven into atheism and that he later destroyed the Kleine Gemeinde” (page 591). This is an interesting comment to make of someone who suffered exile to Siberia in 1874 for the strength of his convictions and who admonished his co-religionists in three separate published books to leave Russia so that their children would not one day say, “Father, out of fear of losing a few ruble you have sold us to these barbarians” (*Die Lage der Deutschen Colonisten in Ruszland*, 1876).

However little Separatist-Pietists such as Peter M. Friesen might think of



Margaretha P. Janzen (1867-1936) and Peter F. Thiessen (1859-1937). Margaretha was the daughter of Johann S. Janzen (1842-1905). Peter was the son of Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), see Section 10.16. In 1889 Peter sold his farm in Jansen, Neb., and moved to Blumenhof, Manitoba, to marry Margaretha. Photo courtesy Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 18.

the Kleine Gemeinde, to call one of its members an atheist stretches the bounds of reason. Far from being destroyed, the KG still exists to the present-day with over 2000 members in Canada, United States, Mexico, Bolivia and Belize.

The late historian, Cornelius Krahn, provided a different interpretation of Thiessen considering him to be "...among the prophets and fearless fighters for the new dawn... who did influence the cause of justice and Christian love in a community that had almost forgotten what that ingredient was..." This was probably a subtle play on words and a reference to P. M. Friesen's concluding statement in his work (page 976): Cornelius Krahn, "Abraham Thiessen: A Mennonite Revolutionary?" *Mennonite Life*, 1969, April, page 77.

Historian James Urry referred to Abraham Thiessen "as clearly a troublesome individual, much given to accusations against his brethren and quite willing to seek redress for alleged wrongs in the courts rather than within his congregation" (page 204). But Urry's conclusion that Thiessen's accusations regarding the landless were "difficult to substantiate" does not appear to be conclusive.

Another example of the KG sense of social justice and standing by the oppressed occurred during the same time when Johannes Lange, a member of the Templar Church, was imprisoned (see Section 6.03). Like Abraham F. Thiessen, Lange got involved in the landless dispute and made many enemies "...who denounced him and his compatriots to the government as dangerous and restless... During his long and lonely imprisonment, when Lange requested the Aeltester to come and give him communion, nobody came. Only a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde, on his own initiative, visited him" (Goertz, page 101).

Abraham Friesen, Abraham F. Thiessen, and Isaak Harms and other KG-ers were motivated by a faith which called people to a radically new vision of social justice within society. They were willing to put at risk their lives and property for the sake of those in need; they were pioneers among Russian Mennonites establishing a model, unfortunately not frequently followed. Their courage and concern on behalf of the oppressed, established a tradition whose spiritual ethos pre-dated those espoused, albeit a century later, by organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee, MEDA and MDS.

Section 11.04: Millennialism.

One of the key issues grappled with by the KG since its founding in 1812 was that of millennialism. No issue with the exception of nonresistance was so constantly challenging the leaders of the KG to defend the veracity of their beliefs and teachings and possibly on no other issue was their faith to be so unequivocally exonerated and vindicated as led by the Spirit of God.

Mennonites of the conservative faith tradition consistently rejected millennialism as a false teaching, and placed it in the same category as the Münsterites of Reformation times who had also believed in a Kingdom on Earth which they actually established using force and violence until they were vanquished by the authorities and executed. In his 1830 "Answer in defense..." Klaas Reimer, KG founder, referred to those who "comfort themselves together with the Münsterites that there shall be another time period. But the angel says, after this time period, "there shall be time no longer (Rev. 10:6).... Israel too believed that Christ was to come....but they expected Him to redeem them from the Romans and to establish an earthly Jewish Kingdom. And even so today. On the basis of Revelations chapter 20, they expect that Christ will first come and live and reign with them here on earth for a thousand years."

Like all Mennonites in the conservatives faith tradition, the KG saw the inroads of millennialism in Russia as a disaster for the faith. In their view this was a false doctrine which led to the truncating of the gospels. Reflecting positively to the recent movement among Christian churches to send missionaries to spread the Gospel, Klaas Reimer stated, "At the same time Satan is also zealously sending out his servants in order that they will falsely expound the Gospel....The false prophets entice them away from the Gospel with the teaching that there will first be an earthly kingdom in the world....It is evident that the Sun of Righteousness has been darkened."

Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), the second Aeltester of the KG felt equally strongly about millennialism. In his 1833 letter to Heinrich Balzer, Friesen also made the analogy to the Muensterites and that "therefore we delineate against this teaching as something frightful and we do so out of love for our fellowmen, in order that no one from among us would have to fall into doubting and error..We perceive the matter to be terrifying....When we are to take the Kingdom of Peace (Friedensreich) which was so dearly purchased for us by the blood of Christ over 1800 years ago, and of which he appointed us his stewards, and then to remove this Kingdom of Peace so far distant from us. So many thousands have had to die for this faith and still have to die... I will take no part in such a rejection."

The latter statement by Friesen was an obvious reference to a popular form of millennialism known as dispensationalism. The span of human history was divided into various time periods or dispensations, each with its own governing paradigm. The time starting with the birth of Christ was supposedly the church age, in that Christ had offered his Kingdom to the Jews who rejected him, and therefore it was offered to the Gentiles. The church age would close with the second coming of Christ when the Jewish people would be converted. In the

meantime the teachings of the Gospel were not in force. In fact, many advocates of these ideas, such as the American Bible commentator Scofield, taught that it was sinful to even try to living according to the teachings of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount.

In a letter to his brother Peter von Riesen in Prussia of October 25, 1824, Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, Molotschna, referred to these teachings as "...deceiving books for which they have stolen and mixed in the Word of God...and the prophet Zachariah compared the same to 'a great flying letter'...a curse which goeth forth over the face of the earth....which include the tidings of the Kingdom of God, which name they unashamedly give to their deceiving message, together with the speeches of Bengel and Stilling and also in hundreds of booklets, declaring those as being pious whom Christ calls thieves and murderers."

But unfortunately the teachings of Bengel and Jung-Stilling became even more popular among the Russian Mennonites after the death of Abraham Friesen in 1849. By the time Peter Toews (1841-1922) was elected as Aeltester in 1870, these teachings were gaining wide acceptance, particularly through the novel *Heimweh*, by Jung-Stilling which one report claimed was accepted as a second Bible among the Russian Mennonites.

In order to fight this widespread apostasy, Toews decided to publish a small treatise by Aeltester Peter J. Twisck, *Das Friedensreich Christi* ("The Peaceable Kingdom of God") which expounded the traditional Mennonite view of the 20th chapter of Revelations (see Section 11.01). As already mentioned, Peter P. Toews solicited the assistance of his cousin, Aeltester Johann P. Harder (1811-75) of the Ohrloff Gemeinde in the publication project. In a letter to Toews of April 9, 1874, Harder stated that "Matters here have already progressed to the point that it [Chiliasm] is being preached from the pulpit...[and there are] those who are casting shame on the teachings of their Saviour in that they do not endorse nor believe in his teachings."

The peaceable Kingdom, wrote Twisck, was inaugurated by the birth of Christ and was alive within the hearts of all believers. The church of God was a suffering visible body and true believers would needs suffer persecution for the conviction of their faith. The second resurrection or physical death held no power over those who looked to the Saviour in grace and were regenerated.

The duration of this peaceable Kingdom was to be for a figurative thousand years during which time Christ together with His followers and the saints who had already died would rule the earth. During the "millennium" Satan would be bound and unable to extinguish or eradicate the Church of Christ. The church as the bride of Christ would survive and subsist in the face of persecution and tribulation by following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. Love was the only force which His disciples and the church should exercise.

In a sense the efforts of Peter P. Toews and the KG in the translation and publication of *Das Friedensreich Christi* completed in 1875 were a last and final parting gift and farewell to their dearly beloved Russia.

For Further Reading: The story of the publication of *Das Friedensreich Christi* and the complete text of the treatise itself is published in *Storm and Triumph*, pages 307-321.



Jakob F. Bartel family, Jansen, Nebraska. L-r., rear: John, Katie (Mrs. J. C. Friesen), Dave, Agatba (Mrs. Charles Robrbaugh), Jacob; Front: Anna (Mrs. J. K. Friesen), Jakob F. Bartel (1858-1929), Heinrich, Mrs. Katharina Bartel (nee Flamming), Maria (Mrs. I. C. Friesen). Jakob's mother, Agatba Fast (1828-96), was a sister to Johann W. Fast (1837-1924), publisher of the Freundschaft Kries in Hillsboro, Kansas, 1885-6. They were the children of Johann Fast (1794-1864), Blumstein, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Maria Bartel Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.



Circa 1910. Isaac R. Loewen (1860-1953) and Elisabeth S. Friesen (1864-1934), Winkler, Manitoba, where they owned Winkler Woodworks, corner of South Railway and 6th Street. Isaac R. Loewen was the youngest son of David W. Loewen (1836-1915), Hochstadt, who went to Russia in 1902 to visit his old birthplace in Lindenau, where the family home built by his grandfather Isaac Loewen (1759-1834) in 1805 was still standing. Elisabeth S. Friesen was the daughter of Heinrich Friesen (1827-77) whose father Hermann Friesen (b. 1790) settled in Schönau, Molotschan in 1816. Photo courtesy of Winkler, A Proud Heritage, page 134.

Section 11.05: Nonresistance.

Nonresistance was the issue which triggered the separation of the original 18 families of the KG in 1812. In 1874, some 60 years later, nonresistance was the issue which determined that they would be among those emigrating from Russia.

As already mentioned in the previous section (Section 11.04), nonresistance in the conservative faith tradition was an integral part of the theology and not merely a pleasant sounding adjunct to be prominently displayed if and when convenient. The very essence of the Peaceable Kingdom of Christ as enunciated by Twisck was founded on love based on the teaching of Christ "to love your enemies". Klaas Reimer considered love to be the foremost commandment and in his 1832 "Sermon on Love and Brotherhood" he provided much teaching on the subject and pleaded with his followers "...to proclaim the Gospel of peace, so that brotherly love would be genuine in our midst... to accept the faithful love and learn of the Lord genuine humility. For herein we shall find peace unto our souls."

There was no clear theological statement on nonresistance among the early writings of the reformers in the Molotschna. But the teaching of the reformers was defined at every turn in the pioneer Gemeinde, as Klaas Reimer and his supporters were challenged time and time again with new issues which tested their faith. In 1807 the Russian government asked for permission to solicit funds in support of the war with Napoleon, "requesting voluntary contributions of war materials such as rifles, swords, money and food." Aeltester Jakob Enns initially permitted the book of pledges to be circulated but he withdrew his approval after the reformers came to him in protest.

Many of the issues concerning nonresistance centred around the governance and regulation of the Gemeinde. When Klaas Reimer and his friends arrived in the Molotschna they found that there was open disputation and use of force "... that people had come to blows and were fighting with each other." The response of Aeltester Jakob Enns was to refer the guilty ones to the Gebietsamt for punishment (*Golden Years*, page 158). In 1815 a jail was built in Halbstadt. On January 28, 1815, the Gebietsamt "sent forth a notice and thereby decreed that the dancers and the drinkers should be penalized with a fine or work the way Aeltester Enns had taught."

This also meant that the residents of the Molotschna Colony were to take turns serving as guards, presumably as part of the "Scharwerk" or statute labour. The members of the infant KG refused to perform such guard duty which Klaas Reimer regarded as being "... entirely against our Confession of Faith and the teachings of Christ, who taught us urgently to the contrary in Matthew 5:39, `...But I say unto you that ye resist not evil.'" As a result the reformers were accused in the Kontor in Odessa as rebels "with a severe charge lodged against us few with General Insov in Odessa." Reimer was "sternly ordered to appear before the Gebietsamt because ...[he] was to assist in apprehending thieves and that if ...[he] would not do so ...[he] was to be sent away." It was at this time that Reimer made his famous statement that "I have covenanted on my bended knee before God and the Gemeinde that I would not exercise revenge against anyone

and before I do so, I prefer to be satisfied with that which God and the Czar would do with me." Reimer's position was acknowledged and accepted by the authorities and the members of the KG were exempted from the requirement.

In addition to the usual quotations from Menno Simons and other writings in the canon of devotional literature, Klaas Reimer referred to the authority of earlier Aeltesten in Prussia. In a letter of 1819 Reimer quoted from a sermon on the Lord's Prayer by Aeltester Cornelius Regehr of Heuboden, who emphasized that believers "are obliged to take the sword of the spirit" and not the physical sword. In his autobiography, Reimer referred to a letter of March 30, 1772, written by his father-in-law Peter Epp, Danzig, to the Heuboden Gemeinde in which Epp stated that "such a person who struck another adult person was not only completely unqualified to remain as a minister, but should not be allowed to remain as a brother in the Gemeinde either."

The practice of guarding and transporting of prisoners continued. In a letter to Jakob Klassen, Kronsgraben, of 1831, Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, "...referred to fighting and the transporting of prisoners which is not a figment of my imagination. With my own eyes I saw two wagons driving by on the preceding Sunday and seated on each wagon was a prisoner with his hands tied behind his back. Tell me my beloved, where have you ever read this of Jesus, in whose footsteps the Mennonites have covenanted to follow on bended knee? Or where have you read that any apostle or true believer has ever done such a thing? And yet those who still want to be called nonresistant Christians are so inclined."

The issue of nonresistance became very real during the Crimean War when Britain, France and Turkey attacked Russia laying siege to the navel base at Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula, and bringing the ugly spectre of war to within two hundred miles of the Mennonite Colonies. The KG held a collection for the nursing care of wounded soldiers and many young men also served in the "podwodden" or transporting of military goods to the front in the Crimea (see Section 7.01). Some strong concerns were later expressed by Aeltester Peter P. Toews that the KG had gone too far "in yielding to the demands of the state in regards to the provision of drivers and vehicles for the transportation of goods for the Russian military."

To the KG, nonresistance was the corollary of Christ's foremost commandment of love and the fundamental purpose of His coming to earth as a human being as the Word incarnate to establish his Peaceable Kingdom. As a result the KG teaching of nonresistance permeated every aspect of their lives. The struggle of the pioneer reformers to avoid serving as guards for prisoners has already been mentioned.

Unfortunately these issues arose again during the 1860s and became one of the reasons for the movement of the KG out of the Molotschna. In his memoirs, "Eine Lebensreise," Johann F. Harms referred to 1865 as the date when the system was changed so that village farmers had to take their turn quartering prisoners and guarding them. Harms stated that "The government regarded this as a police service without arms, but it seemed to be somewhat questionable to

us. Especially the members of the Kleine Gemeinde rather moved away, to rented land, where they were spared from this sort of thing. The other farmers said that one must be obedient to the authorities and that we should attempt to carry it out.”

A related issue arose in 1871 when Abraham Klassen (1826-1906), a KG minister in Prangenau, Molotschna, was ordered to serve on a jury. He repeatedly refused and was threatened with huge fines. The matter was resolved favourably when Klassen wrote a letter to Peter Schmidt, Steinbach, Honourary Justice of the Peace, explaining the theological basis of his position.

A related issue arose later the same year when the KG in Borosenko were advised that the Nikolaithal Vollost district was to be established in their area and that they were to proceed with the election of the necessary officials. In September, 1871, the Aeltesten Peter P. Toews and Abraham L. Friesen travelled to Ekatherinoslav where they filed a petition expressing “fear respecting the involuntary imposition of offices which would be incompatible with our conscience and faith...[for] we are unable to hold any office where the use of force or the taking of prisoners might be required.”

Part of the problem was that the Mennonites from the Chortitz Colony who had established the villages of Ebenfeld, Schöndorf, Nikolaithal and Blumenfeld, Borosenko, favoured the formation of a Vollost. The Old Coloniers in the area had a different view of nonresistance and did not see that there was any danger to the integrity of their faith. The matter was resolved as the Mediator-Judge ruled in favour of the KG and exempted them from voting for and possibly serving as judges and any other position which would be in conflict with their faith. The first Oberschulz of the Nikolaithal Bezirk or Vollost was a Rempel.

These issues kept alive the KG concern regarding nonresistance and insured their vigilance and sensitivity to the issue. In 1870 an Imperial Ukas was issued proclaiming the end of many of the privileges which the Mennonites had enjoyed in Russia since their immigration in the previous century. Not only was their special colonial status being revoked they were also to lose their perpetual exemption from military service which Czar Paul had guaranteed in perpetuity in 1800. By 1871 the first Mennonite delegates travelled to Petersburg to obtain information and to lobby government regarding the exact nature of the new laws.

The KG response to this issue and their actual involvement in the process will be dealt with at greater length in Section 12.09. A petition prepared for presentation to the Imperial Czar although never actually presented provided a clear statement of KG beliefs. The petition pleaded “For grace! To have consideration for the conscience of a small nonresistant flock, in which every single member has solemnly promised his Lord and Saviour to dedicate every limb as a weapon of righteousness, Romans 6:13. Not only that we are not to brandish the sword but also that the tongue, as part of our body, will not take part in any expression of a judgement or punishment. And also that we are not to bring before the authorities whom we are to honour, fear and obey, any charge or legal process. 1 Peter 2:13-25, Romans 13 and 1 Corinthians 6.” The wording of the petition forms an appropriate conclusion to this chapter.

Section 11.06: Discipleship and Discipline.

By definition, discipline was a necessary element of discipleship. The soldiers of the cross must dispose themselves to the dictates and directions of the Peaceable Kingdom of Christ. God had chosen to build His earthly spiritual Kingdom with weak and imperfect mortals and had also chosen the same means with which to regulate and govern it. The function was performed by the members of each Gemeinde democratically assembled as a corporate body. The Aeltester and the ministerial acted as an executive body in identifying situations in need of discipline and recommended as to their disposition.

The canon of devotional literature contained a great deal of inspired writing regarding the topic of discipline and was repeatedly referred to among the KG. All conservative Mennonites believed in the necessity of the ordinance of the ban, but often disagreed on the extent and severity of its implementation. Evidently the ban was little used during the early years of the KG and was only seriously exercised after Klaas Reimer's victory over the false humility pietists in 1828. In a letter of 1830, Klaas Reimer wrote that "...it is our view that in light of the Holy Scriptures, we find that we have not always exercised the ban strictly enough. When we first separated, a spirit of deception entered so strongly around us that we would not use the ban for quite a time" (see Section 5.07)

But as soon as the decision was made to implement evangelical discipline, it became very clear that there was disagreement as to its application. Reimer's brothers-in-law, Peter von Riesen and Abraham Friesen, took a much stricter view of the ban and favoured harsher measures including shunning transgressors for life in some cases. In his 1832 "Sermon on love and brotherhood," Klaas Reimer responded to such ideas, quoting Menno Simons who advised his followers to "take heed in exercising the ban that you do not become proud so as to engender hatred like the others, Therefore, take care when you seek to remedy a small evil, that you do not create a bigger one. The shunning is good if done in the right way, namely, to avoid stumbling. I would gladly see you to take care and to warn and caution people not to apply one scripture reference too harshly and thus violate others. Some use the ban too readily without proper consideration. Therefore let us properly consider all things, heeding patience and longsuffering; and let us also deal that way with our fellow servants, so as not to be a stumbling block to anyone, whether in the world or the Church of God."

Klaas Reimer interpreted Menno Simons to say that "he did not want to use the ban too readily and that we ought not to deal highmindedly, lest we create a greater evil and come to a fall thereby...the sinner should not be totally shunned and pushed to the others... so that he [should] be led to realize his shame and be converted."

In his 1845 "Einfache Erklärung", Aeltester Abraham Friesen wrote, "Separation is a great medium of love and a very necessary measure for the salvation of man." Friesen repeatedly asked the question, "Who is acting more benevolently...those who because of fleshly love do not cut off the offending member and indirectly cause them...to be cast into the fire of hell.....or [those]

who together with Paul deliver such a person unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus?"

In his 1843 "Declaration to the Agricultural Society", Abraham Friesen wrote that "Just as a house cannot subsist if it does not have doors, portals and walls, through which the evil men can be driven out and locked out-but into which the good and virtuous can be received, subsisted and protected, Christ has given His Gemeinde the keys to Heaven for its protection which is His Word, Matthew 18:18, and 16:19, John 20:23, in order that His Gemeinde through and in accordance with the Word would judge and punish all those which belong under its fellowship and who are found to have been offensive, 2 Corinthians 18:8 and 12:10."

The separation must be applied so that the entire Gemeinde "would not become soured." It was to be applied in accordance with the seriousness of the sin "and not unto the ruination of men, Luke 9:56" as separation was instituted for "the renewal of a sinner" who has separated himself from God and the Gemeinde by his transgression. "Nor is anyone to be separated...who has not previously separated himself from God through his own sins, James 5:16."

Abraham Friesen also stressed a part of evangelical discipline which is seldom talked about, that "A repentant sinner must be accepted back into the Gemeinde as "...repentance and regeneration again openeth the entry into the Kingdom of God, 2 Peter 1:11...And just as one endeavours to rejoice over the penitence and return of the lost sheep, penny, or prodigal son, the believers and all the angels of God shall rejoice over the penitence and return of one brother or sister who was lost."

The position enunciated by Aeltester Klaas Reimer that he no longer had spiritual responsibility for those who left his Gemeinde to go to another was affirmed by his successor, Aeltester Abraham Friesen, even if somewhat reluctantly. The practice was continued by Johann Friesen, elected as Aeltester in 1847, but evidently somewhat indifferently with matters declining to the point that the KG "allowed apostates, if they handed in their written cancellation of their membership before they were expelled, to go their own way..." Aeltester Peter P. Toews stated that this became such a popular device and contrivance that discipline by the ban under Johann Friesen became a rare happening. In the view of Peter P. Toews this was an "attractive liberty, for many a lustful or also discipline avoiding and cross-fleeing child of God in the Church of Christ."

Ironically a slackness in exercising discipline was not one of the accusations and counter-accusations exchanged between the reformers and the supporters of Johann Friesen. Although Ohm Johann himself seemed to hint at such a possibility in his "Declaration of 1866" stating that "The foremost reason why this situation has gone awry may well be that we have not given serious enough heed to the proper exercise of the ban with respect to the present as well as in previous matters." But Ohm Johann went on to state that this was not applicable in the present matter as no sin punishable by death had taken place. The point was made several times that many were disillusioned with Johann Friesen be-

cause he had previously consistently admonished his parishioners to exercise shunning against those who were separated and now he had taken Abraham F. Thiessen back into the Gemeinde without requiring him to bend the knee, namely, without repentance.

Since Peter P. Toews himself collected the most important letters regarding the 1866 division, it raises the spectre that his view was formed many years after the fact, perhaps in order to justify a different interpretation and practice in the Holdeman church which he joined in 1882. The ministerial journals of Johann Dueck covering the years 1848 to 1866 record many transfers to other Gemeinde but do not reveal any rash of transfers out which could be attributed to a desire to circumvent discipline.

It is interesting to note that the KG in Manitoba and Nebraska also adopted the policy of avoiding former members who “are leaving or have left our church” which was formally recorded as part of the ministerial resolutions of 1899. One source referred to these resolutions as being drafted by Rev. Peter R. Dueck, Steinbach, who became Aeltester of the East Reserve in 1901. Possibly the move to a more extensive exercise of the ban implemented by Toews during his tenure as Aeltester in the KG was merely continued by his successors.

The KG position may well have been in response to the challenge posed by the Holdeman and other Revivalist denominations such as the Krimmer Brüdergemeinde, Brüderthaler (EMB) and Brüdergemeinde, all of whom were actively targeting the membership of the KG in various areas, each claiming to be the sole receptacle of truth and condemning all others. In other words the KG had to tighten up its exercise of the ban and shunning to compete with the Revivalist groups whose historical ethos included active involvement in the slave trade, waging of war, and therefore was not subject to the humanitarian compassion found in the teachings of Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders such as Klaas Reimer.

According to Peter Toews’ ministerial journal of 1872-78, discipline was applied in the Blumenhoff Gemeinde in all manner of matters. The Toews and Dueck journals provide an instructive record of the prayerful and spirit-filled ministry of the KG “Lehrdienst” admonishing and encouraging believers in the vineyard of the Lord and directing saints and sinners alike to the refuge of His church.

Discipline within conservative Mennonite denominations was a measured response to acknowledged and confessed moral lapse, spousal abuse and dereliction of socio-economic obligations to family and neighbours. Such measures were only implemented after due process in a democratic hearing before the laity. In the vast majority of cases such discipline was successful in bringing a penitent sinner back to God and full fellowship within the community. Such disciplinary measures had nothing in common with the psychological terror used by Separatist-Pietists and American Revivalists, and later Fundamentalists, to implement thought control over their parishioners, reminiscent of the Salem witch trials and Orwell’s novel, ‘1984.’

Section 11.07: Assurance of Salvation.

One of the teachings conflicting most directly with the spiritual ethos of the conservative faith tradition, was the Separatist-Pietist doctrine of “assurance of salvation”. The teaching held that “true” believers would have a conscious cognitive knowledge that they were saved, as in the form of a constant intellectual affirmation and reaffirmation. Such an idea was directly contrary to the traditional Mennonite belief that God alone knew who was saved and who was not saved and that to speculate and/or to elevate oneself to such knowledge abrogated the divine nature of God and constituted spiritual arrogance and a sin against His boundless mercy and grace.

No other teaching struck more at the heart of the chasm between the two religions, challenging the evangelical teaching of the spiritual, peaceable Kingdom of God. Believers in the conservative tradition believed that Jesus, the Son of God, had come to earth to institute a spiritual Kingdom, and that salvation followed for those who accepted Jesus as their Saviour and became His disciples. Being a Christian, simply put, meant following Jesus, following His example and His teachings, as enunciated in the Gospels, such as loving your neighbour as yourself, feeding the hungry, clothing the sick, etc.

Discipleship or “Nachfolge” was really a very simple concept which even the youngest child could understand. This was the foundation of faith for believers in New Testament times. The seminal leaders of the faith in Reformation times such as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips had recognized and acknowledged this teaching as the core of genuine evangelical belief. They saw it as a great and all-powerful truth and emphasized the teaching as an integral part of Christian faith. Those who followed the Saviour in simple and childlike obedience had no need for artificial stimulation and/or reassurance. They were living their faith, and to experience Christ through that faith was assurance enough; this was the true and only evangelical assurance of salvation.

In fact, the very need of a religion to develop an artificial doctrine of “Assurance of Salvation” seemed to affirm the great impoverishment and bankruptcy of that faith and religious culture, stemming from the failure of John Calvin to complete the Reformation by going all the back to the Apostolic church. The obsession of so-called “Evangelicals” about assurance of salvation and their focus on the artificial stimulation of such feelings seemed to reveal a fundamental lack of confidence in their faith, as if they themselves do not really believe what they were teaching.

Obviously somewhere, somehow, there were or had been Christians not satisfied with the simple experiential faith of the Apostolic Church. Perhaps they were those who were ambitious and seeking positions of power in secular governments, or those who wanted to exercise revenge or wage war against neighbours, or ecclesiastical leaders desiring power over their parishioners, or businessmen who felt that such simple discipleship interfered with the advancement of their operations. The question became, how could such a childish faith--the simple foolish teachings of the Gospel--be circumvented? What could be done so

that believers could be Christians and still do all the things that pleased the flesh?

The answer in the end for some Protestants was quite clever. Simply get rid of the Gospels. Take the Gospels out of the Bible or at least come up with some teaching which restricted their application to the present day, and presto--the result was a ready made, all-purpose form of Christianity which no longer interfered with all the things that "normal" people wanted to do in life.

This wonderful new concept was called "millennialism" (already discussed in Section 11.04). Simply declare that the span of human time was divided into epochs or dispensations and that God had established a different covenant or governing paradigm for each. Christ offered the kingdom to the Jews but they refused and so He was unable to institute His earthly Kingdom. Instead, Jesus, supposedly, offered His salvation to the Gentiles, constituting the "church" age. During the church age humankind was saved by grace alone, it was a sin to even attempt to practice or follow the teachings of Jesus epitomized in the Sermon on the Mount.

This was the view taken by C. I. Scofield, for example, the great American Bible expositor and editor, whose teachings were like a second Bible for a whole generation of American evangelicals. This was the sort of doctrine taught in North American Bible Schools and Seminaries during the 1940s and 50s.

Of such a weak and superficial faith, Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) responded "I will take part in no such rejection...." Friesen continued by giving his personal testimony that the Kingdom already existed in his heart, "...I do not consider myself to be very intelligent but nevertheless I do have knowledge within my heart that the reign of Christ has already found its commencement, and that the time [of his first coming] has already brought the Gospels to life in great clarity and power."

Obviously there was something lacking with the Separatist-Pietist idea of dispensing with the teachings of Jesus. Sure Christians could be saved but if they were not supposed to actually follow the teachings of Christ as had been the case with the New Testament church what were they supposed to be doing, other than perhaps winning other people to the same truncated, disembodied religion?

The answer was the doctrine of "assurance of salvation". Protestants such as Separatist-Pietists came up with this teaching to cover the black hole or lacuna in their faith. The teaching held that they should feel affirmed and "saved" during their lifetimes. Like the various legalistic forms of conversion experience required by various denominations, feelings of assurance of salvation were stimulated by all manner of artificial means, and worship services to a large degree were designed to foster and promote the same. Separatist-Pietist denominations invariably went one step further and taught that such feelings of assurance of salvation were a requirement of salvation, another one of the many legalistic prerequisites already referred to in Section 7.08.

By a complicated strategy of Biblical proof-texting and quoting verses out of context, Separatist-Pietists developed a body of "evangelical" teaching on the subject, sufficient to convince their followers who were always strong on emotional appeal and weak in the intellectual department in any event. For example,

the words “that ye may know that ye have eternal life...” 1 John 5:13, were frequently quoted by Fundamentalists in support of their “assurance of salvation” teaching, without mentioning the opening words of the verse, “These things have I written unto you....” which referred to the earlier parts of the Epistle such as chapter 2, verse 4, “He that saith I know him, and keepeth not my commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

The foregoing also illustrates the differences in the hermeneutics of Separatist-Pietists versus conservative Mennonites. To the Mennonites the Bible was not only the Word of God but also an historical document describing the story of God’s people in a chronological sequence, with Christ as the centrepiece and cornerstone. This meant, for example, that the writings of Paul were read subject to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and not the other way around. The interpretation of any particular verse of scripture had to be consistent with the entire Bible, read from this perspective.

Separatist-Pietists, by comparison, apparently decided what they wanted the Bible to say and then they extracted the appropriate verse in isolation as already seen in the forgoing example, and then read every other verse, conflicting or not, subject to the one being elevated. In this way, great spiritual gurus such as Albrecht Bengel and Jung-Stilling were able to set dates for the second coming of Christ, notwithstanding repeated statements in the Bible that believers should not even speculate about such things, Deuteronomy 18:22.

The end result of taking the Gospels out of the Bible and of postponing them to a future age and replacing discipleship with various legalistic requirements such as assurance of salvation etc. amounted to little more than a complicated sophisticated subterfuge which would have been the envy of medieval theologians whose genius, however, was limited to debating how many angels could dance on the point of a needle.



Susanna R. Loewen (1876-1917), daughter of David W. Loewen (1836-1915), formerly Lindenau, Molotschna, one of the larger landowners in Hochstadt, Manitoba. She married Jakob F. Friesen. Photo courtesy of Footprints of Mi-Chig-Wun, page 153.



Jakob F. Friesen (1874-1969), son of Steinbach teacher Diedrich S. Friesen (1849-1901). Jakob’s maternal grandfather was Cornelius F. Friesen (1810-92), Blumenort, Manitoba, a career teacher. Photo courtesy of Footprints of Mi-Chig-Wun, page 153.



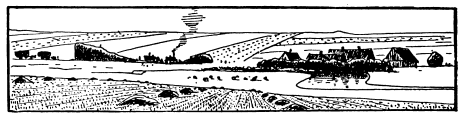
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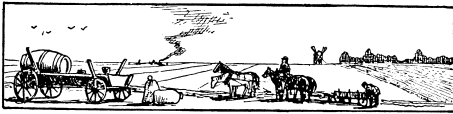
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The Months of the Year, by Johann H. Janzen

Section Twelve: Consolidation and Emigration

Section 12.01: 1869 Union

The 1866 division had resulted in the formation of two congregations, those who remained with Aeltester Johann Friesen (1808-72), Neukirch, sometimes referred to as the “Friesens” Gemeinde, and those who held with the so-called reformers led by Heinrich Enns (1807-81), Fischau. By 1866 the KG was living in four regions, the Crimea, Markuslandt, Borosenko and the Molotschna, with a functioning congregation in each area.

The villages in the northern part of the Crimean peninsula were about 250 verst from Borosenko, while the Markusland settlement was 100 verst from the Molotschna and Borosenko 80 verst from Markus. The members of the KG and, particularly, the ministerial did a great deal of travelling between these congregations in the course of which they became intimately familiar with their homeland, with the Russian and Ukrainian people and culture in which they lived as well as the numerous other ethnic groups and colonists who lived in, among and around them.

As was to be expected the consolidation process followed quickly in the wake of the division. On October 10, 1866, the brethren from all four regions were called together at a brotherhood meeting in Fischau, Molotschna. The senior minister of the reform group, Heinrich Enns, was elected as Aeltester by an overwhelming majority. The other candidate was the minister Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Schwesterthal, Crimea. Also elected at the meeting as ministers were the cousins, Peter P. Toews and Gerhard P. Goossen. Approximately 60 brethren were present. A year later, December 3, 1867, a ministerial election was held in Annenfeld, Crimea, with the election of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), with a majority of seven votes.

Another all district brotherhood meeting was held in Blumenhoff on January 4, 1868. Two days later, a ministerial election was held in Grünfeld with Cornelius P. Toews, the older brother to minister Peter P. Toews, elected with a majority of 18 votes. The other candidate was brother-in-law Johann P. Goossen with six votes. A communion service was held the next day, January 7, with 59 members present in Borosenko for that purpose.

However, when the Molotschna brethren returned home there was considerable dissatisfaction regarding the election of Cornelius P. Toews. A teaching in the conservative faith tradition held that a person who had once been under the ban, could not subsequently serve as a minister. In some cases the proscription only applied if the offense had been a moral deviation. The purpose of such a provision would be similar to modern regulations restricting service in offices where there were opportunities for taking advantage of those in vulnerable situations. Authority for this protocol was found in the writings of Aeltester Peter Epp (1725-89), Klaas Reimer's father-in-law, particularly a letter of March 20, 1782, already referred to.

The result was a great deal of dissatisfaction as Aeltester Enns and the ministerial had previously been “persuaded to declare as invalid a number of earlier actions, namely, the excommunication of a number of brethren.” The votes for minister now fell on one of these. The matter was particularly difficult in the Molotschna as Aeltester Enns “had not put this matter to the brethren prior to the election, namely, the declaration of invalidity of the earlier actions.”

The position of Enns was already tenuous. Although many agreed with his concerns regarding Aeltester Johann Friesen, they also felt that he had acted too hastily in some of his judgements. As a result of these new matters “he fell even more under suspicion than the others in the ministerial.” The matter with Cornelius P. Toews was resolved when he voluntarily renounced “his office because of the discord caused by his election.” Letters written by both Peter and Cornelius P. Toews shed further light on the matter.

In the meantime, “...for many, confidence in Aeltester Heinrich Enns had completely disappeared.” By June Enns had come to the conclusion that he should resign “in the best interests of the Gemeinde” but wavered again in this decision because of the instigation of a number of brethren. The matter was finally resolved at a brotherhood meeting in Kleefeld, Molotschna, on August 14, 1868, where “the collective decision was that the Aeltester should remain by the declaration he had already made”—that is, to resign. One of the serious results of these events was that Enns developed a mistrust of the minister Gerhard P. Goossen, who also happened to be his step-son, although with time the matter resolved itself in favour of Goossen.

Johann Isaak (1836-1920), the brother to folk historian Peter and great-nephew of Philip, ran into an anxious situation in 1868 after he was falsely accused of desecrating a shrine by breaking a picture in a Russian graveyard and that he had also said it was not God or deity and was nothing more than ordinary wood. The consequences of the matter was that Johann had to appear before a judge in Ekatherinoslav on December 29, 1869. At this time he received a one-month sentence. But this was too light for those who had laid the charges, including the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox church, and they appealed to the Criminal Court in Odessa. Represented by the minister Gerhard P. Goossen, Isaak appeared but the judgement remained the same as in Ekatherinoslav.

The resignation of Heinrich Enns left the three congregations of the KG with two active Aeltesten, Johann Friesen of the “Friesens” Gemeinde, and Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), elected May 7, 1868, by a small group which had separated from the “Friesens” Gemeinde, considered in more detail in Section 12.02. The situation was alleviated somewhat by the election of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921) in the Crimean Gemeinde in early 1869.

Through the inducement of the ministers Abraham F. Friesen (1807-91), Neukirch, by now living in Rosenfeld, Borosenko. Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), Ohrloff, Isaak Friesen (1834-98), Fischau, and the deacon Peter Wiebe (1835-1902), Schönau, a large part of the Friesens’ Gemeinde became resolved to join the reform congregation after the resignation of Heinrich Enns. A meet-

ing to discuss such a union was held in Blumenhoff, Borosenko on May 6, 1869, with Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe and minister Peter Baerg from the Crimea, minister Peter P. Toews, Blumenhof, minister Gerhard P. Goossen, Grünfeld, and deacon Abraham Loewen (1833-86), Grünfeld, in attendance. It was noteworthy that the "reform" congregation at this time was frequently referred to as the Grünfeld Gemeinde, possibly because two of the ministerial, Goossen and Loewen, lived there.

The result of the large brotherhood meeting was a reconciliation and a "Deed of Union" dated May 6, 1869, in Borosenko, subscribed to by all present: "In the grace of God and together with you who are also the habitation and the building of God, and after the Lord has allowed our reconciliation to come to pass, we henceforth want to constitute and erect upon this sacred precious cornerstone and sure foundation which is Jesus Christ. Indeed, upon our most holy faith to which we have been chosen and engaged and for which we have been given testimony of a good confession before many witnesses. We strive to hold fast to this good confession before God and many witnesses and wish to hold to this confession of hope and not waiver, for the One who has promised the same is true; nor do we want to forsake our assemblies as some are encouraging, and rather to admonish one another and this so much more so, because ever more we see the day approaching. Ephesians 10. For those who believe will not flee... And now that He has bound up our wounds, we subscribe that we wish to remain true to our Jesus, and continually to pray for each other, and also wherever it be only possible to seek to win others. Jesus, let it thus be done. AMEN. Blumenhoff, the 6th day of May, 1869."

Another large conference was held in the Molotschna starting in the village of Kleefeld on May 14, where Wiebe preached and a brotherhood meeting went all afternoon. On Saturday, May 17, the articles were read in Kleefeld, and again the next day, Sunday, at the worship services. On Monday, May 19, the Deed of Union was adopted at a brotherhood meeting in Fischau. After the declaration was acknowledged, three young people were baptised by Jakob A. Wiebe. A preparatory sermon was presented in Alexanderkrone on May 20, and in the afternoon there was a ministerial election, with the election of Johann L. Dueck, Alexanderkrone as deacon, and Abraham Klassen, Prangenu, as minister. On Wednesday, May 21, communion services were held in Fischau. A letter by Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884), dated August 1, 1869, provided a view of the tremendous spiritual unity and closeness achieved through this conference.

By the end of 1869 the consolidation process in the wake of the 1866 division was largely completed. The consolidation of leadership was also completed with the election of three new Aeltesten. The men chosen for the immense responsibility of leadership at this critical juncture were young-under 40: Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) and Peter P. Toews (1841-1922). All of these leaders made distinctly different choices in the furtherance of their spiritual pilgrimages, Wiebe in 1869 in Russia, Toews in 1882 in Manitoba, while Friesen remained with the faith already received. Their

stories speak for the continuing history of the KG and its diaspora in North America.

A physical consolidation had also taken place. The Markuslandt leases which had been made for six years expired in 1869. Most of the families living there moved to the Borosenko settlement and other colonies founded nearby such as Grünfeld, Friedensfeld, Neuanlage and Hochfeld. By 1869 Borosenko had become the geographical heart of the KG.



Isaac B. Loewen (1865-1938) and wife, nee Anna Wiebe (1878-1958), Swalwell, Alberta, Isaac was the son of Cornelius W. Loewen (1827-93), Steinbach, and grandson of Isaac (1787-1873), Lindenau, Molotschna. Anna was the daughter of Johann Wiebe (1841-1909) and Maria Neufeld (1840-1921), Steinbach, Manitoba, pioneers. Photo courtesy of Footprints on Mi-Chig-Wun, page 340. Isaac's nephews in Steinbach, Manitoba, founded a number of successful enterprises--Cornelius T. Loewen founded "Loewen Millwork", and Abraham T. Loewen founded "Loewen Funeral Homes".

Jakob P. Penner (1877-1956) and Katharina Dueck (1873-1951) Jakob was born in Blumenort, Manitoba.

After managing the John Deere implement dealership in Steinbach for several years they moved to Linden, Alberta, in 1927. Jakob was the son of Peter H. Penner (1839-1916) and grandson of Peter Penner (1816-84), patriarch of the Blumenort and Steinbach Penners.

Katharina was the daughter of Johann L. Dueck (1833-94).

Grünfeld, Manitoba, and granddaughter of Obm Johann Dueck (1801-660).

Photo courtesy of Footprints on Mi-Chig-Wun, page 531.



Section 12.02: The Heuboden Gemeinde, 1868.

The ministerial requirements of the so-called “Friesens” Gemeinde were considerably less than those of Enns and his reformers. A ministerial election was held on November 23, 1866, where Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908), Ohrloff, was elected with 36 votes out of 44 cast, with a total of 47 taking part. The “Friesens” Gemeinde now consisted of six ministers and three deacons.

But the difficulties of Aeltester Johann Friesen were not over. In the spring of 1868 the ministers Peter W. Friesen and Abraham L. Friesen, and the deacons, Klaas F. Friesen and Jakob W. Friesen together with 26 families resigned their association with his congregation because of various differences. The records of Abraham L. Friesen, formerly Tiede and by now of Heuboden, Borosenko, indicated that they had been excommunicated by Ohm Johann.

Johann K. Friesen (1857-1935) minister at Rosenort, Manitoba, later wrote that these events arose from a dispute between two neighbours in Heuboden, the Aeltester’s brother, Jakob F. Friesen, known as the “Grosse” or “large” Jakob Friesen, and his cousin, the “Kleine” or “small” Jakob W. Friesen, the deacon, son of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1872-1849), Ohrloff. Apparently Jakob W. Friesen was to have ordered and purchased a load of building lumber for himself and Jakob F. Friesen. Jakob W. Friesen also hired the Russian labourers to haul the lumber home. Evidently he took some personal advantage of the situation, and the matter became a huge affair leading to a division, so that Abraham L. Friesen together with one part of the Gemeinde of Johann F. Friesen, separated.

The new group proceeded to organize itself as an independent congregation. On May 7, 1868, Abraham L. Friesen was elected as the Aeltester with 21 votes and his uncle Peter W. Friesen, Tiede, five votes. Obviously the new Aeltester would not be ordained by Johann Friesen, whose Gemeinde they had just left, and the “reform” Grünfeld Gemeinde did not have an Aeltester at the time. On May 7, 1869, almost exactly a year later, Abraham L. Friesen was ordained as Aeltester by Aeltester Johann Harder (1811-75), Blumstein, of the Ohrloff Gemeinde. Since the new Aeltester was living in Heuboden, Borosenko, his group was referred to as the “Heuboden Gemeinde”.

The remaining members of Johann Friesen’s ministerial and the majority of his parishioners now initiated discussions which led to their union with the Grünfeld Gemeinde (later known as the Blumenhoff Gemeinde), formalized on May 6, 1869, already discussed in Section 12.01.

This left Aeltester Johann Friesen with a small group of 10 families, undoubtedly some of the most conservative and loyal people in the KG (see Section 7.04). They included cousin Abraham F. (“Fula”) Reimer who frequently referred to Ohm Johann in his journals and Abraham’s children Johann R. Reimer, Elisabeth (Peter R. Toews) and Katharina (Abraham S. Friesen), as well as the Abraham L. Duecks, Heinrich R. Brandts, Johann Warkentins, Johann H. Toews, and Johann Friesens, Nikolaithal. This list consisted of those families joining the Grünfeld Gemeinde in 1871 to 1872.

The Heubodner Gemeinde held a ministerial election on August 24, 1869,

with the election of a deacon Cornelius L. Friesen (1841-1923), Heuboden, with 19 votes. He was the Aeltester's brother. In the ministerial election which followed, Cornelius L. Friesen was elected with 27 votes, against 1 vote each for deacon Klaas F. Friesen, Rosenfeld, and deacon Jakob W. Friesen, Heuboden.

An attempt at a reconciliation between Johann Friesen and the Heubodner was made in early 1871. On March 25 Ohm Johann told his cousin Abraham F. Reimer "that in the future we shall have the services together" [presumably with the Heubodner]. On Sunday, March 28, "services were at Joh. Friesens', Rosenfeld, a good half of those from Heuboden were there." But on Monday, the 29th, there was "no service except in Heuboden. The mutual services seem to have failed. During the brotherhood meeting the majority did not vote for it."

The families remaining with Johann Friesen joined the Blumenhoff Gemeinde in 1871-72, when it became obvious that he was terminally ill. On February 22, 1872, Aeltester Peter Toews, Blumenhoff, Gerhard Schellenberg, Rosenfeld, Jakob Regehr, Grünfeld, and Dietrich S. Friesen, the local Rosenfeld school teacher, attended at the sick bed of Johann Friesen, at his request, where Toews presented the Word. After they had finished the worship service, Johann Friesen passed over "the deeds and documents which belonged to the Gemeinde", namely, to Abraham F. Friesen, Gerhard Goossen, Abraham Loewen and Peter P. Toews. Peter Toews recorded that he later passed these documents on to Johann K. Friesen, Rosenort, son of Ohm Johann.

The transfer of Ohm Johann's last members to the Blumenhoff Gemeinde completed the consolidation process resulting from the 1866 division. This is probably an appropriate point to reflect on the division. Enemies of the conservative faith tradition such as Peter M. Friesen pointed to it as being evidence of some kind of fatally deficient gene in the Mennonite faith, which resulted in the movement imploding upon itself periodically, which of course is complete rubbish. The KG had grown larger and with an estimated 200 families in 1866 was simply too large to be regulated within the organizational context of one Gemeinde. Had they made a voluntary division in 1860 into two Gemeinden which would have allowed for slight variations in faith and practice, the division need never have occurred.

But one should also ask the question, what would have happened had the division not occurred? The KG grew steadily during the 1840s and 50s and had gained respect and recognition as a peacemaker in the Molotschna. Had these trends continued the KG might well have become another mildly pietistical Ohrloff Gemeinde, its most natural ally in any event. In that case, the KG would not have been disposed to hear the call of God to "take the pilgrim's staff" less than six years later.

Many would interpret the 1866 division as a providential event which humbled and chastened them so that the foregoing scenario would not occur. Indeed the division resulted in a renewal and revival of faith in both congregations, an essential ingredient in the physical and spiritual battle which they would face in the forthcoming decade. As a result of the division both congregations

were trimmed of excess fat leaving only those truly committed to the covenants they had once made to their Lord. The event could be interpreted as a benevolent act of God purifying His people, so that humbled and chastened they would have the courage and vision to leave “the land of milk and honey” at a time when this seemed like such a foolish thing to do.

The 1866 division must also be considered in light of the bigger picture. When compared to the banning, counter-banning, shunning and counter-shunning of the Separatist-Pietist congregations as documented, for example, in the work of historian Peter M. Friesen, the KG division looked like a Sunday School debate. It was conducted in an orderly manner, accusations were made but were polite and gentlemanly for the most part, members of the various congregations continued in fellowship with each other. While all this was going on, the landless and landowners were plotting against each other, serfs had been thrown off their ancestral lands, and the government was preparing to embark on a Russification program which would change forever the lives of all Mennonites in Russia.

The question remains, whether there were any real differences between the two congregations arising from the division or whether it merely represented a clash of characters and personalities as has been suggested. The fact that the 1866 division represented the first real challenge to the hegemony of the extended von Riesen clan by the allied Plett, Loewen and Toews families has already been mentioned in a previous section.

It is my interpretation that there were significant theological variations between the two groups and that the division in that sense was a healthy albeit painful occurrence. It seems that the Blumenhoff Gemeinde was more open to theological change, with greater openness in expression of piety such as audible prayers, more emphasis on conversion experience, etc. The Heubodner group, on the other hand, continued in the faith tradition of Aeltester Johann Friesen, and was more Anabaptist in terms of community of sharing, while stressing traditional devotional practices such as silent prayer, etc. On the other hand, it was the reformers who objected to purchasing land as a community for the landless.

When the majority of the “reform”/Blumenhoff Gemeinde people joined Peter P. Toews in his 1882 union with Johann Holdeman, the remainder turned to the Heubodner under Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen for assistance, and accepted its form of piety and theology. In fact, for the next several decades, individuals chosen for church leadership were those who had remained solidly associated with Johann Friesen and/or the Heubodner, e.g. the Heubodner minister Jakob M. Kroeker became the first Aeltester elected in Manitoba and Abraham L. Dueck, the first East Reserve Aeltester, had remained a faithful member of Ohm Johann Friesen’s Gemeinde until the end.

Presumably the social leadership status of individuals such as David Klassen (1813-1900), a Heubodner who had joined the Blumenhoff Gemeinde in its decision to emigrate to Manitoba instead of Nebraska, was significantly enhanced after the 1882 Holdeman secession. Others such as Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) possibly redeemed themselves to some extent by their very strong and

proactive stance against the Holdeman union, but it would not be until 1891 that his sons, Cornelius and Peter L. Plett were elected to the ministry.



LEFT: Sketch of Cornelius D. Loewen (1866-1937), youngest son of deacon Johann Loewen (1823-81) and Anna Dueck (1825-87), Kleefeld, Molotschna, and later Rosenort, Manitoba. Cornelius and his brothers Johann, Abraham and Peter were large-scale farmers in Rosenort, Manitoba. Sketch by Holly Bockurka. Photo courtesy of Gateway to the Past, page 16.



RIGHT: Maria Dueck Loewen (1870-1932), wife of Cornelius D. Loewen, was the daughter of Peter H. Dueck (1837-1931) and Margaretha Friesen (1840-1900), Heuboden, Borosenko, and later Rosenort, Manitoba. Her brother Johann had been the first child born in the new settlement. Sketch by Holly Bockurka. Photo courtesy of Gateway to the Past, page 17.

Holly Bockurka



Gerbard S. Friesen (1852-1922), son of Heinrich D. Friesen (1827-77) and Katbarina Schellenberg (1824-1901), originally Landskrona, Molotschna. Gerbard's brother Jakob was the founder of the Steinbach Post. Gerbard was the grandfather of Dr. Archie Penner, Kola, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Footprints on Mi-Chig-Wun, page 151.



1904. Cornelius K. Friesen (1887-1965), son of Heinrich L. Friesen (1851-1910), brother to KG Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, Jansen, Nebraska. Cornelius K. Friesen moved from Rosenhof, Manitoba, to Mexico in 1948 and from there to Belize. Cornelius was the father of Rev. Cornelius L. Friesen, deceased, Whitemouth, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Furrows in the Valley, page 382.

Section 12.03: The Crimean Secession, 1869.

The election of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921), Annenfeld, as Aeltester by the Crimean congregation in early 1869 has already been mentioned. He was soon actively involved in the work of the congregations in the Molotschna and Borosenko playing an important role in the reunification which was finalized in Borosenko on May 6, 1869, and in the Molotschna on May 19.

Wiebe's doubts about the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism, however, were still lingering. Before judging Wiebe too harshly it must be remembered that these were times of great social upheaval and disruption. Greed and the acquisition of wealth was evident everywhere as was landlessness and hopelessness for others who despaired of ever coming out of poverty. Added to this were hordes of fanatical missionaries prowling the steppes of Russia, seeking to break apart families and congregations which were earnestly seeking to follow the Lord. With their brashness, arrogance and disrespect for elders and the traditional faith, these missionaries were able to subvert many an anxious and sorrowful soul.

The recently published correspondence of Jakob A. Wiebe certainly revealed confusion on his part. In a letter to Peter P. Toews of October 4, 1864, he stated ""[We] had allowed ourselves to be baptised, but now we have both promised obedience anew with hand and mouth before God and His Kleine Gemeinde, namely, we have renewed the covenant which we previously had made with God not ever to depart therefrom during our lifetimes, neither to the right nor to the left, but to remain true to it until death." Five years later Jakob A. Wiebe would contradict the contents of this letter and claim that he had not had any faith at the time of his first baptism and therefore needed to be rebaptised.

In his subsequent correspondence Wiebe encouraged fellow ministers and their parishioners in the other settlements. His intimate remarks and forthright confessions of his own feelings reflect a closely bonded fellowship and a oneness of spirit.

By 1867 some peculiar comments are found in his letters. In a letter of April 28, 1867, he referred to a declaration of Peter Toews, regarding his brother Cornelius, stating that "As much as I love the beloved Ohm Toews, I still cannot justify his declaration, I find it particularly disturbing that he does not know whether it was before or after baptism." The comment indicated that some of the legalistic categoricalism of Separatist-Pietism was coming forth.

According to his letter of September 1, 1868, Wiebe again had found strength and encouraged his brethren in Borosenko and the Molotschna, requesting prayers for three brothers from Johannesthal, Cornelius, Abraham and Jakob Kornelsen. On February 27, 1869 he wrote pleading for Peter P. Toews and Gerhard P. Goossen to come to the Crimea to ordain him as Aeltester. But Toews and Goossen were unable to come and Wiebe was ordained by his senior minister Peter Baerg during Easter of that year.

In a letter of April, 1869, Wiebe referred to Ohm Abraham F. Friesen, Neukirch and how he had "visited us for five years out of Christian love....[and] the blessed times, often it felt as if we were in heaven while we sang many a

beautiful song together with each other; how many a sacred Scripture we read.” But later in the same letter Wiebe wrote “...and now we have become as enemies” indicating that the Crimean group led by Wiebe had definitely adopted a different religious culture.

In his letter of August 1, 1869, Wiebe finally came out with his unspoken concerns about the requirement of immersion baptism and stated unequivocally that during his “mission tour through the congregations in the Molotschna and Borosenko....to serve them with communion and baptism...I did it with fear and trembling because I was not content with my baptism, which I received before I was truly converted....I have come to the conclusion that I can not continue to serve in this way any more unless the [KG] can resolve to accept the Biblical baptism [of the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism].”

Wiebe’s other expressed concern was the Separatist-Pietist teaching of awareness of forgiveness of sins. Such a teaching was foreign to the conservative tradition as those with true evangelical faith did not need to agonize over such trivialities, they simply lived out their faith. It was evident that all the social unrest of the time and particularly the false teachings being spread by fanatical individuals had created considerable anxiety over this issue, not restricted to the Crimean congregation.

On September 3, 1869, a little over a month later, possibly before the foregoing letter had even arrived in Borosenko, Wiebe wrote again. He mentioned that he still had no reply to the earlier letter. The main point of the letter was that Wiebe has decided to “... allow myself to be baptised again according to the example of Jesus.” Regarding this symbolism Wiebe conveniently ignored the fact that Jesus was baptised “in the water with water”. He asked the rhetorical question, “How can a person who still lives completely in their old nature, make a covenant with God or be freed from sin by baptism?” again reflecting adoption of Separatist-Pietist religious culture and language. The KG was clearly correct in its view that baptism would not save anyone, it was merely a symbol of genuine and penitent submission to the Saviour.

Wiebe then revealed that most horrible of evils inherent in Separatist-Pietism, the categorical spirit, which allowed that they and only they were Christians and held the keys to the Kingdom of God. He wrote: “And the same cannot be recognized by anyone as a brother or sister in the Church of Christ and be allowed to partake in the Christian order, unless they have first undergone the Christian baptism as above set forth.” Actually Wiebe was quoting from the *Martyr’s Mirror* referring to the necessity of adult baptism upon faith, but cleverly rephrasing the quote into a different context in a desperate attempt to justify the legalistic requirements of Separatist-Pietism for its own rigidly defined prerequisites for salvation.

In actual fact a number of letters were written to Wiebe from the KG leaders in Borosenko and Molotschna, but because of the exigencies of communication, had not reached Wiebe in the Crimea in time. Letters by Peter P. Toews dated August 31, 1869, and a letter by Gerhard P. Goossen dated September

1869, have been translated and published in *Storm and Triumph*, pages 213-217. Letters by the minister Gerhard Schellenberg, Rosenfeld, dated September 28, 1869, and veteran school teacher, Gerhard S. Kornelsen, Lichtenau, Molotschna, dated December 15, 1869, have been translated but not published. The readers are encouraged to study these letters particularly those of Goossen and Toews as they reveal a thorough knowledge of evangelical teachings and the precedents of the conservative faith tradition as well as a scholarly and well-reasoned presentation.

It was doubtful that the earlier arrival of this correspondence would have made any difference. Experience has shown that once people adopted a fanatical religious culture such as Separatist-Pietism and had broken existing religious and social networks, such a person became totally enslaved to the new religious culture and language and it takes years before such a person can free himself enough to listen to rational argument, if ever. Those who wish to learn more of the position taken by the Crimean secessionist are referred to a letter of Cornelius Enns (1832-79) to his father, Aeltester Heinrich Enns, Fischau, dated August 15, 1869, repeating the standard Separatist-Pietist arguments.

But the letters written by the KG leaders did make an impact. In the last letter he wrote to Toews dated November 19, 1869, certainly the last letter which is extant, Wiebe was quite incensed at the comment made by Toews that he had "...joined those who seceded so angrily or that we have taken up their books, first to examine them, and thereafter, to be deceived by them" an obvious reference to other Separatist-Pietist articulated groups such as the Brüdergemeinde. Wiebe's correspondence also reflected typical Separatist-Pietist hypocrisy: first the perpetrator denied the salvation, faith and teachings of his former brethren and sought to alienate as many of them as possible against their previous associations and elders; secondly, after such treacherous actions resulted in the diminishment of desire for spiritual fellowship, the perpetrator accused the victims of his aggression of withdrawing and terminating the spiritual fellowship, adding the cynical epithet that the former brethren were narrow-minded, reactionary and afflicted with what Peter M. Friesen called the "Anabaptist disease" (page 31).

Whether by design or otherwise, Wiebe's letters do not enlighten the reader much regarding the events taking place in the Crimea. The letters of minister Peter Baerg, Schwesterthal, Crimean, constitute a parallel source of information. In his letter to Peter Toews of July 21, 1869, Baerg reported that "... A sorrowful occurrence has taken place amongst us, for our Aeltester is intending to alter the baptism. He says that the baptism which we currently practise amongst us is no baptism, rather it must be a complete immersion in and under the water....Three men came from the Molotschna to serve Abraham Walls with baptism. Ohm Wiebe went over thereOn Sunday evening the three aforementioned men went to Ohm Wiebes, and Corn. Enns also went there, and, as I have understood, others from our brethren went there as well."

Presumably the men referred to were Separatist-Pietist missionaries from the Molotschna ever watchful for an opportunity to cause dissatisfaction and if



*Johann P. Harder (1811-75),
Blumstein, Aeltester of the prestigious
Obrloff-Halbstadt Gemeinde. Photo
courtesy of Blumstein Legacy, page
26/Pres., No. 13, page 129.*

possible to tear apart congregations still earnestly seeking to follow the Saviour and His teachings. After being pressed by Baerg on the issue, Wiebe finally conceded that he was planning to have himself rebaptised and also rebaptise others.

In September Baerg sent a letter to Toews along with Klassen, “who would personally bring you news of how things are going for us here” and so Baerg did not describe the events that had taken place. Baerg was obviously discouraged by the defection of Wiebe and the majority of the Crimean congregation believing that perhaps it might be a sign of the last days, when “Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am Christ’, and they will lead many astray.” Baerg also quoted Acts chapter 20, that “...men will arise who will teach falsely, thereby seeking to draw the disciples unto them.”

The response of Toews and others in Borosenko was to question Baerg as to whether he had accepted the secession of Wiebe too readily. In his reply of October 14, 1869, Baerg explained that “...many more innocent hearts would have been lead astray than is presently the case, had I remained together with him any longer—for a number were even in doubt whether I myself would remain steadfast. I never had any doubts in this regard, but I did suffer damage within my soul.”

In his letter of October 3, 1869, Baerg indicated “...he had found courage and new strength” as he faced the onslaughts of Satan. The experience of having his brothers and sisters fall victim to the delusions of false teachings devastated and tested his faith to the core. Referring to the house built upon sand, Matthew 7, Baerg wrote, “This has been our experience as well, that some built upon the sand, wherefore the Saviour says, we are to build upon a solid rock, namely, upon Him and to serve Him in truth, for He says, “I am the way, the truth and the life....What other alternative do we have but that we remain of one mind and build anew.”

Baerg continued valiantly as the leader of a small KG congregation in the Crimea consisting of eight families. In 1874 the congregation joined their co-religionists in Borosenko and Molotschna to emigrate to Manitoba, Canada.

The impact of the Crimean secession, though highly unfortunate, should not be overrated. It must be judged in light of the circumstances of the time which were highly agitated and troubled. Even considering other similar losses particularly in Friedensfeld, north of Borosenko, they only amounted to some 15 or 20 per cent of the total KG membership. Other conservative Mennonite congregations were taking similar and even higher losses at this time, possibly because they had higher percentages of landless people and others dissatisfied with their lot in life.

Section 12.04: The Blumenhoff Gemeinde, 1870.

Obvious the Crimean secession, following closely on the heels of the 1866 division was demoralizing for many who still knew the way of the cross and chose to follow it. It took almost a year before the “reform”/Grünfeld congregation had united itself sufficiently to elect a new Aeltester.

The election was held on October 10, 1870, in Rosenfeld, Borosenko, presumably at the home of Abraham F. Friesen, the senior minister. The votes were recorded as follows: Peter Toews 65, Gerhard Schellenberg 8, Abraham Loewen 2, and Gerhard Goossen 2. Toews was ordained on behalf on the entire Gemeinde with all ministers present and not merely the local congregation possibly in order to avoid the mistakes made with Jakob A. Wiebe, a year earlier. The ordination was performed by Peter Baerg (1817-1901), Schwesterthal, Crimea, and Gerhard Schellenberg (1827-1908) presented the ordination sermon.

The membership of the KG were held to a strict moral standard, a “sainthood of the laity”. An even stricter standard was required of the ministerial. On April 25, 1870, the minister Isaak Friesen had been removed from his office for “...carelessness in allowing his cattle to stray unherded and other similar incidents.”

On August 29, 1870, the minister Gerhard Schellenberg was voted out of office “...on account of overstepping of a boundary while harvesting hay, and subsequently the inadequate acknowledgement.”

A serious issue arose in 1871 when the KG in Borosenko were advised that the Nikolaithal Vollost district was to be established in their area and that they were to proceed with the election of the necessary officials. In September, 1871, the Aeltesten Peter P. Toews and Abraham L. Friesen travelled to Ekatherinoslav where they filed a petition expressing “fear respecting the involuntary imposition of offices which would be incompatible with our conscience and faith...[for] we are unable to hold any office where the use of force or the taking of prisoners might be required.”

Part of the problem was that the Mennonites from the Chortitz Colony who had established the villages of Ebenfeld, Schöndorf, Nikolaithal and Blumenfeld, Borosenko, favoured the formation of a Vollost. The Old Coloniers under the leadership of minister Gerhard Ens, Schöndorf, had a different view of nonresistance and did not see any danger to the integrity of their faith. The matter was resolved when the Mediator-Judge ruled in favour of the KG and exempted them from voting for and possibly serving as Judges and any other position which would be in conflict with their faith. The first Oberschulz of the Nikolaithal Bezirk or Vollost was a Rempel.

In November and December, 1871, the remaining ten families belonging to Aeltester Johann Friesen, Rosenfeld, transferred their membership to the Blumenhoff Gemeinde.

The losses from the ministerial referred to above resulted in a ministerial election on January 23, 1872, again in Rosenfeld. Peter M. Kroeker (1840-1915) was elected as deacon with 81 votes cast. Abraham Loewen was elected from among the three deacons with 38 votes to Peter Kroeker’s 36, and Peter Wiebe’s 5.

This was followed by an unfortunate incident in the Blumenhoff Gemeinde where Johann S. Friesen (1852-1920), son of senior minister Abraham F. Friesen, Rosenfeld, impregnated their maid, Helena Siemens, who happened to be the niece of Mrs. Friesen. The matter came to the attention of the ministerial and both Helena and Johann “were impeached (abgestimmt)” from the Gemeinde, even though Johann was not yet a member. After due repentance and upon their request, Helena was reaccepted a few weeks later, she was “forgiven completely.”

In the meantime, the elder Friesens had also been admonished for not being “watchful enough”. The action reflected a particular high level of concern within the KG regarding exercise of the parenting role and that children be nurtured and taught correctly, by example and otherwise. Helena Friesen, wife of the minister, apparently “made certain statements with which the Gemeinde did not want to be satisfied.” When confronted by the ministerial, Helena said things which Toews categorized as “totally indiscreet and vain” although he did not write down what was actually said. The end result was that both Abraham and Helena renounced the Gemeinde on the 18th and 25th of May, 1872. They subsequently joined the Heubodner Gemeinde.

The ministerial of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde, in particular, continued to exercise their pastoral duties in valiant devotion to the Saviour ministering to the flock scattered across southern Russia. Many trips were made to the Molotschna and the Crimea to preach, admonish and encourage. Contemporary letters indicated that both Gerhard P. Goossen and Peter P. Toews also travelled to Nikolaithal, Fürstenlandt, were the brethren Heinrich Fast, Jakob K. Friesen, and others lived, preaching to the entire community in the area.

Goossen’s letter of January 10, 1870, is instructive as to the impact of the fanatical teachings of Separatist-Pietism. Goossen referred to a certain Kroeker who “had come to some strange interpretations of many passages of scripture...For example, he allows his wife and children to starve in order that they should receive the Holy Spirit.” On the particular Sunday that Goossen was preaching in Fürstenland, he and Kliever, the local minister, were called to Kroeker’s place, who was found in a complete state of delirium rolling on the ground, and eventually running into the river trying to drown himself. Such circumstances were only too familiar among the KG and revealed the utter irresponsibility of Separatist-Pietist missionaries, who would first pump vulnerable people full of lies and untruths, and then when they are unable to handle the strain of turning against family and their traditional faith community suffering a nervous breakdown, they would hypocritically blame it on the “Anabaptist disease”.

On Friday September 1, 1872, the minister Gerhard P. Goossen died in Grünfeld after a severe three-week sickness. He was only 36 years old and a veteran of teaching in the Molotschna schools of 17 years.

Occasionally it happened that a particular individual touched the lives of those around him in a special way: Gerhard P. Goossen was such a person. Through his teaching, his ministry, and by his genuine interest and love for

people--and no doubt also because of his tragically early death--he captured the hearts of his fellow human beings. The love and esteem in which he was held is shown by the following testimonials: cousin Peter P. Isaak wrote "...I can give him the testimony that he lived a God-fearing life." Peter I. Fast (1831-1916), Jansen, Nebraska, wrote "[he]...was my boyhood companion, and a right smart lad. He had, however, become converted, and went over to the Kleine Gemeinde. He was a school teacher and since he had very manifest talents, he was elected as a minister, that is to say, in the Toews Gemeinde." Peter P. Toews later wrote that he and his fellow minister Gerhard P. Goossen "...had already often given testimony during public teaching, and especially, that one had to have the witness of being a child of God."

Another example of extreme proselytizing which was experienced by God-fearing people like the KG occurred in Friedensfeld where the Separatist-Pietists harassed a young mother on her death bed until she was screaming in anguish. One wonders how people like that expected to account for themselves at the judgement bar. It was the wife of the village school teacher, Mrs. Peter L. Dueck, nee Justina Wiebe (1844-70), Friedensfeld, who died October 10, 1870, who struggled mightily on her death bed, "...for Satan so cunningly circles to see who he can ensnare....our opponents here believe they had found a great example that the right rebirth is lacking. nevertheless one must not be alarmed by them as it must stand that we are not to believe every spirit and that we are to prove the spirits to see if they are of God." Tragically, the correspondent, Isaak L. Plett, a successful farmer in the same village, also fell victim to the deadly typhoid disease and died on July 27, 1871.

The practice of the KG had always been to hold worship services in the premises of its larger farmers as required. With the growing number of families living in Borosenko as well as the associated settlements in the area, such as Friedensfeld and Neuanlage, even the biggest hay barns were no longer large enough to accommodate everyone. A discussion ensued as to whether to purchase the house of Johann Isaak in Grünfeld or to build a new worship house. On May 7, 1872, the decision was made to purchase the house of Isaak. The decision was suspended on May 14 as there was considerable interest in building a spacious new house of worship.

A final decision was reached on June 5, 1872, to build a new worship house "...here in Blumenhoff together with the school. In addition to our brother Cornelius Plett, the elected representative of the village [presumably the mayor], two brothers were elected ...to supervise the construction of this building, namely Johann Goossen with 19 votes and Franz Froese with 22 votes. On June 18, the final plans were approved. The construction was funded with donations and the balance of 700 ruble was covered by loans of 300 ruble from Cornelius Plett, and 200 ruble each from Johann Dueck, Alexanderkrone, and Abraham Klassen, Prangenau."

This was the first worship house ever constructed by the KG. Folk historian Johann W. Dueck described the building "...as a beautiful school house with

adjoining worship house. It was built in the middle of the village with kilned brick and the roof was covered with plates of kilned clay. The building also included a teacherage...in the adjoining room was the school and in front of both the teacherage and the school was the worship house which was usually locked except on Sundays.

Also noteworthy during this time was a continued hunger for the devotional writings of the faith. Aeltester Peter P. Toews had made contact with Johann Funk, Elkhart, Indiana, and initiated a regular correspondence with him commencing June 1, 1872. One of the results of this correspondence was that the Blumenhoff Gemeinde ordered various devotional books from Funk with one large order on August 20, 1872, followed by another on December 25, 1872, and a third in June 1873. The first order included 24 large *Martyr's Mirrors*, 12 *Spiegel der Taufe*, 12 *Ebe der Christen*, 1 *Hoffart und Demut*, and 1 complete Menno Simons.

The village of Blumenhoff was the largest in the Borosenko area with 30 to 40 families. After Aeltester Peter Toews was elected Aeltester of the denomination in 1870 and with the construction of the new worship house in 1872, Blumenhoff became the centre of the KG settlement in the Borosenko area. It was also the heart of the "reform"/Grünfeld congregation and thereafter was usually referred to as the "Blumenhoff" Gemeinde. The Blumenhoff Gemeinde with approximately 100 families was larger than the Heubodner Gemeinde with approximately 50 or 60 families, and was recognized as the senior and more influential of the two. The congregations in the Molotschna and the Crimea continued to be associated with the Blumenhoff Gemeinde.



Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921) and Justina Friesen (1833-1916), Gnadenau, Kansas. Wiebe was the fifth Aeltester of the KG, elected by the Crimean congregation in 1869, but left later that year to form his own Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Gemeinde, based on the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism. Justina was the daughter of Johann Friesen (1797-1875), Halbstadt. Molotschna. Photo courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 57.

Section 12.05: Abraham L. Friesen 1831-1917, Heuboden.

Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917) was the oldest son of deacon Jakob W. Friesen (1808-89), Blumstein, and a grandson of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Ohrloff, second Aeltester of the KG (Section 5.05).

In 1835 Abraham L. Friesen married Anna Dueken, probably the daughter of Gerhard Dueck (born 1786), owner of Wirtschaft 7 in Blumstein in 1835. Abraham and his bride settled in Tiege, Molotschna. Daughter Anna, age 12, is listed attending school in the village in 1857/8. Friesen was elected as a minister of the KG on Feb. 13, 1861, becoming one of the "Tiegesche Ohms". A few years later the family moved to Heuboden in the Borosenko settlement. Since they had no children of their own, Abraham and Anna raised five foster children.

In 1866 the KG divided into two groups, the "reform" Enns group, and those who remained loyal to Johann Friesen, the "Friesens" Gemeinde. In 1868, Johann Friesen dismissed 2 ministers and 2 deacons who formed their own congregation with 26 families. On May 7, 1868, Abraham L. Friesen was elected as Aeltester of this group. Since many of its members including Abraham lived in the village of Heuboden the congregation came to be known as the "Heubodner Gemeinde." Friesen was ordained by Johann Harder of Blumstein, Aeltester of the Ohrloff Gemeinde, on May 7, 1869.

In 1874 Abraham L. Friesen led the Heubodner Gemeinde to America where they settled in Cub Creek Precinct, near present-day Jansen, Nebraska, village of Heuboden. Abraham was a progressive farmer with a heart of compassion for the less fortunate. He was the first person in his community to acquire a reaper, presumably a self-binder. This machine was in great demand among his neighbours and so he felt justified one Sunday in quickly cutting his own crop, so that it would be available for his neighbours to borrow on Monday. This innocent gesture caused dissatisfaction which was exploited by Isaak Peters, Henderson, Nebraska, who used it to lure 39 members to his group in 1878.

At the time of the 1880 property listing for Cub Creek, Abraham L. Friesen had 135 acres cultivated and 185 acres unimproved land and a farm property assessed at \$4000, 9 horses and 19 head of cattle, and grain inventory valued at \$1660. An adopted son, Gerhard Friesen, age 19 was living with the Abraham L. Friesen family at the time of the 1880 census.

Abraham was involved in the translation and publication of various Anabaptist devotional writings, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and namesake, Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff, the Aeltester. The major work was another printing of *Ausgewählte Schriften* in 1901 in a 498-page edition, this time including a fifth and previously unpublished book by Pieter Pieters. Another popular book by Pieters, *Die Himmlische Hochzeit* ("The Heavenly Wedding") was published in 1904 with 212 pages. Two other booklets published around this time were "Eine Einfache Erklärung", the 1845 treatise and "Eine Kürze Beschreibung," both by his grandfather Abraham Friesen, Ohrloff. There is some indication that the KG and possibly Abraham L. Friesen were also involved in the publishing of George Hansen's writings in 1892, *Ein Glaubens Bericht*, and in 1893, *Ein Fundamentbuch*.



Bernhard Harder (1832-84), Halbstadt, great Russian Mennonite Evangelist. Photo courtesy of Blumstein Legacy, page 17/Pres., No. 13, page 129.



Cornelius Jansen (1822-94), Berdjansk, Imperial Russia, was exiled by the Czar in 1873 for his advocacy of emigration to American. Photo courtesy of Exiled by the Czar, photo plate.

Abraham also carried on an extensive letter correspondence with fellow workers in the vineyard of the Lord, parishioners, friends and acquaintances scattered across North America and Russia. Henry Fast has written that “he showed a warm pastoral care for the church.” Abraham travelled frequently in the service of his Lord. On Sunday, June 18, 1893, worship services were held in Steinbach, Manitoba, and Abraham and brother Cornelius preached twice. Abraham L. Friesen married for the second time to Helena S. Friesen, his second cousin, widow of his cousin Heinrich B. Friesen (cf. Section Four). Helena was a resident in Steinbach, Manitoba, at the time. Helena’s sons objected to this marriage, presumably because they had adopted American Fundamentalist forms of religiosity and were upset that their mother was marrying an conservative Mennonite, even though he was well-to-do and very gifted.

In 1906 Abraham L. Friesen together with the majority of the Nebraska KG moved to Meade, Kansas, where they were able to acquire large parcels of land at a favourable price, thereby enabling many parents to provide sufficient land for their children. The practice of several Mennonite churches in Jansen, of targeting members of the KG for conversion to the religious culture and language of American Revivalism and later Fundamentalism, was also a factor in the decision to relocate. “Because of age and poor eye sight, A. L. Friesen’s involvement with the church decreased with time.”

In the fall of 1914 Abraham L. Friesen made one last journey of spiritual ministry to the churches in Manitoba and invited the ministerial there to come to Meade to assist in electing a new Aeltester, resulting in the election of Jakob F. Isaak on November 22. Abraham L. Friesen was an extremely dedicated and capable servant of the Lord working in the building of His church. He had served the church of God as Bishop for a record 49 years. “Of the three Aeltesten elected by the Kleine Gemeinde in the late 1860s in Russia, Abraham L. Friesen was the only one who had withstood the adversities of time and remained faithful to the covenants he had once made with his Redeemer.” A biography of Abraham L. Friesen by historian Henry Fast and two sermons written by Abraham L. Friesen were published in 1993.

Section 12.06: Peter P. Toews 1841-1922, Blumenhoff.

Peter P. Toews was the son of Johann Toews (1793-1873) and Maria Plett Toews (1811-95), Fischau, Molotschna (Section 10.05). As a young man, Peter P. Toews was converted although "The emphasis was more on living a life of discipleship." His favourite devotional reading at the time was Menno Simon's "Meditation on the 25th Psalm". In 1863 Peter Toews had the privilege of accompanying Isaak Harms (1811-91), on his trip looking for settlement opportunities, visiting what became known as the Fürstenland area and several other locations.

Later that year he married Anna L. Warkentin (1843-1925), daughter of Johann Warkentin, formerly of Blumstein, Molotschna, and later of Blumenhof, Manitoba. In 1864 Peter Toews and his bride moved to rented land at Andreasfeld, Markuslandt. In 1866 Peter and Anna Toews moved to Blumenhoff, Borosenko, where they acquired a *Wirtschaft* of 140 acres.

In 1866 Toews was also elected as minister. He was a man of genuine piety and intense religious experience. In his "1866 Epistle for Intercession" written after returning home from the Molotschna where he had just been elected as a minister, Toews reflected on his anxieties over his election, "On the one hand I felt within myself my very great impoverishment and my sinful flesh and blood which are my greatest enemies. On the other hand, I felt my very definite calling and the vast fields ripe for the harvest." But the epistle quickly focused on a much more traumatic event, his young son who lay dying when he arrived home in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, "Here my pride and joy, my only child lay prostrated and on the death bed, and also died having preached repentance to me for two days and two nights, suffering in all parts of the body. It was not the death of the child, rather the sorrow and loneliness of my wife and the acknowledgement of my sins in the suffering of the innocent child which grieved me so."

In 1870 Peter P. Toews was elected as Aeltester of what became known as the Blumenhoff congregation. Several branches of the KG were reconciled under his leadership. The family also raised two foster children: Isaac Wiens and Anna Broeski.

Peter P. Toews led the denomination through the difficult emigration period. In 1875, Toews led the last 30 KG families out of Russia. Peter and Anna settled in Grünfeld, Manitoba. Upon arrival in Manitoba Toews poured immense energy into the organization of the pioneer church and educational system.

In 1882 he left the KG to join with Johann Holdeman. In 1897 Toews was the co-founder of *Botschafter der Wahrheit* of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, being the first denominational paper among all the Russian Mennonites.

In 1900 Peter Toews moved to the village of Hochstadt, several miles to the southeast of Grünfeld. In 1911 they moved again to Swalwell, Alberta, to join their four sons--Johann, Cornelius, Peter and Isaac--who had moved there several years earlier to homestead.

Peter P. Toews was an historian and collected many writings and documents pertaining to the history of the church in his 1873 "Sammlung zur

Historie....der Kleinen Gemeinde der Molotschna Kolonie...” Toews was a gifted poet and expositor of the evangelical faith and some 20 of his sermons are still extant. Peter Toews’ extant writings and documents form one of the more important collections of source materials of the 19th century Russian Mennonites.

An extensive biography of Peter P. Toews was published in 1993 (*Leaders*, pages 819-858). A brief biography of Anna Warkentin Toews by Margaret Penner Toews was published in 1997 (*Pres.*, No. 10, June 1997, Part Two, pages 23-25).



Peter P. Toews (1841-1922), Blumenboff, Borosenko, and Grünfeld, Manitoba. Sixth Aeltester of the KG, poet and historian. Drawing from an old photograph by Henry P. Febr, Steinbach, Manitoba. Courtesy of East Reserve 125, page 21.



General Eduard Ivanovitch Tottleben (1818-84), the Czar’s emissary to negotiate with the Mennonites during the immigration movement of the 1870s. Photo courtesy of Goertz, The Molotschna Settlement, page 145.



Dutch style windmill and farm housebarn in Blumenort, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 29.

Section 12.07: Jakob A. Wiebe 1836-1921, Annenfeld.

Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921) was the son of Jakob Wiebe (1805-53) and Anna Wiens (1810-76), Margenau, Molotschna. Jakob Sr. had come to Russia with parents Dietrich Wiebe and Aganetha Thum in 1818, settling in Lichtenau. They moved to Margenau in 1832, Wirtschaft 12. Margenau had a substantial KG community which no doubt had considerable influence on the family. Jakob's father Dietrich came from Ellerwald 3 in the Gross Werder, only 10 kilometers south-east of Tiegenhagen, the KG heartland. Jakob's mother Anna Wiens was the granddaughter of Peter Wiens, listed as a wealthy farmer in 1776 in Fürstenau, Prussia, a village five kilometres south of Tiegenhof.

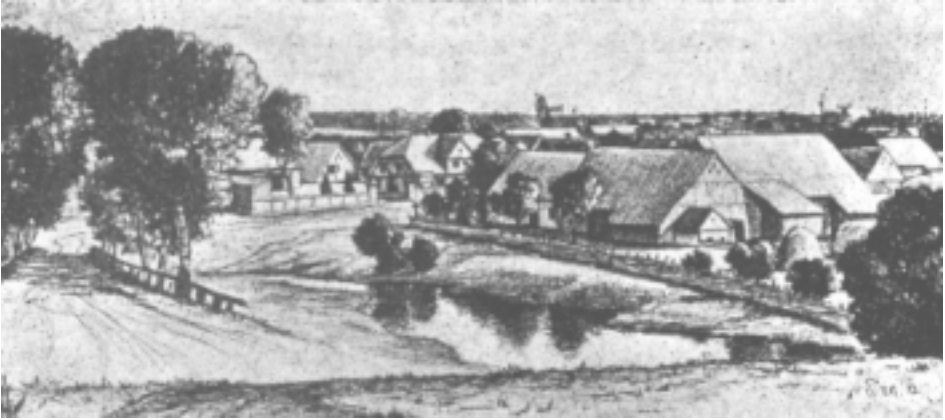
Because his father died when he was still young, Jakob A. Wiebe was socialized by his mother, quite common among the KG. During these years Jakob "... was employed by one of the leading [KG] brethren and had observed how they lived a quiet and separate life." His mother was a nurse and spent a great deal of time in the nursing care of wounded soldiers during the Crimean War 1853-56. During these years Jakob also did his duty in the "podwodden" hauling supplies to the front and bringing back wounded soldiers.

Sometime after his father's death in 1853 Wiebe left his parental home and moved to Halbstadt where he found employment as a coachman for David A. Friesen, the Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony. One day he was helping an attractive young woman into the coach, when she gave his hand a squeeze. This gave him the courage to court her. She was Justina Friesen (1833-1916), granddaughter of Daniel Friesen (1752-1826), one of Klaas Reimer's neighbours in Petershagen, Molotschna, and presumably one of the early reformers. Anna's father Johann Friesen (1797-1875) moved to Halbstadt in 1833.

In 1857 Justina Friesen and Jakob A. Wiebe were married. They lived in Ohrloff close to KG-ers such as the brothers Gerhard and Aron Schellenberg. In 1860 they and a group of others purchased a small Tartar village in the Crimea and settled there calling it Annenfeld. Their dreams to become rich in short order were thwarted by a series of crops lost to drought and pestilence. This led to a period of spiritual searching and in time a revival broke out.

The group allied themselves with a small community of KG-ers already living in the area and called upon Aeltester Johann F. Friesen to organize them as a congregation which was done with Rev. Peter Baerg (1871-1901), Schwesterthal, as minister (see Section 7.02). Wiebe expressed his concern to Friesen about the need for a second baptism by immersion, a belief founded in the religious culture of Separatist-Pietism. Friesen, unfortunately did not deal with Wiebe's concerns and merely assured him that such anxieties were not uncommon.

With the hindsight of history, Johann Friesen might well have referred to his uncle Abraham Friesen's characterization of a baptism without faith as like unto the sealing of a blank letter, being void and without meaning. The other question, of course, was whether Jakob A. Wiebe was genuinely being honest concerning his lack of faith at the time of his baptism in the Margenau Gemeinde-



"Peace and prosperity on the Molotschna". The old homeland would be remembered fondly for generations. Photo courtesy of They Seek a Country, page 30.

-in which case serious doubts were raised about his veracity, or was he merely articulating the religious language of Separatist-Pietism that he had not had a baptism or conversion experience which met the exacting thresholds stipulated by its legalistic religious culture.

In 1867 an election was held for a second minister and Jakob A. Wiebe was elected by a majority of seven votes. There were 22 members at the time. In early 1869 Wiebe was elected as Aeltester for the Crimean congregation and ordained by Peter Baerg on Good Friday. Wiebe was involved to some degree in the reconciliation and union between a large part of the congregation of Johann Friesen and the congregation of Heinrich Enns which took place in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, May 6, 1869. Wiebe also served communion after he had first baptised three young women.

Unfortunately Wiebe had never resolved his inclinations in favour of the religious culture and language of Separatist Pietism. On September 21, 1869, Wiebe and 17 others were rebaptised by immersion in a stream. First Wiebe himself was baptised by Cornelius Enns, son of Aeltester Heinrich Enns, Fischau (Section 7.05). Wiebe then baptised the others. For Wiebe and his group, the rebaptism constituted an act of secession and they now called themselves the Krimmer Brüdergemeinde. They adopted unequivocally the language and religious culture of Separatist-Pietism and denounced their former KG brethren and sisters in Christ as heathen, refusing any spiritual fellowship or interaction with them.

The event was followed by an extensive exchange of correspondence between the KG-ers in Borosenko and the Molotschna, shedding considerable light on the positions taken by Wiebe and his associates. In 1874 the KMB emigrated from Russia and settled in Gnadenu, Kansas, where they prospered. Having made an essential compromise with the popular religious culture of the day, they grew rapidly as a denomination.

A lengthy biography of Jakob A. Wiebe (1836-1921) by Leland Harder as well as 15 letters written by him between 1864 and 1869 were published in *Leaders*, pages 741-817.

Section 12.08: Faith under Fire, 1872-73.

It was ironic that the principle of nonresistance which brought the KG into life in Russia in 1812, was the same principle which dictated its departure 62 years later. The Mennonites first learned of the impending implementation of compulsory military service from the newspapers during the latter part of 1870. After several special meetings, a conference of Molotschna, Chortitz and Bergthal representatives was held in Alexanderwohl on January 11, 1871. It was decided to send a delegation to St. Petersburg to make representations regarding the new laws. Several such delegations would make the journey to Petersburg during the forthcoming years.

It quickly became evident that there were great differences of opinion among various groups of Mennonites in Russia. The representatives of many of the larger Gemeinden did not share the same concerns as the KG, Bergthaler, Alexanderwohler, and other congregations who still followed the conservative faith tradition. The more assimilated Mennonites apparently were mainly concerned that there be some form of substitutional service as long as it was not directly in military combat units. Coincidentally, the Mennonites in Prussia at this time had just completed the difficult process of discarding nonresistance as a matter of conscience and doctrine. Separatist-Pietists, secure in their chiliast prophecies that Christ would return in the East in 1881, disparaged those considering emigration. KG associated men such as Abraham F. Thiessen, Neu-Halbstadt, and Consul Cornelius Jansen, Berdjansk, who had travelled widely and witnessed the gross injustices of Russian society, advocated zealously in favour of emigration. As a result of his agitating, publishing pamphlets, Jansen was exiled by the Czar in 1873. Thiessen was banished to a Siberian labour camp at least partially as a result of his stance in favour of emigration.

By the beginning of 1872 it had become clear that the conservatives could not rely on others to represent their position to government authorities. On January 11, Peter P. Toews attended another conference in Alexanderwohl where Cornelius Jansen shocked those in attendance by suggesting that the Mennonites surrender some of their comfortable economic privileges in exchange for properly guaranteed religious freedoms. In a letter of January 17, 1872, Peter P. Toews reported at length on the conference: "The government will require that we serve in the medical corps,...there is little confidence in our colony regarding a further delegation to St. Petersburg...that they will not be able to work together in one mind in any event. There is a great agitation here that we should[accept] service in the medical corps....Whereupon I repeatedly expressed myself that if we would compromise in this, that we were then proceeding completely contrary to the teachings of Christ, and that we were thereby surrendering our youths to the full military service."

The February 1872 delegates were assured by Lord Gerngroz that they could sleep peacefully until September. Peter P. Toews responded to this with the comment that "sleeping was not all that peaceful in the midst of such thunderstorms." In another letter Toews noted the irony that the delegates were

seemingly not at all troubled to petition for freedom from military service while their fellow Mennonites in the Molotschna were arresting people and building a jail for those arrested. At the previous Aeltesten Conference, Aeltester Lanzman had stated that it was "...not becoming that they work together with us for our freedom of conscience." In a subsequent letter Toews stated, "...that it may well be that it is even less becoming for us to work together with them! Because they make such as inconceivable distinction in their endeavours, we in association with them might also forfeit our freedom of faith."

As a result it was decided on June 25, 1872, to appeal to old friend and benefactor Eugene von Hahn, who had come to the rescue of the KG in 1843, when their private worship services were threatened (see Section 5.08). The petition was undertaken jointly with the Heubodner Gemeinde and was read to the assembly of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde on July 19, 1872. The petition made it clear that the KG did not intend to "accept service in any military installation, nor can we take up any medical or supportive service as we did in 1854-55 during the Crimean War....nor [can we perform] the duties of offices of authority."

The petition signed by all the members of both ministerials, demonstrated a bit of drafting flair, appealing to the Czar's demonstrated ability to intercede for his subjects: "In our depressed situation we know of no other place of refuge than the paternal heart of his Imperial Majesty our beloved Czar who has been led by God....that in the future as in the past we, insignificant that we are, might be allowed to live out our faith in our beloved fatherland."

Another Aeltesten Conference was held in Alexanderwohl on June 23, 1872. But the members of the KG and others in the conservative faith tradition were becoming more and more alarmed at the hypocrisy of the representations being made in Petersburg, which they saw as shallow posturing leading up to a sell-out. At a brotherhood meeting of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde on August 26, 1872, it was decided that the KG would have to make its own representations in Petersburg.

The delegates, Rev. Abraham Klassen, Prangenau, from the Molotschna congregation, and Aeltester Peter P. Toews and Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, from Borosenko, representing Blumenhoff and the Heubodner, departed for St. Petersburg on September 11, 1872. Ironically it was the day after the Blumenhoff Gemeinde had dedicated the new worship house in Blumenhoff, the first and only house of worship of any KG congregation in Russia. The delegates undertook a journey of almost 2000 verst by rail arriving on Sunday September 17. They met with Eugene von Hahn but he "gave them little encouragement." After a series of other meetings, the delegates left St. Petersburg on September 29 and arrived home on October 5.

Although nothing concrete had been achieved, Toews did meet two Hutterite Aeltesten in St. Petersburg, thereby reestablishing a connection between the two denominations which dated back to 1848 when Aeltester Abraham Friesen had counselled the Hutterian Brethren regarding an internal struggle over the implementation of community of property. No doubt Toews quickly realized that the KG had more in common with the Hutterian Brethren from a faith perspec-

tive than with the majority of their co-confessionists in the Molotschna. One of the positive results of the emigration movement was that the two groups were brought together by common ground regarding the issue and, in fact, collaborated in several respects.

In a letter of December 24, 1872, minister Abraham Klassen reported that he had visited Hutterites in Hutterdorf, "to speak with the Hofers...for they had only arrived home....on the 9th of November....The elder Hofer was not at home.....but I was able to discuss everything...with the younger Hofer. Toews wanted a report on what had occurred after the KG delegates left Petersburg and apparently trusted the Hofers' version of events more than the other delegates. The Hofers had met twice with minister Wolujew and submitted their petition to the Czar. They had also travelled to Tsarskoe Selo, the Czar's personal residence in an attempt to submit their petition in person. But they were unable to do so." Klassen reported further that "...right in my presence the Aeltester by the name of Waltner said to Hofer that they would have to put their land up for sale and even if they would not seed for a year, that they would hire themselves out." From this the KG leaders concluded that the Hutterites were as determined to live out the evangelical teachings of the New Testament church as they.

The delegates were hardly home from St. Petersburg when they were notified that the Czar was still in residence in his palace in Yalta in the Crimea and that a delegation was going there from the Molotschna. Aeltesten Abraham L. Friesen and Peter P. Toews agreed that they should go as well and departed from Borosenko by Post on October 13, by way of Simferopol. After a difficult journey through the mountains south of Simferopol they arrived in Yalta in plenty of time to meet the Czar as he was still in residence in Lavadia, his palace south of

the seaport. Unfortunately they were not able to meet with the Czar, but talked instead with Governor General von Kotzebu. It was at this meeting that Johann Epp, Secretary of the Chortitzer Vollost offices, tried unsuccessfully to bring ridicule upon the Bergthaler Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900).

The delegation to St. Petersburg and Yalta unequivocally convinced KG leaders there was no hope for the continuation of their religious freedom in Russia.



Cornelius W. Fast (1840-1927), teacher in Steinbach, Borosenko, and one of the Steinbach pioneers in 1874. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 8, Part Two, page 23.

Section 12.09: The Delegates' Journey, 1873.

Abraham Klassen, Prangenau, Molotschna, also notified Toews and the others in Borosenko that an Aeltesten conference was being arranged in the Molotschna for those interested in sending a delegation to North America. Peter P. Toews received an invitation to attend the conference on January 6, 1873. On January 21, Toews, Johann Harms and Abraham Loewen accompanied by many brethren drove to the Molotschna. On Wednesday, January 23, 1873 they attended a conference in Pordenau where such a delegation had been discussed although the KG representatives remained silent.

After holding worship services and communion with the Molotschna congregation, the representatives attended another meeting in Alexanderwohl on Monday, January 29. The next day they left for home. In Borosenko the Blumenhoff Gemeinde held a brotherhood meeting on February 4, discussing the results of the journey to the Molotschna. After a lengthy discussion the brotherhood decided that the KG would have to send its own delegates to America, they could not rely on the others. An election was held with the election of Cornelius Toews, brother to the Aeltester, with 62 votes. Peter W. Toews, Rosenfeld, cousin to the Aeltester, received 5 votes and Jakob M. Barkman, Friedensfeld, 3. A collection was held and within six days 1200 ruble had been gathered to fund the journey.

The Heubodner Gemeinde had come to a similar conclusion and already elected David Klassen, Heuboden, as their delegate.

On February 10, 1873, the letter of instructions of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde was completed and was read to the brotherhood which approved the contents. The document consisted of a list of questions for which Cornelius Toews was to obtain answers and, if possible, written guarantees. The questions understandably related directly to the KG experience in Russia and dealt with "a complete exemption from military service,...[exemption] from all state service and offices of authority...[freedom] from participating in elections..." and asked the poignant question, "Will our freedom from military service be preserved for us...through a Privilegium?" The document listed the membership of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde, presumably in Borosenko only, as 602 souls. A preference was indicated for settlement in the United States.

In a letter of February 4, 1873, Peter P. Toews reflected on the state of the church on the eve of its most courageous undertaking. "Any hope for freedom here in our fatherland is sinking more and more....certainly no one expects to find the same in the heap of stone and rubble which is the earthly Jerusalem", a reference to chiliasts such as the Templars who were looking to Jerusalem as a destination which combined their eastward millennialism with a desire for emigration.

Toews was not only concerned that the delegation proceed promptly, but was already planning for the actual emigration. He referred to the concept of community of sharing and requested that the Molotschna congregation consider, "how all the poor, the widows and orphans are to be transported. I hope that you will forgive me if the concern is impressed upon me more heavily than

on all the rest. Especially when the thought occurs to me of all the purposes for which the tenth part of the crop might be applied in the example of Israel.”

On February 15, 1873 the two delegates were driven to the Molotschna by Johann Loewen and Abraham Friesen, but it turned out that the others had postponed their departure date. On Saturday, April 14, 1873, a farewell service was held by the Blumenhoff Gemeinde for Cornelius P. Toews “who took leave of the brothers and sisters who had assembled in rich numbers.”

On the same day he was accompanied to Nikopol by many brothers and sisters. “They were accompanied to Odessa by a number of brethren as well as Klassen and two persons from the Hutterites” Lorenz and Paul Tschetter. The travellers had planned to meet Suderman from Berdjansk and Buller from Alexanderwohl in Odessa, but they did not come and so the KG and Hutterian delegates went on by themselves.

The journal of Paul Tschetter and some of the correspondence of Cornelius P. Toews, preserved by brother Peter, provide information regarding the journey made by the delegates. By April 21, 1873, the delegates had travelled across Eastern Europe, through Berlin and reached Hamburg. On April 25, they embarked on the ship S.S. Silesia enroute to New York City arriving on May 8. The next day Toews copied some details about the ocean journey from his diary and sent them to brother Peter back in Russia. He reported that he “was quite sick...[and] completely unable to eat for two days. ...But thanks and praise unto God for I was relatively well once again during the last four days.”

On May 9th the delegates departed for Elkhart where they waited several days for the arrival of the other delegates from Russia as well as the return home of Johann F. Funk who was to accompany them on their land scouting expedition. On May 21, 1873, Cornelius Toews wrote another letter home to Russia. The other delegates had not yet arrived and finally on May 21, Toews, Klassen and the Tschetters decided to leave for Fargo without them. On May 24 (June 5 Julien calendar), the others finally caught up with them in St. Paul. On the 29th they looked at land in the James River area 100 miles north of Fargo where the Hutterites would eventually decide to settle.

On Thursday, May 31, 1873, the group decided to continue on to Manitoba. That same evening Toews wrote another letter to his loved ones back home. The delegates embarked again and by June 4, 1873, they arrived in Emerson, Canada. Tschetter noted the red coats of the British soldiers. The next day they arrived in Fort Garry, where they were hosted at a reception by the Governor who “told us about all the good they would do for us.” On Wednesday, June 6, a group of 20 men on three wagons left for a tour of the land being offered southeast of Winnipeg, or Fort Garry was it was known. After crossing the river on a barge they drove for 15 versts [kilometres] and stopped to feed the horses and eat. “It was a terrible road.... After 60 verst....we finally arrived at ...[Point des Chenes]...The people did not want to allow us unto their abodes, but finally we were allowed to enter and could spend the night.”

At 5 p.m., June 7 “we arrived at the land where we ate our evening meal...”

The next day they continued south to what later became the Steinbach area where they "...arrived at a residence where only the wife was home. She spoke a beautiful German having immigrated to Canada two years ago....she praised the region highly, presumably because they dearly wanted to have neighbours."

Based on the comments in his journal, Tschetter was obviously a good judge of soil, climate and other factors relevant to selecting good farmland. He did comment quite negatively about the lack of roads and other infrastructure. After having inspected what became the East Reserve all except the KG and Berghthal delegates went on to inspect other land in the American mid-west.

On June 21, 1873, Cornelius Toews wrote to brother Peter, "...we are already in the tenth week since we departed. ...We have been here in Winnipeg since the third of this month....The government takes us into all parts of the State.... We have decided on another[tour] tomorrow which will take four days at the most. After this we will proceed to ...[Ottawa] in order to attempt the final and most important part of our mission....We have the expectation that we can be home in seven weeks....[God] has protected me from danger and preserved me from evil." Letters were also written to Toews from Russia but only received sporadically.

On July 1, 1873, Cornelius again wrote brother Peter, stating "...we are now proceeding to Ottawa, the capital of Canada with the purpose of obtaining a complete conviction regarding our principle concern. In fact, we have the expectation that there is nothing more satisfactory to our questions to be obtained anywhere than exactly here."

The delegates arrived in Ottawa and were able to obtain the assurances they deemed necessary. On July 25, 1873, these assurances were confirmed in writing by John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, a document which has subsequently been regarded as the Mennonite *Privilegium*, and which responded favourable to practically all of the list of questions which both the Berghthal and KG delegates had presented to the government officials.

The delegates arrived in Nikopol on August 7, 1873, where Cornelius P. Toews was greeted by his brothers Peter and Johann. By 2 p.m. that afternoon they brought Cornelius home to loved ones and family in Grünfeld "where he was greeted with tears of joy and all the brothers and sisters together gave praise and thanks to the Lord." One of his children, three year-old Katharina had died July 31 causing brother Peter Toews to reflect on his own four children who had already died, and "preceded us into a joyful eternity where they are now radiant in blessed innocence and transformed by glory, over yonder sea of stars to the land of freedom beyond. Which seems to be as far away and yet is also very near."

In the same letter addressed to the congregations in the Molotschna and Crimea dated August 8, 1873, Peter P. Toews wrote "Alas when a new circumstance such as the present one comes directly towards us in the flesh, I frequently pray that we might raise up our heads with the spirit and look unto the mountains from whence He shall appear in the clouds of heaven, and that consequently we would always direct our sights upon the beloved Saviour with a true passion in the spirit."



Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), Grünfeld, Borosenko, delegate for the Blumenboff KG. Photo courtesy of 60 Jahrige Gedenkfeier, page 32/33.



Paul Tschetter (1842-1919), was one of the Hutterite representatives of a delegation of twelve in search of land in the American prairies. Tschetter maintained a journal during the trip, a valuable record of the delegates' experiences. Photo courtesy of Brothers in Deed, page 169.

Peter P. Toews continued to worry about the need to provide for widows, orphans and poor "...and that we might also have as much love for Christ who has so much love to us. If only all the beloved brothers and sisters would gladly surrender their hearts to him in this instance in order to decide whether we are also willing to sacrifice the necessary capital and in addition to put aside what is necessary for the brethren." Toews concludes his pastoral letter, "Oh that we would not waste the day of salvation, the acceptable time, in which we are to work for the meat which is not perishable. This is the day in which we are to gather treasures in heaven which will never perish.....Oh, that we would be acceptable with a life that is holy and pious."

Toews was obviously concerned that the teaching of community of sharing as espoused by the New Testament church would not be acknowledged intellectually only and not in actual practice. History would show that the KG was abundantly vigilant with respect to being able to bring all their orphans, widows and poor along with them, so no one need remain behind because they lacked means.

Section 12.10: Transition, 1872-1874.

On October 12 and 13, 1870, KG teacher Abraham R. Friesen (1849-84), Lichtenau, an intelligent young man who had already attracted the ire of some of the Ohms for “reading too many magazines and that he had too much influence with the Oberschulz and others”, started a journal with the notation: “On two nights there were very bright northern lights, so bright that the sky was red as far as one could see. To the north it looked as if it was dawn. Streamers of light came from different directions and joined with one another above us, but not from the south.”

On January 23, 1872, Friesen noted a similar occurrence: “A sign occurred in the heavens like northern lights; it was a deep red in the north at one place, like in October 1870, but it spread very rapidly and was really amazing for it became red right beneath the Orion, and it had white patches and streamers from different directions, many of which went into the south and at 10.00 o’clock what actually looked like a star formed above us with tremendous streamers showering out in all directions.” Mysteriously Friesen also maintained a private code in his journals never yet deciphered. Four lines in code and Russian with this entry were struck out.

A hundred miles away to the east in the village of Friedrichstahl, Bergthal Colony, another young teacher, David Stoesz (1842-1903), observed the same phenomenon. “On the Evening of Jan 23 [1872] we saw a sign in the heavens, of which the Prophet Joel had prophesied, that God would show signs and omens in the heavens of the coming day of judgement. It was as the prophet foretold, in colours of Blood and Fire. These colours came and went as clouds rolling in great speed from the north and moving up overhead with many bright areas interspersed, which seemed to tell us that God was showing us that in some areas the light of Evangelism was still alive, though in most places where the light still shone among Christians a few years ago it is now cold and dark.”

Stoesz, who would become Aeltester of the Bergthaler people in Manitoba in 1882 was not alone in seeing a multitude of signs some natural and others human which they interpreted as divine interventions, a warning of forthcoming danger to the church in Russia and a guiding beacon leading the faithful out of Russia, just as the cloud by day and a fire by night had once guided the Israelites from out of ancient Egypt.

All was not well in the Molotschna and other Mennonite settlements in Russia. Abraham R. Friesen noted frequent fires set by Russians which destroyed Wirtschaften, of which the following was an example: “On August 14th, there was a fire in Hoffenthal also, it is said that the old Russians are setting the fires. On the 17th, three houses burned down in Friedrichsthal, two in Alt-Nassau, one in Neumonthal and one in Klein Nassau....Monday the 18th, there was fire this week again, in Neumonthal, the others, one in Hoffenthal, in Blumenthal and a number in Weinau. There was fire in many other places, but now it has pretty well quietened down.” The villages referred to were German colonists on the west side of the Molotschna River.

On February 14, the villagers in Friesen's own village of Lichtenau were having trouble with the Russians and imprisoned three of them.

As soon as the individual decision to emigrate was made, each family had to undertake the momentous task of disposing of property, hearth and home. Several contemporary diaries provide considerable information regarding this process. The journal of Abraham R. Friesen, Lichtenau, already referred to, first mentioned the emigration on September 11, 1873. On October 15, 1873, Friesen was visiting at the home of Abraham Eidse Sr. (1811-93), Fischau, and learned that they had sold their *Wirtschaft* to Derksen, Lindenau, for 2800 ruble. This was a favourable sale being almost half the amount received by KG-ers disposing of their properties during the 1860s when they moved to Markuslandt or Borosenko. Heinrich Enns (1807-81) sold his *Wirtschaft* in Fischau for 3500 ruble and on September 2, Enns held an auction sale. Heinrich Warkentin (1833-88) sold his *Wirtschaft* in Fischau for 3056 ruble and held an auction sale on September 29 where he realized a further 1118 ruble.

The constant stream of visitors between the KG settlements in the Molotschna Colony, Borosenko and the Crimea continued unabated. On December 21, 1873, Abraham R. Friesen, only held school until noon and then drove to Fischau, together with his father Cornelius from Anafeld, Borosenko, where a number of family heads were gathered to discuss the emigration passes.

The planned emigration by the KG was that of an entire society and the process of living and dying continued until the day they left Russia, indeed, it never stopped throughout the entire transition from one continent to another. Babies were born and others died. On April 20, 1874, Friesen received a funeral letter for Martin Rempel (1823-74), a beloved brother in Margenau, who died the day prior.

In May Abraham R. Friesen drove to Borosenko where he purchased a mare for 75 rubles at an auction sale. He resold the mare shortly thereafter for 95 ruble making a small profit. Friesen had already decided to stay in Russia until 1875 and signed a teaching contract for another year. On February 2, 1875, his father-in-law Gerhard S. Kornelsen, realized 744 ruble at his disposal sale. On March 29, 1875, Friesen conducted examinations in his school for the last time attended by Aeltester Johann P. Harder, Ohm W. Berg, Lindenau, Ohm Korn. Enns, Fischau, the teachers from Fischau, Lindenau, and Blumenort and 12 others. The large attendance was a tribute to a gifted and capable teacher.

The sale of property and the disposition of goods and livestock in the Borosenko area was an entirely different proposition. Here the market was far more depressed than in the Molotschna Colony where only a quarter of the population was leaving instead of three-quarters as in Borosenko. The result was a buyer's market made worse by the fact that vendors had already booked and paid for their passage. As a result the buyers frequently knew that if they waited they would eventually be able to name their price, however unconscionable that might be. Contemporary American newspaper accounts speak of *Wirtschaften* normally worth 5-6000 ruble selling for \$1-2000. If a farmer had a modest debt of

\$1000 and sold for even \$2000 ruble he had only \$600 left after paying his debt and the cost of transportation to North America.

The experience of the farmers in the village of Rosenfeld, Borosenko, was typical. The property of the 14 villagers was sold by disposal auctions which went on for three days. The widow of deacon Heinrich Wiebe, nee Anna B. Toews (1853-1935), later recalled that the villagers sold their farms as a unit to purchasers from the Old Colony who drove a very hard bargain. After receiving payment the leaders divided the money among the villagers according to previously determined values, but even here there was some bargaining as the wealthier farmers felt they had been underpaid. Peter W. Toews (1831-1922) and Peter Penner (1816-84) did not leave Borosenko with the first group of emigrants because they had the responsibility of completing the final legal documents with uncle Heese, presumably the agent for the buyers. They were to receive and bring with them the final payment of purchase monies.

In Grünfeld, school teacher Abraham P. Isaak (1852-1928) reported that the disposal of properties started right after New Year's 1874, and the land was sold to non-Mennonites "...mostly Catholics and Lutherans. The land all sold for a good cash price. All other property was sold through public sales, also for cash. All through the spring months there was much undertaking in brisk form. Nearly every day witnessed a sale. In order to save time, some would number their property and merge their sale. This also took place in the new settlements that were established away from the mother colony. The buyers were mostly non-Mennonites, although a few Mennonites, who possibly looked at our emigration as though we mocked them, also purchased. Today 50 years later, many have woefully regretted and bemoaned their mistake that they did not forsake their lovely places in Russia, and establish a new home in America. They would have totally escaped the improper operations of the Russian government under which many, many have, and are still suffering intensely."

Grünfeld was unique in that half of the village was owned by Russians who may now have been the first to purchase the fine farms of their neighbours. The village was quite small and so all the sales were held at one place. Peter W. Toews (1866-1935), later recalled how he had ridden to the place of the auction with their best mare. His father also sold another horse to a Russian. Peter's mother had tried to comfort her son, an ardent horse lover, saying, "we will cross the ocean on a ship not a horse." One old mare was simply shot. The immigrants would soon discover the harsh reality that all livestock, including horses and cattle, was much more expensive in the primitive Manitoba economy where Peter's parents would not even be able to afford a horse for many years.

One of the villagers, Cornelius Loewen (1927-93), held his auction in February, 1874, and recorded some of the details. Many of the buyers were other Mennonites in the area but also included some KG-ers such as Cornelius S. Plett who was not emigrating for another year and decided to purchase his brother-in-law's gelding for 48 ruble, about a third of what a good horse would cost in Manitoba.

By the spring of 1874 many from Borosenko planned one last trip to the Molotschna Colony to say goodbye to their birth place and to many dear friends and family. Johann Toews (1829-95), Grünfeld, travelled to the Molotschna just before the emigration to visit sister Helena, married to Jakob Buller, Alexanderwohl, and sister Maria, married to Peter Loewen, Fischau, whom he never saw again. Others made the trip to settle accounts, collect or pay debts, all part of the process of preparing for emigration.

Often goods were sold by auction. Peter Loewen (1825-87), Hierschau, Molotschna, later Sawitzki, Borosenko, acted as the auctioneer for many dispersal sales. Sometimes neighbours put their farms together to make a more attractive package. Aeltester Peter P. Toews placed his farm of 140 acres together with his next door neighbour, his widowed aunt, Karolina Plett Friesen, who had the same acreage, for a total of 280 acres. The two farms together sold for 3800 rubles, or about \$10 per acre, about the same price which the KG had paid in 1863-65 for the entire complex of 18,000 acres consisting of only bare land. In the meantime, however, many farmers had a number of excellent years, netting almost enough from a single crop to pay for the land. The very same land increased tenfold in price by World War One, selling for \$100 per acre.

The journals of Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92), Steinbach, Borosenko, provide information regarding the pre-emigration period in Borosenko. The first reference was during a brotherhood meeting held in the worship house in Blumenhoff on Sunday, August 26, 1873, during which "the selling of properties and the American emigration was discussed."

Another "big" brotherhood meeting (one which involved the Molotschna and Crimean congregations as well as the Blumenhoff Gemeinde), was held on Friday, September 14. A regular brotherhood was held on September 18, Tuesday. The strict protocol of the Gemeinde requiring proper respect for women was not sacrificed during the pre-emigration period and young Isaak Loewen was chastised at a brotherhood meeting on September 30, "as he had made jokes about the maid."

On October 5, 1873, Reimer recorded "The merchants from Hochstadt were here, they want to buy the entire village for 40 ruble [per desjation]". By the 19th the price being offered by the buyers had dropped to 34 ruble. On the 23rd Peter Enns from Kuteshebue bought the village windmill from Peter Buhler (1836-1900) for 575 ruble, it took several days for three men, three workers and six horses to dismantle the mill and 13 loads to haul it away.

It seemed that the Steinbachers were able to generate some interest in their properties and on October 28, nine buyers were in the village, four stayed at Peter Reimers and five at Abraham S. Friesen for dinner. Later that day, more colonists came, some from Felsenbach and other neighbouring villages and also some from the Molotschna. Four of them bought the entire village at 37 ruble per desjation. Individual items were sold separately. A sheep buyer came on November 2, purchasing the sheep.

Not everybody was unequivocally committed to the emigration. On No-

vember 6, Reimer's daughter Elisabeth and her husband Peter Toews returned from the Molotschna, "sick from travelling and with doubts about the emigration."

On November 24, buyers offered 37 ruble per desjation for the entire village of Blumenhoff. In Grünfeld the Russians offered 40 ruble. On November 27, the village auction in Steinbach began. Horned cattle were sold the next day, as well as big implements, only finishing at "vesper" on the 30th. The total auction sale brought 4000 ruble. On December 7, the colonists paid a further 11,000 ruble on account for a total of 12,000 to that point. It seems that in the village of Steinbach, at least, each farmer sold his individual "Feuerstelle" or farmstead in the village separately.

During the night of Friday, January 11, 1874, the Penners in Rosenfeld held their auction sale: "They sold livestock and many articles from three farms." During that night a thief broke into the Jakob Klassen home in Steinbach and stole "articles, like shirts, etc. from out of the chest in [their]...room. The loss was worth 54 ruble." On the 15th an auction sale was held in Anafeld, including livestock, which continued for two days. On the 21st an auction sale was held in Grünfeld, "livestock was sold, the cows had a fair price, from 25-45 ruble." The auction was completed on the 23rd. "Things were sold cheaply." Peter Reimer from Steinbach sold a mare on Monday for 50 ruble.

By now some of the purchasers started moving into their new homes. On January 24, 1874, "10 colonists with nine children moved in with Froese in Heuboden. This meant relocation for the vendors who had to find temporary quarters until the departure of their ship in May and June. "Froeses moved to Pragenau[?]" In the meantime 5-7 inches of snow covered the ground. On Monday, January 28, 1874, a big auction sale started in Rosenfeld lasting until Thursday.

Peter and Maria Reimer in Steinbach had evidently sold their Wirtschaft and moved into his father's summer kitchen on February 4. On Friday, February 8, Peter B. and Elisabeth Friesen moved into the school and Jakob and Katharina Klassen moved into Buhlers' old place. The next day, the colonist Greber moved into Klassens' place. While all this was going on the Bazavluk River was overflowing and on Monday, February 11, it was four meters from the blacksmith shop. The settlers were only barely able to cross through the river with their vehicles. The sick daughter of Abraham S. Friesen had to be taken across the creek with a boat. The danger of flooding was probably one reason why the Steinbachers later settled so far from a river in Manitoba. A three-day auction in Heuboden, lasted from Tuesday until Thursday.

On the 18th of February, 1874, the Borosenko settlers had an important visitor: "...a deputy from America was in Heuboden. He said much that apparently was true. He strongly advocated emigrating to the U.S." February 23, "the Heubodner all have sold, except Klaas Reimer, he may get 35 rubles." On March 2, two children drowned "in the creek near Klassens." March 14, "much ploughing in the village and the colonists repaired the dam." March 28, "the mature cattle were chased on the fields. Steinboks moved today to Johann Reimers." By April 1, wheat was up in many places and the flowers were blooming.



Mrs. Martin Penner, nee Aganetha B. Toews (1854-1920), matriarch of Greenland, Manitoba. It was reported that Aganetha and her husband, Obm Martin Penner (1849-1928), owned "1600 acres of debt-free land, a quarter section for each child, and a threshing machine." Photo courtesy of great-granddaughter Linda Schinkel, Steinbach/Pres., No. 11, page 85/ East Reserve 125, page 70.



Mrs. Johann G. Barkman, nee Margaretha Schierling Friesen (1858-1946) and her sister Mrs. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht, nee Katharina Schierling Friesen (1855-1938). In 1875 their father Jakob K. Friesen drowned in the Red River. He was the son of Johann von Riesen of Obrloff, Molotschna. The two sisters were neighbours on Wirtschaft 2 and 3 in Steinbach for 35 years. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, a granddaughter of Katharina Friesen Giesbrecht/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 22.



Helena Klassen Eidse (1861-1938), Rosenhof, Manitoba, pioneer midwife and nurse. Helena was the daughter of KG delegate David Klassen (1813-1900), formerly Margenau, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Lori Scharfenberg, R.R.1, Morris, Manitoba/Pres., No. 8, Part One, page 51.



Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen (1854-1937), wrote her life's experiences, which were translated and published by her grandson Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach, Manitoba. Anna was born in Fischbau, Molotschna. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 1/East Reserve 125, page 33.

Section 12.11: Farewell to Russia, 1874-75.

While all this was going on Peter P. Toews decided to proceed with the publication of the Peter J. Twisck book *Das Friedensreich Christi*. The project is mentioned for the first time in his papers on October 23, 1873, when he received a letter from the printers in Odessa, that they were accepting the book for printing. But the manuscript first had to be approved by the censors and it would be April 1875, before the printing of the book would actually be completed and not before Toews had made three trips to Odessa, regarding the project.

Significant discussion were initiated between the Blumenhoff and Heuboden Gemeinden, regarding a possible union. On August 10, 1873, three days after the return of Cornelius P. Toews from America, Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen and his brother Cornelius visited Peter P. Toews in Blumenhoff "to discuss a union with us [the Heubodner Gemeinde]." On Sunday the 12th, the letter of guarantee brought along by Cornelius P. Toews from the Canadian government was read to the brethren in Blumenhoff.

On August 18th, 1873, a conference was held in Blumenhoff "to consider the desire of the Heubodner to unite with us." They also considered a number of matters regarding the immigration such as, "how the poor would be able to cope and accomplish the emigration." Although the Canadian government had provided travel subsidies to induce the KG-ers to come to Canada, the cost per family would still run \$3-400. Both issues would be revisited several times during the next 12 months. Perhaps because of the exigencies of the pre-emigration period, such a union did not come to pass. On Sunday, August 26, Peter P. Toews admonished his parishioners "that everything pertaining to the sale and disposition of properties should be done only in love so that neither one nor the other would occasion damage thereby."

On August 30, 1873, a meeting took place at the home of Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, Heuboden, where Jakob Wiebe from the Crimea was present. The agenda was to plan for the emigration. Wiebe was able to set aside his scruples regarding the salvation and invalid baptism of his former brethren at this point, realizing that he had much to gain from the far more extensive resources of the well-established KG-ers in Borosenko and the Molotschna. It was decided to accept the land grants as offered by the Canadian government including the provision that all men and women over 20 years of age would be entitled to a quarter section of land and not merely the men. All those intending to emigrate were also encouraged to pay their debts in advance, thus removing their names from the officially published debtors list, there being a requirement that these be published to ensure fulfilment of their financial obligations.

At a brotherhood meeting on September 18, 1873, it was decided to hold another conference with the Heubodner regarding a possible union. The brethren discussed whether further inquiries should be made to determine the exact nature of the new military laws, but concluded that it was unnecessary given that the new laws had already been promulgated.

The meeting with the Heubodner took place on September 20 at the wor-

ship house in Blumenhoff with Toews, Abraham Loewen, Peter Kroeker, Jakob Barkman, Heinrich Wiebe, Abraham Klassen, Johann Dueck and Peter Baerg present from the Blumenhoff Gemeinde as well as the Molotschna and Crimean congregations. The Heubodners were represented by Aeltester Abraham Friesen, his father deacon Jakob W. Friesen and the new minister Jakob M. Kroeker (1836-1913), Heuboden, elected on April 10, 1873, with 37 brethren taking part. The discussion centred on practices pertaining to prayer and edification; the Heubodner placed emphasis on silent prayer, while the Blumenhoffers placed greater emphasis on the inward spiritual life of believers. The meeting, unfortunately, veered off topic and focused around the diminished confidence of some, presumably the Blumenhoffers, towards Ohm Jakob Friesen.

On November 7, 1873, Aeltesten Abraham L. Friesen and Peter P. Toews were summoned to attend at the Vollost offices in Nikolaithal to answer to charges by Abraham F. Thiessen who had put a claim against the KG. On January 2, 1874, Peter P. Toews was called back to the Vollost offices to deal with a similar claim by Jakob Braun, a former member. In April 1874, Governor-General Totleben issued a decree banning Thiessen from southern Russia which eliminated further problems in this regard.

On February 17, 1874, the brotherhood of the Blumenhoff Gemeinde was encouraged "that the treasury be more richly supported in order that capital could be assembled so the poor could be transmitted to America." As a result Isaak Friesen (1834-98) renounced the Gemeinde on March 2, 1874.

On April 14, the brotherhood also gave consideration to the collection of a fund for the needs of the poor, referred to as a "rate or assessment" and 1182 ruble were soon collected.

Some of the members were still unhappy with Aeltester Jakob A. Wiebe, for what they saw as his treachery in leaving the KG with the majority of their Crimean members. The KG brotherhood dealt strictly with all such individuals. On April 14, 1874, Heinrich Friesen, Sagradovfka, was forgiven for his loveless expression, "on the condition that he write Wiebe in Annenfeld to confess his loveless attitude."

On April 17, 1874, Aeltester Peter Toews was summoned to the Vollost offices in Nikolaithal and instructed to attend in Halbstadt to appear before Governor-General Totleben on April 19. As ordered, Toews travelled to the Molotschna, but the meeting only took place on April 20. At the meeting Totleben made a last unsuccessful effort to talk the KG out of their forthcoming emigration. On April 25, another meeting was held in Chortitz and again Toews was directed to be present where "again we were given the same presentation and earnestly advised to remain in [Russia]."

The KG preparations for emigration had already encountered bureaucratic delays with the issuance of immigration passes and Aeltester Peter P. Toews took advantage of this meeting to hand Totleben a letter of thanksgiving and petition, "for favourable disposition to those who would emigrate."

On April 29, Peter P. Toews and "a number of those who had not yet sold

their properties were required to attend in Ekatherinoslav. This included Cornelius S. Plett, uncle to Aeltester Peter P. Toews and Heinrich Reimer Jr. from Blumenhoff. At this meeting Totleben reiterated his previous presentation in Halbstadt and Chortitz. Toews finally "added the request that the people who had already had their auction sale and therefore would soon be without a place to live and who had such a lengthy journey ahead of them, might be allowed to receive their passes."

The Heubodner Gemeinde, no doubt influenced by Cornelius Jansen, Berdjansk, whose wife Helena von Riesen was a cousin to many of the KG leaders, had already decided to immigrate to the United States. But not all of the Heubodner agreed with this decision and some preferred the Canadian option selected by their delegate David Klassen. In May, the Sunday before Pentecost, those from the Heubodner Gemeinde who wanted to be received into the Blumenhoff Gemeinde were presented. There were some 15-20 families who made the transfer including David Klassen, the delegate, and the recently elected minister Jakob M. Kroeker. Several other families from the Molotschna wishing to emigrate joined the KG at this time, including the Gerhard Doerksens and Dietrich Isaaks, Fischau.

Evidently the plea made by Peter P. Toews to Totleben was successful as the first immigrants soon received their immigration passes. On May 30, 1874, the first contingent of the KG departed from Nikopol for America. The group consisted of 25 families, including brothers Johann H. Toews and Cornelius P. Toews. The second group which included the ministers Abraham Loewen and Peter M. Kroeker left on June 2. Both groups were accompanied to Nikopol by numerous brothers and sisters including Aeltester Peter P. Toews who himself would remain in Russia for one additional year to settle the denominations affairs.

On June 4th another group departed from Nikopol including most of the Rosenfelders and the deacons Heinrich and Peter Wiebe. On June 17, the remaining Rosenfelders and Dietrich Isaaks from Hochfeld left for Nikopol in order that they could depart by steamship the following day. On June 19, 19 additional families from Steinbach and elsewhere were underway. The remaining families from Steinbach and Anafeld left on Sunday, the 21st. They were under the leadership of Rev. Jakob M. Barkman, Friedensfeld. Many of these groups joined together in Hamburg, Germany from where they travelled as one large group of 65 families, the first Mennonite settlers to arrive in Manitoba, disembarking at the landing site at the juncture of the Red and Rat Rivers on August 1, 1874. Much to their credit, several of the pioneers maintained detailed accounts of their gruelling six-week odyssey across continents and the Atlantic Ocean, a number of which have recently been translated and published.

The Heubodner followed a different course with 24 families joining together with 77 families of the Hutterian Brethren as one emigration party. The group embarked in Hamburg, Germany on the S. S. Hammonia arriving in New York City on July 17, 1874. The Heubodner group was led by members of the ministerial including Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, ministers Cornelius L. Friesen

and Peter W. Friesen. Klaas R. Friesen, son of Peter, maintained an account of the emigration journey of this party.

The emigrants arranged to live in Clarence Center, New York, for a few months, working in the harvest. At the urging of relative Cornelius Jansen, the Heubodner travelled to Nebraska, where they purchased 15,000 acres of land in Cub Creek County, commonly known as Jansen, Nebraska. Other families followed individually and by secondary immigration from Canada so that by the end of 1877 some 60 families had settled there. About half of the twenty or so Heubodner families who joined the Blumenhoff Gemeinde to emigrate to Manitoba undertook a secondary migration to Jansen, Nebraska, or other destinations in Kansas within the first several years.

The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren group led by Jakob A. Wiebe actually was the first of the three congregations to reach American soil, arriving in New York on July 15, 1874. This was two days before the Heubodner and Blumenhoffers, the former arriving in New York on July 17, and the latter arriving in Quebec, Canada, on the same day. The KMB-ers and a number of associated families established the village of Gnadenau two miles southeast of present-day Hillsboro, Kansas. The village of Gnadenau proper consisted of some 20 families but according to a map of Gnadenau at its zenith another 20-30 families lived in the immediate vicinity "on the land" as opposed to being part of the village complex.

Another village, Alexanderfeld, was established two miles southwest of the present-day Hillsboro. Some of the Alexanderfeld settlers came by virtue of secondary migration from Canada such as former KG minister Abraham Klassen, Prangenau. A third village Hoffnungsthal, made up largely of KMB-ers was located six miles to the southwest along the bend of the South Cottonwood River. A number of KG-associated families settled in Inman, Kansas, including most of the children of Regina von Riesen Neufeld.



1897. Jakob B. Koop (1858-1937), born in Mariawohl, Molotschna. Emigrated from Neuanlage, Imperial Russia to Neuanlage, Manitoba, Canada. He was the author of the most complete record of the immigration experience among the Mennonites immigrating to Canada in 1874-6. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 12, page 57.



1941. Peter B. ("Grotta") Toews (1859-1945), Greenland, Manitoba. His father Peter W. Toews (1831-1922), had lived in Prangenau and Margenau, Molotschna, and had owned one of the first steam engines in the "East Reserve", Manitoba. Peter Sr. was known far and wide as "Grout Foada" Toews. Photo courtesy of Pres., No. 10, Part Two, page 50.

Section 12.12: Legacy.

By the 1880s a large percentage of the Russian Mennonites had adopted Separatist-Pietist religious language and culture including the millennial teachings of Jung-Stilling that Christ would return in the East and that Russia would be the haven of the church in the end times where it would be under the protection of the Imperial Czar. In contrast, the KG and other denominations who continued in the conservative faith tradition such as the Bergthaler and Alexanderwohler obviously had a much more realistic comprehension of social and political realities and/or were led more directly of the Spirit of God, as evidenced by the fact that they made the correct assessment of the situation in Russia and “took the pilgrims staff” while it was possible, which spoke to the veracity of their faith.

Although it should not be idealized, the KG sojourn in Russia, represented a dramatic testimony to the efficacy of full gospel faith and a prophetic witness for peace and biblical justice. Its prophetic stand for genuine discipleship and the restitution of the apostolic church rings with crystal clarity over the centuries, calling all Christians to a new paradigm based on the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount, and a renewed sense of what it could mean to be Biblically faithful. Such a faith manifested itself in many ways, breaking new ground in several areas: respect for elders, feminism, social justice, community values based on equity and fairness, etc.

The KG represented in the clearest way a continuation of the teaching and practices of the Prussian Mennonite Gemeinden of the 17th and 18th centuries. It incorporated a wide spectrum of theological and cultural backgrounds. The most direct theological impetus of the KG came from the Danzig Flemish Gemeinde, Prussia. But it was also influenced in a positive way by the Kronsgarten Frisian Gemeinde, the Waterländers in 17th century Holland, Jakob Denner (1659-1746), Altona, Germany, and other sources of spiritual inspiration.

Regrettably conservative Mennonites were always vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. There is no doubt that Satan frequently used Separatist-Pietists to achieve his goals of assaulting those aspiring in their weakness to follow Jesus. In his “Ein Kleines Aufsatz”, Klaas Reimer quoted Menno Simons that “nothing is more unfortunate for the devil than when peopleearnestly discipline themselves with the ban in accordance with the scripture and profess the Word of God to the world.” Such devout faith seemingly incurs the focused wrath of Satan whether it be in the steppes of Russia or in the jungles of Belize, and he will be sure to send forth his minions to seek, if possible, to turn people away from such endeavours in favour of the religious cultures of the world.

The KG was as prone to error as any other group of Christians; they aspired to sainthood and purity in the church but were always and indelibly mere mortals, humble sinners. The inherent sinfulness was clearly documented for all posterity by the ministerial journals of Johann Dueck and Peter P. Toews, but they also logged the heroic efforts of the ministerial and others to help those in difficulty and need, as well as the many instances of penitent sinners made victo-

rious by the grace of God, rising to sainthood in spite of, and in a certain sense, because of their abject sinfulness.

Contemporaries have given testimony of them. Abraham Toews, who took over as Oberschulz of the Molotschna Colony after the death of Johann Regier in 1842 is quoted by Franz Isaak as saying, "that in the fourteen years of his service no member of the Kleine Gemeinde had carried on any legal process, nor was involved in a transgression: and even more definitely that no member was punished by reason of having committed an offense." David H. Epp, the biographer of Johann Cornies, stated that "...at the time, the members of the Kleine Gemeinde, which definitely quickly increased in size through the addition of new members, endeavoured to live a strictly moral life."

In *The Molotschna Settlement*, Heinrich Goertz, says of the Kleine Gemeinde that "In other respects their people were otherwise genuinely pious and endeavoured to live the Christian lifestyle in accordance with their beliefs. In economic matters they were exceptionally industrious and soon became very wealthy" (Goertz, page 64). Jakob P. Bekker, co-founder of the Brüdergemeinde in Russia, quoted Jakob Martens, a minister of the Ohrloff Gemeinde as follows: "Furthermore it is a fact that among us an entire church, the so-called Kleine Gemeinde avoids the use of worship books [referring to the writings of the Separatist-Pietists] entirely, and yet there is no trace of fanaticism among them. Instead there are many sober, faithful and thoughtful witnesses, and a wholesome program of activities among them" (Bekker, page 121).

Franz Isaak, minister of the Ohrloff Gemeinde and advocate of the landless, stated, "...for a long time they [the Kleine Gemeinde] were singled out by a common ridicule, and the exemption from statute labour could not be enjoyed by their ministers as could other ministers. However, they endured everything with great patience and rendered their invariably punctual obedience to the local as well as the higher authorities. Their entire striving was to live out the teachings of Jesus. Matthew 5:39-41...After this Gemeinde had quietly and peacefully lived among the other Gemeinden for half a century, and had shown that the secular authorities had not found it necessary to subject a single member of their Gemeinde to punishment during this whole time....[they moved out of the Molotschna]" (Franz Isaak, page 91-93).

If the object of Christianity was a comfortable self-congratulatory experience focused on egocentric self-edifying worship, mirroring the popular culture of the day, to be judged solely by the number of adherents a group could acquire by one means or another, including the tactics of modern hucksterism and marketing, the KG was an abject failure. But if the purpose was a self-sacrificial discipleship based on a genuine biblicism and experiential faith which informed and revolutionized social relationships in all aspects of life, the KG story shines as a lighthouse beacon in the storm and has ever greater relevance in the modern age of cynicism, sensual self-indulgence and the "pop" religious cultures of the day. Truly, the KG were saints as well as sinners.

About the Author:



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

Appeal to Readers:

Hopefully an updated and more complete footnoted edition of this book can be published within the next few years. It would be my wish that a second edition could be more complete in terms of photographs. Unfortunately, I did not have access to many photographs from those descendants of the Kleine Gemeinde whose families emigrated to Jansen, Nebraska; Gnadenau, and Inman, Kansas, and later Meade. Readers who have access to such photographs and/or early writings of the Kleine Gemeinde are asked to send copies to the author, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, or phone 1(204)-326-9022. If you find that the history of your family is missing from this book and/or the "Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series", the reason is probably because I do not have the information about your ancestors. The only way to insure that your ancestors are properly included in the historical record and receive the credit they deserve, is by making this information available. I will appreciate your assistance.

Appendix A

The Story of the Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series, 1978-98.

I grew up in the KG community of Blumenort, Manitoba, Canada, my birth place in 1948. I always had an avid interest in history often asking my parents, especially my mother, about our family background. My parents had actually withdrawn from the Mennonite church during the 1930s seeking their spiritual solace in various branches of the Charismatic and Evangelical movement. In retrospect, her answers were sometimes confusing to a young inquisitive boy. In any case, I grew up not really thinking about myself as a Mennonite or even as being of Mennonite background. I was certainly aware that most people in the local community where I grew up were different, although many were my close relations.

In 1969 I left home to attend the University of Manitoba graduating with a Law Degree in 1972. In 1973 I started my own Law Practice in Steinbach. In 1975 I married Doreen Thomson, of Scottish background, whom I had met while attending Law School in 1970.

By a combination of good fortune and hard work, I was richly rewarded financially in my early years in practice. This was the time when Alex Halley's book *Roots*, about a man of Negro slave background seeking his own genealogical identity, had just been published. There was a renewed interest in genealogy and family history. Having satisfied my immediate financial needs, I too became interested in my own background.

In about 1978 I started asking questions and reading books about my own background. Slowly my lifelong passion for history--my favourite topics were the Roman Empire and WWII--coincided with my blooming interest in my own identity and my quest to discover who I was, my true purpose in life, and indeed, the meaning of life. I read the historical work about the Russian Mennonites written by Peter M. Friesen, just recently published in English translation. I remember reading for the first time his very negative statements about the KG, my ancestors. I discovered to my horror that these negative statements were repeated in more-or-less every Russian Mennonite history book I found.

My quest for self-discovery and my budding historical interest was reinforced time and time again by clients who came to my office and insisted on telling me they had known my preacher great-grandfather Cornelius L. Plett in Kansas or that they had worked for my grandfather, Heinrich E. Plett, in the lumber camps at Vassar or Roblin, Manitoba. It made me wonder about these people--I had never heard of them before but their lives and philosophy continued to have significant impact on me.

As part of my quest I visited various older people such as Cornelius L. Toews, a retired Holdeman school teacher, and Peter A. Plett, Landmark, my great uncle. Both were very knowledgeable about our history and I learned a lot. I quickly discovered that the negative view of the KG which I had found in Peter

M. Friesen's work and in the published historiography was false and that there was another much more logical interpretation of our history, one which my grandparents and great-grandparents would have accepted as truth.

I also started to talk to other people and found out that many had old shoe boxes full of ancient writings. Having received a sound university education I realized that these were documents of immense historical value. I started actively searching out and collecting such writings. I would guess that by now the KG "Schriftentum" found in various archives would be in excess of 100,000 pages. I assumed some professor anxious to make a name would quickly seize upon these new primary sources and do whatever was necessary to publicize them. But nothing happened.

After some time I decided that I would have to learn to read the Gothic script in order to decipher and digest the treasures which these documents contained. I literally butted my head against the wall until slowly but surely I was able to read these documents, not fluently but well enough to access their precious contents. I quickly learned they contained facts and details which not only contradicted the published negative view, but which laid out an alternate interpretation of our history, revealing that our ancestors had played an heroic role in the preservation and continuation of the Church of God since Reformation times.

During my university years I had also become either an atheist or an agnostic, I am not quite sure which. At the same time I continued to be a deeply spiritual person, but the questioning atmosphere of university coupled with the apparent superficiality and cynical self-aggrandizement of American Fundamentalism, completely turned me off all organized religion.

But now another important thing happened. As I started reading these writings my attitude changed. The genuine Christianity expressed in these ancient forgotten writings by my KG ancestors stirred the embers of faith in God somewhere deep within my heart. I saw for the first time and with singular clarity, another more genuine expression of evangelical truth.

By this time I had gathered a considerable body of written material. Since no one had come forward for the task of writing the KG story, I started the tedious work of translating these documents. To my surprise I found I quite enjoyed the process as I laboured over one sermon and journal after another. At my hand was an old Fibel and a hundred year-old "German to English" dictionary, invaluable as many of the words in the ancient Danziger High German dialect used by our Russian Mennonites forbears were not in current dictionaries.

Still no university professor or church denomination had come forward to publish and distribute this material. I found this very surprising and also disturbing as these writings contained the story of the soul of a people. So I decided I would publish a few special pieces myself after which surely someone better qualified would come forward to finish the task. The result was *History and Events* published in 1982. Finally with growing frustration I realized I would have to shoulder the task myself.

In my view a great injustice had been done to the KG and other conservative Mennonite groups by other denominations who found it to their advantage to disparage and write negative things about them. It has been said that lies and misrepresentations if repeated often enough will soon be accepted as truth, and that is what had happened here.

In reading various historical works in the historiography I quickly learned that what was written about conservative Mennonites was very selective. Even supposedly inter-Mennonite publications such as the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, in most ways an extremely valuable reference work, often described an important 19th century Aeltester who had led a Gemeinde of hundreds of families through transitions and migrations, as well as treacherous interference from other churches, with only a few short paragraphs of mainly incorrect and pejorative information. In the meantime any unemployed missionary running from one village to another breaking apart families and communities in a fanatical effort to coerce them to adopt the religious culture and language of German Pietism and/or American Fundamentalism was typically given a lengthy glowing biography.

The recently published three volume series *Mennonites in Canada* is an example of marginalizing conservative Mennonites by omitting them from the historical record and disparaging them. In Volume One (page 195), for example, Old Colony and Berghthaler Mennonites people were referred to as “poor and simple people” as if they were a lesser racial species. In Volume Three, Mexican Mennonites are characterized as “naive” (page 129), “impoverished”, “dirty”, and “stupid” (pages 136-139). Mennonite writing in general seemed to deal with conservative Mennonites with unabashed disdain. Students from conservative Mennonite denominations attending bible schools and colleges are frequently indoctrinated with lies and misrepresentations about their own heritage which has turned many against the faith.

Those propagating these attitudes are often superficially well educated and well-to-do Mennonites, and yet, they have not the social and cultural sensitivity and sophistication to treat these--their coreligionists--with at least a modicum of respect and tolerance. Those propagating these attitudes even include some members of the Mennonite clergy, as well as some individuals among the echelons of para-church organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee.

Thus it became a passion with me to try to correct the story of the KG. Because of my training as a lawyer I realized that it would not be sufficient to merely write a 100 page overarching history of the KG in Russia. To reverse the negative image of conservative Mennonites resulting from writings such as the Peter M. Friesen book, would require an extensive history. In short, the evidence would have to be detailed, analytical, thoroughly documented, and damning in the face of which no reasonable person could abide by the misrepresentations and perversion of facts previously written.

The result was the “Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series” that saw six volumes published between 1982 and 1993, making available a massive amount of new primary source material, over 3000 pages, translated into English. Volume

Seven, focusing on family history and genealogy, is forthcoming. At some point another volume focusing on the correspondence between the KG in Meade - Kansas, Jansen - Nebraska, and Manitoba, would be useful. But I will leave such further endeavours to other younger and more energetic minds.

It was always evident that at some point all this material should be used to write a brief but analytical introduction to the story of the KG in Imperial Russia. This would allow the more general reader access to this incredibly rich treasure trove of historical materials. This point was brought home to me on February 8, 1998, when I made a presentation on "The Anabaptist Vision and the Kleine Gemeinde" at Spanish Lookout, Belize, where 500 people attended at the "big" church in Schönthal. It made me realize again how helpful it would be to have a short introductory history book available which could serve as an overview to guide interested lay people through the abundant sources and the myriad of facts and details necessary to appreciate the exciting nuances and intricacies of our history.

On the flight back to Canada I decided to make it my highest priority to compile and write such a book. I decided that I would start by compiling the notes I had used for my presentation into a written paper and to make the paper available to the residents of Spanish Lookout, Belize in time for their 40th anniversary celebrations on March 14 and 15, 1998, if possible.

Once a working outline and format was complete I planned to continue the project, with the intention of having a 150 page book with illustrations and photographs available no later than 1999. This, of course, has grown to the present 300 page manuscript which may well result in a 350 page book by the time maps, photographs and indexes are added.

By 1882 the KG of Imperial Russia had become four separate entities, all of them in North America: the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren in Kansas; the Holdeman Mennonites in Manitoba, and, of course, the KG in Manitoba and Nebraska. Today the descendants of the Manitoba KG are found within the 6000 member Evangelical Mennonite Conference with headquarters in Steinbach, Manitoba, as well as the 2000 member "Kleinegemeinde" which still thrives in Mexico, Belize, Nova Scotia, Bolivia and Oklahoma.

This article and book are to be my special gift to all these KG descendants and their diaspora all over the Americas in honour of the 125th anniversary of the Kleine Gemeinde settlement in Manitoba and Nebraska in 1874.

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Warkentin, Johann <i>Stammvater</i> (1760-1825) Blumenort	44,48,59,90,149,164
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SAINTS AND SINNERS

In this book, *Saints and Sinners*, Delbert F. Plett has integrated twenty years of research, writing, and translation of primary sources about the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites founded on the steppes of Imperial Russia in 1812. With its genetic roots planted firmly in the sandy soils of the Prussian Vistula Delta, and its spiritual ethos informed by the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation in Holland in 1536, the Kleine Gemeinde blazed a trail of biblical faithfulness throughout the 19th century.

In 1874 the Kleine Gemeinde denomination immigrated to North America together with 16,000 other Mennonite and Hutterite Anabaptists. They left Russia in search of religious and cultural freedom, settling in the western plains of North America where they established settlements which evolved into the modern-day villages of Rosenort, Kleefeld, Blumenort and City of Steinbach, Manitoba, and Meade in western Kansas. The Kleine Gemeinde story has continued with the transplanting of the denomination to Jagueeyes in the mountain valleys of northern Mexico in 1948 and ten years later to Spanish Lookout in the jungles of Belize.

Plett's work is much more than a recounting of Kleine Gemeinde history. He has brought forth a fundamental reinterpretation of the religious history of the Russian Mennonites. In his account, the Kleine Gemeinde are faithful preservers of the conservative tradition articulated by their Anabaptist forebears, striving for nothing less than the restitution of the New Testament church.

In addition, Plett has discovered for posterity the culture and spiritual ethos of an entire people. In his quest, Plett has recaptured a lost civilization, speaking for the vitality and vibrancy of ages past going back to medieval times when Low German and the Hanseatic League dominated social life and culture in Northern Europe and around the Baltic Sea.

In page after page of documented history, Plett develops these themes and more, telling above all the story of a community with a revolutionary message, but always human and mortal, made up of saints and sinners. As an expression of genuine Biblicism the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde was informed by a Christian vision that gave breath and life, and reformed social constructs which affected the rights of women, the plight of the poor and the hope of the dispossessed.

Above all, Mr. Plett tells the fascinating story of a community which applied ancient strategies to survive as a people, successfully transplanting their culture from one continent to another and from one century to the next.