

Preservings

-being the Newsletter of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.



Special Double Issue - Part Two Price \$10.00

No. 10, June, 1997

"A people who have not the pride to record their history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great." *Jan Gleysteen*

Feature Article:

Anna: Woman of Strength

The Journal of Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen (1854-1937): "Woman of Strength,"
with introduction and annotations by grandson Ben B. Dueck, Box 118, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Anna Dick Doerksen could trace her genealogy to great-great-grandparents Gerhard Doerksen (1742-1806) and Anna Fast (1743-94) in Prussia: "... originally from Heuboden, but moving to the City of Danzig in 1766...": courtesy of Henry Schapansky.

In 1825 her great-grandparents Gerhard Doerksens (1767-1837) emigrated to Russia with 5 sons. They settled in the village of Fischau, Molotschna, where they had acquired a block of 3 Wirtschaften by 1835.

Anna was born to Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82) and Helena Dick (1832-1910) on December 28, 1854. She received her education (and work ethic) in Fischau. In his younger years her father had also served as a school teacher and was a gifted *Fraktur* artist: see *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, page 28.

Together with her parents, Anna emigrated to Manitoba, Canada in May-June, 1875. She was 20 at the time and kept a diary. That first fall Anna together with her parents, joined the Kleine Gemeinde (KG). On October 17, 1875, Anna married Martin G. Barkman, son of Rev. Jacob M. Barkmans (1824-75) of Steinbach: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec., 1996, Part Two, pages 1-10.

The young couple homesteaded in Hochstadt, a few miles south of Gruenfeld.



Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen (1854-1937) in about 1926. Photo by son Jakob D. Barkman.

After reading her whole story (written in her words and translated by Ben B. Dueck, her grandson now living in Steinbach after a lifetime of teaching), you will understand my calling her a 'woman of strength'.

Birth, 1854.

On the banks of the Molotschna River in Molotschna colony, lay the Gerhard B. Doerksen home and farm Wirtschaft in the pleasant village of Fischau in the late-afternoon winter sunshine. Christmas, 1854, had just passed. Although gifts had been few and hand-made, no one complained.

Last year at this time, Gerhard and Helena had treasured their first-born son, Bernhard,

born in October, but he had quietly slipped away early in 1854. Now they were expecting their second child: one they hoped would survive.

Tiny energetic Anna appeared on December 28. With her first healthy cries she expressed her will to live. Soon their daughter ran after her tall father from house to barn, helping to feed the chickens and calling the cows and horses by name.

Little did young Anna - girl realize that she would soon take part in the greatest adventure of her developing life: an adventure that would inspire and alter the destiny of future generations more than she--or even her descendants--could ever dream of . . .

Fortunately for us, Anna was highly observant and loved writing. Let us hear her tell the saga of her unfolding life.

The Journal.

Birth: I, Anna Doerksen, was born on December 28, 1854, in the village of Fischau in South Russia on the Molotschna River. Here, I also received my education, starting school in 1860.

Education: I learned enough during the first winter to finish the first primer [Fibel] soon after the New Year, starting in the [New] Testament, also.

Gerhard Goossen was our teacher. And going to school was a joy for me. However, in 1864, because of quarrels in the village assembly, Peter Friesen was hired to replace him. He was not Goossen, but, as I found learning easy, I had no reason to complain, although he was very strict with some pupils. If the children he instructed had all taken the shape of the things Friesen called them at times, most of them would have been fools, sheep's-heads, donkeys and flatheads, but, thank God, they remained human beings. In addition, he hit the students over the head with the Bible and penmanship books, things that Goossen would never do. I finished my formal education under Friesen's tutelage

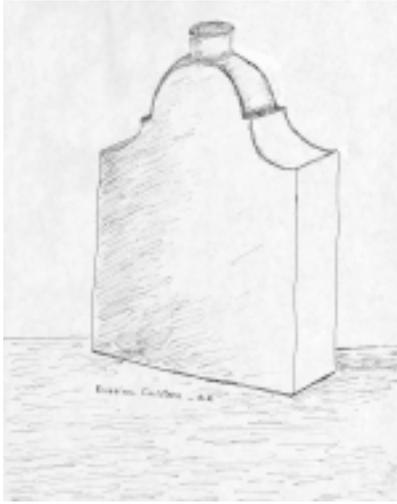
continued on next page

Inside This Issue

Articles pages 1 -65

Material
Culture pages 66 - 80

Book
Reviews pages 81 - 84



A Prussian soldiers' canteen which Anna's grandfather had brought along from Prussia in 1825. Sketch by grandson Ben B. Dueck, who presently has the canteen on his possession.

continued from previous page

(Note One).

Helping Mother: Besides my schooling, I had to help Mother. In the morning, I washed the dishes and swept the floor. As I grew older, I would build the fire in the stove on getting up, then leave for school immediately after breakfast. Despite my work, I was never late for school; in fact, my attendance was very regular.

Illness: One winter I came down with small-pox. Apparently, I was near death, but with God's help and the doctor's advice, I recovered. Later, I often wondered why the Lord did not take me to Himself then, for I was still

innocent and had felt no conscience-pangs. (However, God knows why I'm still a pilgrim here; He makes no mistakes.)

Economic Changes: In 1866 all landless families [Anwohner], including my parents were given 12 desjation of land each [approximately 32 acres], and now I had to help my father with the plowing. Since this land was ten verst away from our village, we would stay on the steppe-land for the whole week, day and night. This was repeated during harvest-time in late summer.

At that time, there were no reapers or binders; the grain was cut with a scythe and bound into sheaves by hand. Then the sheaves of grain were laboriously hauled home. We left home at two in the morning, or even earlier, and came back with the first load of grain by seven. We fed the horses and had breakfast, unloaded our rack and were off to the steppe for our second load. With this we returned at past noon. After lunch, we emptied the rack and went out for our third trip. We came home late; before all the chores were done, it was usually eleven o'clock. Thus, with the hauling of three loads we ended our day. After a few hours of rest, we were up again. This was very hard for me. Driving to the steppe, I lay down on the wagon and slept as well as I could. Going home with the full load, father slept while I had to take the reins. During the second and third trips, I took along some knitting. No time was wasted.

This was how I spent my youthful summers. Those farmers who did not have very good horses could only haul two wagonloads per day, and this is what most of them did. However, when the weather was dry we always made three trips daily. In our journey we had to pass through Wolf's Creek. It had

very steep banks, preventing us from loading our racks very full. But, thank God, all that is behind us.

Threshing: When all the grain was finally home, we threshed it. Horses were hitched to a specially-made threshing stone and the sheaves were threshed with this. After threshing the grain, we shook the straw with rakes to separate the kernels from the straw; this was called "raking out". The straw was then carefully piled while the grain with the chaff was pushed into the barn, where the grain was cleaned of chaff by running it through the fanning mill two or three times. The clean grain was then carried up into the loft.

Late-Fall Work: When we were through with harvesting, my father went out to do custom carpentry, while I had to be "chore-girl" at home, taking manure out of the barn, feeding and watering the horses, often cutting silage and sifting chaff for the cows.

Seamstress: Mother took in sewing for others, with which I had to help her when I became older. We had no sewing machine; everything had to be sewn by hand. Working so late was hard for Mother and me, and I often invoked harm on the whole sewing trade! Later, however, I was thankful that I had learned a little sewing.

Church: Conversion: In 1874 in spring I joined the Lichtenauer ("Light-filled meadows") Church where Jacob Toews was bishop, and was baptized on the second of Pentecost.

Translator's Comments:

Anna, the young Christian, had learned to work hard physically. Now, other clouds gathered on her horizon--clouds deeply affecting her Anabaptist faith. Fortunately, the Doerksen family were united in the way they felt when their faith was threatened; if non-resistance was going to be scrapped by Russia, the Doerksens--including Anna--were ready to join the more conservative Kleine Gemeinde and strike out bravely for freedom--in Canada. Anna was not one to waver in her faith.

II. Emigration.

During the spring of 1875 I emigrated to [North] America together with my parents, three brothers and one sister [Anna covers the epic journey in her diary]. Thursday, May 1, 1875 - We left our home village of Fischau, Russia, in the morning. Dear friends brought us to the railway station at Hochstadt. The train took us from here to Alexandrowsk [modern-day Zaporoshe], where we arrived at four p.m. and overnighted in a new house on the water.

On Friday, May second, we left here by ship on the Dnieper River, arriving at Nikopol at three the same day. There we stayed until Sunday, May 4, having quarters at Priebis.

We boarded our ship at four in the morning on May 4, but the fog was too thick to start; it delayed us until seven. That day we proceeded intermittently, stopping at four places;



The residence and farm of Gerhard E. Kornelsen and Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen, just south of Steinbach on NW14-6-6E. This was the only place where we visited grandparents and our several unmarried aunts. Spirited horses would sometimes thunder over the yard, and we had to be careful. To the left of the house was the orchard, a place of fruit and cheerful walks. Our parents and grandparents would visit inside the house. (My parents: Anna's oldest living daughter, also an Anna, Mrs. Peter R. Dueck, Kleefeld--Ben B. Dueck.) The photograph was probably taken by my uncle Jakob D. Barkman, sometime between 1912 and 1925. Photo and caption, courtesy of grandson Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach.

at none of these were we allowed to disembark. At 2:30 p.m., we arrived in Kokowka, stopped briefly, then went on for 15 minutes to Bereslasso, never pausing for longer than a quarter of an hour. Not before seven did we reach Cherson where we stayed overnight.

On May 5th, we left Cherson at eight in the morning, but on a larger ship. We entered the Black Sea at 1:30, travelling for four hours to reach Odessa at six, going into our quarters at Maibachs.

Tuesday, May 6th - Today my two-year-old brother Abram got sick. We travellers were delayed in Odessa two days and three nights because of several families from Borosenko who also wanted to travel with us. We only left Odessa on Thursday, May 8th, by a train which also took us over the Russian border, 512 verst from our former home. After a day and a night on this train we came to Wolotcheska at eight a.m. on Friday, May 8th; then after another hour we crossed the Austrian border into the city of Podwolotschiska. Here our belongings were to be inspected, but it did not happen; only our passports had to be shown and our freight was weighed. Our train was allowed to depart at seven in the evening, arriving in Krakau on Saturday, May 10th at 3:00 p.m. Here we changed trains and by four in the afternoon we came to Trezebienna. That night, we had to sleep under God's free heaven on the station yard.

Sunday, May 11 - We left Trezebienna today at seven a.m., travelling for two hours, crossing the border of Austria into Prussia and crossed into the Prussian city of Mislowitz. Again, to our surprise, we were not searched.

Spiro, who would be our leader from here to Hamburg, came to meet us at this point. Leaving Mislowitz at 5 P.M. we pulled into Breslau close to midnight at eleven, halting for only a few minutes.

Monday, May 12th - We arrived at Berlin at ten in the morning. In this major city in Germany we had to change trains, and could only leave here at 10 p.m., pushing on steadily until, on Tuesday, May 13 at six in the morning, our eyes beheld the great harbour city, Hamburg, from which we would sail for the New World!

Wednesday, May 14 and Thursday, May 15 - We were in Hamburg.

Friday, May 16 - Our Mennonite travelling group boarded our ship at 5:30 at night, but because of the tides we had to wait until midnight to leave harbour.

Brother Abram was already very sick.

Saturday, May 17 - We all still ate breakfast, but very soon all were sea-sick, except Father [Doerksen], but even he could not keep his head upright!

Sunday, May 18 - We arrived in Hull, England at 5 p.m., but because of low tide, our ship could not navigate in the harbour. All stayed on board.

Monday, May 19 - At seven in the morning, we all disembarked. Several of our chests of goods were opened and searched. Then Falk



Photo taken on Jakob D. Barkman's lot in Steinbach, Main Street. Grandma, Anna, sitting, hands folded; standing beside her is daughter-in-law, Anna, Mrs. Jakob D. Barkman; to the right-hand side of Anna Barkman is her granddaughter-in-law Mrs. Martin B. Barkman, nee Agnes Wiens, holding Clifford. The barn in the background belongs to Jakob D. Barkmans. Their residence is to the right of the picture. The year is not certain, but it might be during Anna's second widowhood, 1933-37. Photo and caption, courtesy of Ben B. Dueck.

(new guide) took us to the second storey of a three-storey building where we were given a lunch of peas, soup, white bread and butter.

When we had eaten, we all walked to the railroad station, boarding the train for Liverpool where we arrived at five p.m. From Hull to Liverpool the train drove through four-tunnel.

During our first night in Liverpool, my brother Abram died at midnight. He became ill in Odessa on May 6th. In his final 4 days he said nothing except when we asked him something. Abram reached the age of two years, two months and twenty-six days. Father had much trouble to arrange for our brother's burial; in fact, he was not buried during the time we were there. It was heart-breaking for our family to leave him lying there on the cold marble slab in the morgue and to walk away.

Monday, May 19 and Tuesday, May 20 - We waited in Liverpool to board our ocean liner. On Thursday, the twenty-second, after breakfast, we were taken on a long walk, about four or five miles, to the harbour where our ship waited. We boarded the giant at ten o'clock in the forenoon. The ship started from the dock and moved for two hours, then it halted for the doctor to board. Everyone singly had to pass by the medical man. This took until six p.m., when the ship moved forward again.

Friday, May 23 - Today we reached Ireland at twelve noon and left it again at six p.m. Our ship had logged 190 miles today.

Saturday, May 24. On the open Atlantic we made 183 miles. Our best time was on Sunday, May 25, when our captain and crew had set a record of 265 miles! Then followed Monday to Thursday, May 26 to 29, when the daily distances we logged were 252; 245; 245

and 250 miles respectively. From here on our ship had to slow down: from Friday to Sunday, May 31; 130; 56; and 50 miles.

We had been away from our home in Fischau, Russia, 1 month now--and we were still on that ship! We had also spent the first few days of June.

Friday, June 6 - I do not know how many miles we made today. However, the ocean journey is over; we docked at the wharf in Quebec City, Canada at twelve o'clock at night!

Saturday, June 7 - 9:00 a.m. We walked ashore in this new land, our feet on solid ground again.

We have been on this ship for sixteen days, disembarking on the sixteenth day. During the whole voyage we had wind for only a day and a night, causing the waves to wash over the deck and the water to come trickling down to our sleeping quarters.

We boarded this ship on May 22nd. On May 29th it became very foggy and remained so until Tuesday, June 3rd. In these six-and-a-half days our ship stood still more than it moved, for the captain and officers feared hitting an iceberg because there was no visibility forward. There were extremely tall icebergs in the vicinity; several times we passed so closely to one of these that we had to reverse the ship to avoid a collision.

On Monday, June 2nd, another ship came toward us, searching for survivors. On June third a different vessel sank two hours after hitting a giant iceberg. Four full lifeboats had managed to escape their doomed vessel, but only one of them had reached land thus far; there was no trace of the other three boats.

Our ship was 130 steps long and 25 steps wide. There were 750 souls on board; 650 passengers and 100 persons who ran the ship. It was named the "S.S. Prussian."

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Father and I were sick three days; Helena and Gerhard were sick a shorter time, while Bernhard escaped illness. Mother was not feeling really well, but stayed up and around.

When the fog cleared at noon on June 3rd, the ship again began to move forward more rapidly. We saw land in the afternoon; it was an island with lighthouses. We were really glad to see land, even if it was only an island. However, we still had a long way to go before we could get off the ship.

We are now in Canada, but still have far to go to the new Province of Manitoba.

III. To Gruenfeld via Chicago

June 7 to June 17, 1875--After our Atlantic crossing, we disembarked at last at nine a.m. on June 7 in Quebec. By four p.m., we boarded again--a Canadian west-bound train!

Sunday, June 8th - At four in the morning we came to Montreal where we were given a properly-cooked breakfast: fried potatoes, beef, white bread, butter and coffee. It was a bit early to eat breakfast, but it was very tasty.

We all slept while the train stopped. After all of us had eaten, the train moved on, arriving in Toronto at one hour after midnight--Monday, June 9th. We stayed in this big city until Tuesday, June 10, receiving meals and beverages.

I forgot to mention; before we left Quebec, we received large quantities of food, donated to us new Canadians by Mennonites living in Ontario and Quebec. Schantz, our leader from Quebec to Toronto, to whom these donated goods were entrusted, delivered hams, cheeses and white bread to our group of Mennonite settlers. Schantz was a Mennonite preacher.

Still on Monday, June 9th, several families of [Swiss or "old"] Eastern Canadian Mennonites met us. They came from 30 miles distance to greet us as brothers and sisters in the faith. With them was also a bishop who held a solemn service together with us. Several of these newfound brothers and sisters in the faith returned to their homes the same evening, but Schantz and his wife stayed with us until our train was ready to depart.

Tuesday, June 10 we left Toronto at 9 a.m. At 7 that night we had to change trains, going on at once.

On Wednesday, June 11, we arrived in Chicago, having crossed into the United States earlier. We were taken to another railroad station here with other conveyances. There we had to wait two hours for Abraham Schellenberg who had stayed behind on Tuesday.

The train stopped for twenty minutes, then it pulled further into Chicago to buy milk. Just as Schellenberg caught up with us, the train left! Schellenberg ran hard, but the train

gained speed rapidly and soon pulled away. Klotz, who was now our leader, telegraphed back to Chicago that they should rush Schellenberg to our next stop. Wednesday at nine in the morning, Schellenberg caught up with our train. We all climbed aboard and sped toward St. Paul and from there to Junction, where we arrived Thursday, June 12, at five p.m.

We Mennonite travellers quickly had to transfer to another railroad car and wait for Klotz, our leader. He had stayed in St. Paul because he wanted to make certain all our baggage would come with us.

Then on Friday, June 13, we left Junction

Fischau, in South Russia. We thanked God for bringing us safely here.

Note One: All the above autobiography is written according to the Russian calendar at that time. According to the present calendar here in Canada, it would be 12 days ahead.

Notes about our Voyage to Canada: At Lake Superior, the trip was not in order [Most likely, the ice was not out of the Great Lakes yet. B.B.D.]; that is one reason why we travelled through the States. Another was because the States also were eager to have more settlers there.

The Canadian government feared that if Canada did not provide us with a leader through the States, the U.S. might not allow us to go on to Manitoba. That is exactly what happened. When Klotz got off the train in St. Paul for necessary business (regarding our baggage), the train quickly sped on with us, but without Klotz! However, Klotz had immediately telegraphed ahead to Junction that the U.S. authorities should leave us at Junction and not take us further along.

When Klotz finally caught up with us and the train, he told us he had been apprehensive that United States authorities would take us somewhere else than to Manitoba. We were anxious, too, when we became aware that we were (for a time) without our leader, and were heartily glad when Klotz again rejoined us and stayed!

IV. New Beginnings, 1875

On Thursday, June 19, [1875], [Anna writes] Father went to look at land. Tuesday, June 24, both our parents went along with Johann Toewses to Winnipeg, coming home on Thursday, the 26th. They had signed a land purchase, bought a pair of oxen for \$110, one cow with a big bull calf at \$30, a stove for \$20 and some smaller necessities.

On June 30 we planted, as a trial, some potatoes, but they did not grow.

On July 2 we moved to Steinreich [area also known as Hochstadt] to Isaac E. Loewens. On July 3, Father, sister Lena and I went to our land to mow some roof thatching; on Friday, the 4th of July we began building a "Sarei" [a roof-like structure]. On Monday, July 7, we moved into our Sarei, although we had not entirely finished putting the thatch on the roof. Next day, Mother and I dug a well; however, it did not produce much water, so we had to carry water a quarter mile from the creek. The day after, we dug a small piece of land and sowed some vegetables, but they yielded nothing. On the 11th of July, we unpacked our big chest ["Kjist"].

Monday, July 14 - Father and Lena drove to Winnipeg to get the wagon which we had brought along from Russia, which had by now also arrived in the city.

Mother and I went into the bush to cut down trees for building a house. On Thurs-



Sewing grouping 1866-72. Objects used in Fischau by Anna's professional seamstress mother in producing lovely wardrobes for the well-to-do. (Anna used these too. There were no sewing machines they could use then.

1) Water canteen - In background. A very old Prussian water canteen found on an ancient battlefield, probably used by the two Barkman brothers--Jakob J. and Martin J., who walked to Russia in 1818, after experiencing the devastation of the Napoleonic siege of Danzig.

2) Light ball - a lovely, highly chromed orb put on the table to reflect the light of the candles so sewing could be carried on longer at night.

3) Needles and thread - below light ball, not old.

4) Scissors - to right, Anna's regular seamstress scissors, in our family for approximately 140 years.

at nine a.m., pulling into Moorhead at seven at night. Here we immediately embarked on a ship. Father went quickly into the city, bought a quarter-bushel of potatoes at twenty-six cents. We walked to the river and cooked our meal.

On Sunday, June 15th at nine p.m., we left Moorhead, going north along the Red River into Manitoba, Canada. On Tuesday, June 17th at four in the morning we disembarked from the ship at the landing place that had been used by other groups of Mennonite settlers, about 15-20 miles south of the city of Winnipeg.

After getting off, we cooked our breakfast on the river bank. An ox-team had been sent from the nearest settlers' village to get us. At eight o'clock we left the Red River landing, travelled slowly all day and arrived at Johann Toewses in Gruenfeld, Manitoba at 1 o'clock past midnight! Johann Toewses was the one who got us.

This was the 48th day since we left

day, July 17, at ten o'clock at night Father came home. He had bought a plow at \$20. On the 18th of July we unpacked the wagon and hauled building logs for a week.

July 28 - Father and Gerhard went to Winnipeg to get some flour; they also brought along a nice cow for \$40, as well as two sheep at \$5 apiece. They returned on July 31st. Grass mowing was begun on Wednesday, August 13th. On the night of June 14 it had frozen.

Wednesday, September 3 - We finished haying; we had made a total of 24 loads. On September 4 and 5, we mowed thatching for our dwelling house and Saturday the 6th we worked on our house. On September 9th Father drove to Winnipeg to get lumber for the floor. He returned on September 11th.

September 22 - Snow fell. Next day, Father and Gerhard went to the city for lumber and potatoes.

We moved into our new house the 26th of this month. Thatching the roof took us from September the 24th to the 30th.

Monday, October 6 - We laid the floor of our new house. Tuesday, October 7 - Father went to Winnipeg to buy some potatoes, returning on Saturday, the 11th.

Getting Established:

I. Kleine Gemeinde: Soon after we came to Manitoba, we [the Gerhard Doerksen family] joined the Kleine Gemeinde [later the Evangelical Mennonite Conference].

II. Marriage: I married Martin G. Barkman son of Jacob M. Barkman [who had drowned in the Red River in 1875 in spring], on October 17, 1875. My husband also belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde.

We took up a homestead in Hochstadt also and farmed there until 1883. In this time, 4 children were born to us, 2 of whom died on that farm and were also buried there.

My father, Gerhard B. Doerksen, died on December 15, 1882. In spring of 1883, my lonely mother married Johann Warkentin.

We bought a farm from Peter Ennses, Heuboden, for \$800 to which we moved in spring of 1883. Here our family increased; six more children were born here--two of them died and were buried on this farm.

In 1893 we moved a few miles south of Steinbach to our third farm, where God gave us two more children.

In 1896 my dear husband, Martin, died after suffering from a lung disease for seven years. This caused a very deep wound in me. Martin, our oldest, was 17 years when I with eight children, became widowed. We were not debt-ridden, yet still in needy circumstances. Now I was supposed to continue farming here to earn our daily bread! It was hard, very hard

for me, but with hard work and scraping and with God's help we have managed without going into debt.

III. Children Marry: My son, Martin, married Elizabeth K. Loewen on February 26, 1899. They lived a year longer with me, then moved to their own farm, a mile south of us.

Martin died on May 6, 1910, exactly on his 32nd birthday. This cut another deep gash across my heart; he was always a real support to me.



Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelson with daughter Anna, Mrs. Peter R. Dueck, Kleefeld, and daughter Aganetha, Mrs. Peter J. Loewen in front

Daughter Anna and son Jacob had also already married; Anna married Peter R. Dueck, Gruenfeld, on March 23, 1902, while Jacob found his bride in Anna B. Barkman and married her on November 26, 1905. Jacob worked in the flour mill in Steinbach, and for this reason he could not come to help me; however, the other children have worked out steadily away from home, especially John, and that has helped me greatly.

Our hay we had to make elsewhere (than on our farm), but have always had enough fodder to bring the cattle and oxen through the winter. One year the grain yield was minimal, then we had to feed wheat straw and chaff, but the cattle stayed alive.

Then Cornelius married in March of 1911. On the 19th he married Margaret Dueck. That

ended my farming career; that spring I moved off the farm to Steinbach where I lived with John for a year.

IV. My Second Marriage: In 1912, on May 5, Gerhard E. Kornelsen, a pioneer school-teacher, farmer and widower, married me. Together with my three unmarried daughters, I moved to the Kornelsen farm. My husband had one unmarried daughter, Agatha, living at home. She and my youngest, Aganetha, became very fast, lifelong friends and sisters.

After just over three years of married life, my son, Cornelius, died on May 13, 1914. Daughter Katharina married Peter B. Koop, less than a month after her brother's death! Lena served at Heinrich Reimers in the store, then for several more years at Jacob Reimers. She decided to get married to Klaas Reimer in 1922. That left our youngest daughter, Aganetha, still at home until she went to Winnipeg to serve in the house of more well-to-do people.

My husband and I decided to give up farming in 1925 and moved to Steinbach.

Here, I broke my right arm in October, 1928. Despite this accident, I did all my own housework with one hand except peeling potatoes. Sometimes I felt very bad, but things got a lot worse; I developed nervous rheumatism (rheumatic fever?) in my whole body. Gradually, I improved, but will never be without pain again. But God be praised that I have healed; even my hand is also better, but not as strong as formerly. In all, my strength is decreasing; no wonder, I am now 81 years old.

V. Old Age: In 1930, November 15th, my husband, Gerhard Kornelsen, had a stroke. He recovered very slowly until he got a second, lighter stroke on November 9, 1931. His thinking was weak ever since his first attack and increasingly became less, especially after the fall of 1932. Despite this he took fresh air daily and often several times a

day, though after Christmas, 1932, everything waned rapidly. When he sat indoors he fell asleep immediately; the same thing occurred at the table after a meal. We both enjoyed singing together, but that became impossible with his slumbering. His eyes, too, had become affected and reading had to be dropped.

On Friday, January 27th, my husband, towards late afternoon, walked to lawyer John D. Goossen to sign the papers for the lot near our church that he had sold. He came home very tired, but ate a good supper and went out to get a big armful of firewood for the night. We then went to bed.

In the morning of January the 28th, we got up as usual. He did not feel well; said it was the grippe; went to the barn to look after the chickens. He came to the table, but did not

continued from previous page

touch a bite of food, nor a drop of coffee. He said he would be obliged if he could get to bed. I straightened the covers at once, but the thought involuntarily came to me; his end is coming.

Sunday, the 29th, we were both sick; he was not clear in his mind, but we were still by ourselves in the house, except grandson Willie Kornelsen came to do chores in the barn morning and evening.

Monday, the 13th, we both felt quite a bit better. "I have got the flu behind me," he said. But still he did not eat, although he was up most of the day. When we went to bed, however, he began to talk; there was no further thought of sleeping.

In the morning of the 31st my husband stood up, but fell down when he wanted to go back to bed. His physical strength was completely gone. We had to call for help, and in the afternoon, two men had to be there with him.

Early on February first, he said goodbye to me without saying a word, because he could not speak any more.

At seven in the morning of February the second he could stop suffering--he was gone.

Sunday, February fifth, 1933, it was blizzardy and 30 below (Reamur) when my dear husband was carried to his grave and buried.

On April 22 all our properties were sold by public auction. I am now without earthly goods, but not without God. I say "God has safely brought me thus far, and will take me safely home."

Anna's Dreams - edited by Ben B. Dueck

When I was a widow for the first time, I had a remarkably vivid dream. I dreamt I wanted to go home. I stood on the banks of a sea and did not know how to cross it. There was no other way to get home. My two brothers and their families were there, too. They boarded a small steamship and left me standing on shore alone. I gazed longingly after them and saw that their ship rocked to and fro. Despite this, they moved ahead, and I was to cross this vast sea on foot! I could see my home on the far shore, but to cross those wide and deep waters seemed impossible to me.

As I sadly stood there, enviously thinking how lucky my siblings were and why I was to cross this large sea alone, I suddenly noticed that its waters were becoming narrower and shallower. Then I could see bottom; the waters reached only to my knees! I thought: "God can do miracles as well today as in Israel's time, when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea."

I started walking, and then I noticed Mother was there. She walked ahead of me and I followed her, and we both arrived home safely. Then I turned and looked over the waters, saying: "There; that's done; never again do I have to cross over." With that, I woke.

Well, it was true, my mother has truly gone ahead of me. She was still living at the time I had this dream. Would that I, too, might safely cross this sea of sorrows and reach my eter-

nal home, where no worries and sins will ever beset me. [Written on April 23, 1934, by Anna Barkman Kornelsen.]

These dreams are as clear in my mind as though I had dreamt them last night. As a rule, I do not attach much significance to dreams, but these were so remarkable and vivid that I have recorded them years after I dreamt them.

Since I dreamt these, I have had to fight my way through many seas of grief.

Even now, I am still in the fight, and only God knows how much longer it will be.

May He help me safely onward, taking away my earthly concerns and providing for me in my old age. He has always provided up to the present. May He richly bless all those who have helped me and have served in love, and who will also continue to care for me in the future. Amen.

2. There was another dream. During my first period of widowhood (1896-1912), I had many cares and worries, making this a very difficult time in my life. However, God always helped!

Once I dreamt I was on my way home. Old Mrs. Peter Barkman and my daughter, Lena, were also with me. While we were walking, Mrs. Barkman and daughter Lena suddenly disappeared, and I had to walk alone.

I could see my home in the distance, but there was a very tall, steep mountain in my way. I observed most people walking around the mountain to the right without any trouble; although there was a fierce blizzard, their path remained open. However, I could not walk there. I tried walking close to the mountain, but even there, it was too dangerous because of the deep holes; one slight misstep would hurl me down into the abyss.

I stepped back, and wondered how so terribly many [people] were able to hurry past the mountain without touching it, while for me it was completely impossible to walk along with the multitudes. Then I turned to the left to see if there would be a possibility for me to bypass the mountain on that side. But it was so dark and horrible there that I was too scared even to try; it was completely impossible.

Determined to try the right-hand side once more, I returned, because I wanted so much to reach my home.

When I got to the middle between the left and the right side, I looked up, and saw, right on the highest peak, the Saviour hanging on the cross. Then a voice said to me: "You cannot get home unless you climb over the mountain, right past the cross." But how was I to climb that impossibly steep, rocky cliff? As I stood there dejectedly, I became aware of a ladder hanging against the mountainside. Then I awoke.

I thought to myself; that is how difficult it will be (for the flesh) to walk the pathway to heaven. The only way for us to get there will be through much prayer. But the climbing seems so difficult for us; we always desire to walk a smooth, comfortable path. Oh, my dear children, let us all climb! This will mean earnest prayer,

and living a Godly life so that we will all eventually get up that mountain to our heavenly Home, where we shall all be rewarded.

Today, on April 23, 1934, I want to add something to this account. This dream has already been partly fulfilled. Auntie Peter Barkman was still living then; now she has left me, and let us hope that she is now in that eternal rest.

Lena, my daughter, has also left me; she no longer wants to walk together with me on the way to heaven. She has forsaken God and the church for earthly gain, but she is now poor, both in body and spirit. This saddens me greatly. May God illuminate her heart, moving her to repentance. This is my earnest prayer (Note Two).

Now I have to walk alone, without companionship. However, the Lord will not forsake me. He has already helped me through much tribulation, and He will continue to do so. With the poet, I say:

"Until now, God has led me through His great mercy

Until now He has preserved, day and night, my heart and mind;

Until now, He has guided me,

Until now, He has made me happy,

Until now, He has helped me," etc.

Descendants.

To help you identify Anna, here are a few of her well-known descendants: Anna - daughter, Mrs. Peter R. Dueck, my parents; son Jacob D. Barkman, engineer in Steinbach Flour Mills and saw sharpener, Steinbach, and his son, Walter, owner of Walt's Studios, Steinbach; Clifford Barkman Reimer, missionary, now living in Alberta; Harvey Barkman, missionary and Ella (Barkman-Dueck) former nurse, Steinbach; and Anne and Ed Heal, missionaries in northern Saskatchewan.

Endnotes:

Note One: Gerhard P. Goossen (1832-72) was a KG minister and professional teacher. He was the grandfather of John D. Goossen, later Notary Public in Steinbach.

Note Two: Later, Lena, Mrs. Klaas A. Reimer, came to the Lord and walked with Him until her death. Her son, Clifford and Eretta and their family have been missionaries for many years. Anna's prayers have been marvellously answered. B.B.D.

Editor's Comment.

Anna's Journal was translated by grandson Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach, Box 118, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, and he is currently in the possession of this valuable document.

Coming in Next Issue

The story of the Dowry Chest or Kjist of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82) Fischau, Molotschna, and later Rosenfeld, Manitoba, father of Anna Doerksen Barkman Kornelsen.

Helena Penner Hiebert (1874-1970): True Pioneer

Helena Penner Hiebert (1874-1970): True Pioneer; by John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Introduction.

Helena Penner Hiebert (1874-1970) was a true pioneer. She was the first Mennonite woman to graduate with a university degree in Manitoba. She was the first Mennonite, of either gender, to teach in a university in Manitoba. She may well have been the first Manitoban to attend school in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. In addition, she had the distinction of being the first Mennonite born in the City of Winnipeg.

Helena Penner Hiebert was the daughter of Erdman (1826-1907) and Maria (Eitzen) Penner, who immigrated to Manitoba from the Bergthal Colony in Russia. In August of 1874, when the family arrived on the East Reserve with the first Bergthal immigrants, they immediately chose to move to Winnipeg. A few months later, on October 14, Maria Penner gave birth to her fourth child and third daughter, whom she named Helena.

Helena Penner was two years old when her parents decided to return to the East Reserve. By then, her father had worked for a hardware merchant in Winnipeg and opened his own retail enterprise there. In early 1878 he moved his business to Tannenau, three and a half miles west of where Mitchell is located today.

East Reserve, 1878-82.

At Tannenau Helena Penner experienced first hand the hardships and the joys of pioneer life on the East Reserve. She enjoyed the pastoral summer scenery where beautiful evergreens surrounded the serene appearing, yet dangerous, bogs near her parents' home. She played on the large yard with its artesian well with her friend and neighbour, Lisa Wall. She learned about the hazards of winter when a farmer coming for groceries during a blizzard, had to be carried in - frozen stiff - and was nursed back to health in their home.

She watched quietly as a diphtheria epidemic put most family members into bed and took the lives of some children in the

community. She happily tapped her feet to the music when Blind Abe came around and fiddled while her older sisters and their friends danced in the kitchen. She enjoyed the lavish wedding celebration as her older sister married John Hiebert (the parents of Dr. Paul Hiebert of Sarah Binks fame). This is her story in her own words!



Helena Penner, 1900 university graduation photo. Photograph courtesy Gretna, Window on the Northwest, page 18.

The Journal.

"[For their new retail store]...my father and Mr. Schultz...chose a small picturesque situated, abandoned village about 45 miles southeast of Winnipeg, called "Tannenau." There they built a small modern store with living quarters upstairs at the outside and back of the building. The first property of their own in America.

"I was very small when we moved there, barely two years old, and remember nothing of the moving, nor the outlay of the rooms upstairs.

"What I do remember...were two mishaps I had there. On the premises was a small log cabin built by the previous owner. Mother fixed it up as a wash house and a summerkitchen. She had found a hen hatching little chicks in the bush, so to save them, she had put them in a box and put them behind the stove. I, toddling in, was fascinated by the little chicks and picked one up. The mother hen flew at me. I dropped the chick, but in so doing, hit my little hand against the hot stove and was badly burned...

"Another calamity...Mother had some turkeys...Well, the gobbler did not like me. He would chase me. I was terrified of him, would run and fall, he'd jump on top of me and beat me with his wings. I don't think he ever pecked me or really hurt me, but I was so terrified of him. Well, this happened once too often. He did this one Sunday when Father was about. He saw it, pulled the gobbler off, took him to the woodpile, chopped his head off, threw him down, and told Mother, "There, cook for dinner."

"Besides us and our store, there was nothing there but a couple of abandoned log houses. One, in fairly good condition, not far from the store, then, about as far as that again, there lived a farmer, a Mr. Wall in a regularly Canadian-built homestead built of boards and a shingle roof. They seemed comfortably off people with two children: a boy, Jacob, perhaps a little older than my oldest sister, and a little girl, Lisa, a little older than myself. So I had a playmate. There was a village about 2-2 1/2 miles away. [perhaps Chortitz - ed.].

"There was an overflowing well about half way between the Wall home and the abandoned log house. At the end of this house was a gorgeous grove of fir trees surrounding a bog and another grove like that with even taller trees surrounding another bog diagonally further off from our store. In front of the store was a very sturdy railing with a beam about a foot square on top for the farmers to tie their teams of oxen or horses to when they came to shop. The reason I remember that railing so well is that my older sister, Anna, could skip up to 100 on top of that railing and I thought that that was perfectly wonderful. She could also ride old Nell bare back. She was certainly someone to emulate, to live up to, she was wonderfully smart.

"I don't think we had lived there longer than a year, hardly that, when we had to move. Father needed the rooms for storage space. They were not ready to build a permanent home, the railway still being in the balance. So they decided to fix up the abandoned log house and live there temporarily for a year or two till they knew what they were at. Mother always said that if you moved into a place temporarily, you might just as well make up your mind to stay there for seven years, and this move almost proved that. They lived there for five years...

"...Father's store, being the only one outside of Winnipeg, 45 miles away, people had to come from far and wide to do their shopping. And our store was, so to speak, the clearing house for all the gossip, the news, the friendly intercourse. When our



Sketch of the Erdmann Penner yard at Tannenau, E. Reserve 1878-82, as recalled and drawn by daughter Helena Penner.

continued on next page

continued from previous page

lumber wagons went to the city for goods every so often, as they had to, they naturally brought along the mail for the whole colony. Anybody coming to shop would, of course, take it home and distribute it in his neighborhood. A new settlement like that had to be, as a matter of course, a friendly and cooperative community.

"In our home, quite a few newspapers and magazines were kept, both in English and German, mostly German. There were at least two that I remember that came from Germany: *Die Gartenlaube* (the Garden Bower), a really lovely family magazine with lovely homey continued stories, etc., and the *Über land und Meer* (Over Land and Sea), a beautiful pictorial. Then there was the *New York Staats Zeitung*, a German weekly, and later the *Nor'wester*, English, of course, from Winnipeg, and others.

"On days that the German papers arrived, our house was always crowded with people who came there to have Mother read them the fascinating continued story about "*Langen Müllers Lieschen*" - the Raggedy Miller's Little Elizabeth. And the speculation about what would happen to the poor child. They would crack jokes, look over some papers, a cup of coffee, and go home. Life was not without its quiet pleasures.

"And there were weddings and funerals. To invite people to any festivity, you would write out your invitation, date, etc. and underneath a list of people invited. You would deliver it to the first and then he would be honour bound to deliver from one to the other without fail. To fall down on a task like that was a terrible disgrace. If you could not do it yourself, you had to get someone to do it for you. We ourselves had a wedding while we lived in the old log house and it was certainly the largest function we ever had. It was the occasion when my eldest sister, Marie, married Mr. John Hiebert, father of Ed, Ernie, Paul, etc. Those old pioneers were quite undaunted by conditions.

"Another joyous occasion always was when Blind Abe would turn up. He was a young fellow, born blind, I think, and he played the fiddle, and would go from place to place, always welcome, stay as long as he liked. While he was there, it was always jolly and happy. The big girls and their friends would dance in the kitchen, and, bad times or good, there was a good deal of laughter and fun!

"But I am getting ahead of myself. We are still up above the store and Father needs the room and we have to get out. We decided to move into the abandoned log house for the time being. It was the regulation style Old Country...farmhouse...Only in the Old Country it would have been built of brick and thatched with slate or tile. Here, it was

built of logs and thatched with reeds. It certainly was not much to look at from the outside, but once Mother had fixed it up inside it was very liveable. It had the [traditional]...layout...a side entrance about 2/3 towards the back of the house...led to an entrance passageway.

"Towards the left were four rooms. First, you came into the dining room with



Helena Penner in a party dress, 1902. Photograph courtesy of Gretna, Window on the Northwest, page 35.

an open hearth in the far right hand corner, at the far end a door led into the best room which was also Father's and Mother's sleeping quarters. On the other side of the house - one door leading from the dining room and another from the best room to two bedrooms - one for the big girls, and the one from the dining room for us little folks. A door connected these also...On the other side of the passage was a large kitchen with back door and windows on one side - the other side was a pantry.

"The large boys slept in the kitchen. There was also a long refectory table for

eating besides the working table. The beds here were what they called "*Ruhbank*", resting seat, you could pull out the side and make a double bed out of it. In daytime, you put the bedding into the seat-like box and put a lid on top and it was used as a seat. In front of the one on the pantry side there stood the long table. At the back of the kitchen behind the entrance passage, which was not quite as long as the width of the house, there was a nook - quite roomy - for the cook stove and the wood box, etc. You had, of course, to go outside of the house to reach the barn. There was no connection between house and barn.

"Not bad at all, really. I am sure that Mother enjoyed housekeeping there more than above the store where everything had to be carried up and down on a snowy, slippery stairway in winter. When people asked Mother where we lived, she told them, "Look for the shabbiest house on the Reserve and you will find us." Some of the thatch was blown off the end of the roof.

"Then there were these two pine bushes on the premises, one completely round surrounding a smaller and completely circular bog, the other large and oval, also surrounding a bog. They were the making of the place, they and a lovely overflowing well. But those bogs really were beautiful. They were absolutely symmetrical, with a clean, clear-cut edge as though done by a gardener, and tall, at least to my childish mind, tall sombre pines or evergreens surrounding them. And the surface of the bog was a lush, velvety, green - like a very heavy Axminster carpet. The larger oval one was quite near the living room end of our house. It was wide open and sunny and friendly and we loved it.

"The other one behind the store was much smaller and the tall dark trees shaded it and it was somber and forbidding and inhabited by gnomes and pixies and bad fairies and we never went near it, at least, not by ourselves. Someone, it must have been the people who had lived in our house before us, had somehow made a well in the middle of the bog towards one end of it and built a road to that well. How they did it, who knows? Anyway, at first it was our delight to go to the middle of this path, jiggle or jump on it and the whole surface of the bog would ripple in little wavelets right to the end of the clearing. When Mother found that out, we were forbidden to do that. But children are children, and it was such good fun.

"Then - suddenly, we learned why, and obeyed. One Sunday morning, a cow, wanting a drink, or perhaps lured by the lush-looking verdure had stepped onto it a bit too far and sank in. Fortunately, it was Sunday, the men-folk were about and someone noticed her. They crowded about and tried to help her get out, but with every effort she made, she sank in deeper. They tried to get a chain around her haunches



Erdman Penner (1837-1907) and Maria Eitzen Penner emigrated from the Bergthal Colony, Russia, and arrived in Canada in 1874. Their store in Tannenau, E. Reserve, served as the business centre for the settlement from 1878 until 1882 when the family relocated to Gretna. The Penners built a retail empire that operated stores in Winnipeg, Tannenau, Niverville, Gretna, Plum Coulee, Morden, Reinland, Pilot Mound, Clearwater, Altona. He was a generous supporter of the private school in Gretna and the town's first mayor. His son Erdman was the first person of Bergthal background to graduate from medical school and opened a medical practice in Winnipeg, and later Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Photo courtesy of Historical Sketches, page 289.

and pull her out with horses. but the bog would not carry a man, not even a little boy, so someone shouted to get the doors. So they took Mother's doors off the hinges, made a platform to carry a man, who managed to get the chain around her. Her struggling and the tugging of the horses got her out. There she stood, a tired, bedraggled, sorry looking animal, dripping mire. And we had learned our lesson...

"...When they sent to Winnipeg for goods, there were several rigs that went together. ...When the boys came home, Father would ask how they fared at creek so and so and how did they find the state of such and such a slough or this patch or that patch. Often at high water, they would have to unload practically everything on the far side of the creek and ferry it across bit by bit.

"...In winter, on every stormy night, Mother would put lights into a window on every side of the house and a lantern on the outside on the blind end of the barn, in order to guide lost wayfarers to shelter. And she saved several lives like that. One case I remember very well was a Mr. Dyck. During the night, there was a commotion outside. They brought him in and put him

on a lounge in the dining room. His feet were frozen stiff, they could not get his boots off, so they cut his footwear off, bit by bit. We youngsters, of course, were awakened and stood open-eyed looking on. Frozen members of the body looked ghastly, they are as white as chalk. They put his feet in a dish and thawed them out with coal oil. His face and hands were frost-bitten too, but his feet were the worst. He stayed with us for quite a while and lost only a couple of toes. Often people, when caught in a blizzard, would try to find a drift, lie down on the sheltered side of the drift and let themselves be snowed under, and come out quite unharmed.

"The other hazard, in summer, was almost worse. If lost, people would see light and think that it was a house and shelter. But quite often it was marsh grass flickering about. So, you had better watch and see if the light stayed steady, if not, don't trust it, don't follow it. You might be lured into a bog.

"I do not remember any particular incidents of importance except one very fierce rain storm, when not only did the plaster on the outside of the house wash off, which happened every now and then, but on the

inside, one side of the living room collapsed and brought down with it a clock hanging on that wall. It was an awful mess. Poor Mother! Poor girls!

"As to the furniture, most of our stuff was made by local cabinet makers...When Mr. Schultz left, he gave Mother his single bedstead, a lovely four-poster and a really lovely walnut bureau with a bevelled mirror over it. There was a drop-leaf table (bought) in the dining room, plus a sofa - lounge, we called it - raised at the end and some armchairs...In the dining room was the open hearth that held whole cordwood and the whole Christmas tree at Christmas, a couple of chairs and hooks behind curtains for clothes in the bedrooms, and that, besides the kitchen stove and table and a couple of chairs in the kitchen, pretty well completed the house furnishings. Mother and Father always ate in the dining room. Sometimes we children were allowed to eat with them, that was a special treat. On the whole, the family and help, clerks, etc., ate at the refectory table in the kitchen...it was on these lounges that Father and Mother always took their afternoon nap, and that was an institution.

"As beds, we had no mattresses nor springs in those days. You had a tick filled with straw, barley straw, I think, wheat straw was too fragile. On top was a feather bed and sheet. In winter, you had another feather bed as cover - in summer, a quilt.

"The one big function I remember was my eldest sister Marie's wedding when she married John Hiebert, her former tutor and recently helping in Father's business. They were married in the house at 2 p.m., but already by noon, some of the guests arrived for dinner. Then, after the ceremony, afternoon coffee, then a full meal, supper, refreshments at midnight and some were still there for breakfast. We youngsters had slept in the meantime, but not Mother, and when the last guests had departed and the bride and groom driven off in a buggy to...Niverville...to catch the train for Winnipeg [for]...their honeymoon, I can still see Mother, tired and weary, saying... "Now, leave everything just as it is and let us all go and lie down and have a good sleep! We will clear up afterwards." It was quite a wedding.

"They had built a very large carriage house, which was comparatively fresh and new. They had cleared that out and cleaned it up, built a small platform at the end for the musicians - Blind Abe, fiddle, a harmonica player and a drum. The rafters and beams were decorated with evergreen boughs and wild flowers, benches placed along the sides, and they danced and they danced all night through. Some wedding!

"And then came Father and Mother's darkest hour, the worst calamity of their whole married life. In those pioneer days, medical men were few and far between...In the Mennonite reserves, I do not think

continued on next page

there were any bonafide doctors. There were some [pretty good] bone setters...

"Well, Mother was kind of a "Mother of Israel" among these people, and when in...trouble, sickness or otherwise, they would come and talk it over with "Auntie Penner." [One time] a couple living about five or six miles away had...visitors from the West Reserve...[with] a couple of children,...one...having a sore throat. They came to Mother for help...She went along to see what she could do. When they got there, the baby was dead...

"After the incubation period had elapsed, nearly our whole family came down with diphtheria...and three children...died within two weeks. There was Margaret, a tall slight girl with long fair braids, about 2 1/2 years older than Erdman, and an extremely intelligent child, the brightest of us all. And Abram, 2 years younger than myself, a sturdy, red-cheeked little fellow, the apple of my father's eye. And Sara, a perfect cherub of a little child, with lovely blue eyes - Mother's only blue-eyed child - and with a mass of golden curls. She was just beginning to talk, and was everybody's pet. Erdman, who was always a puny delicate little boy, escaped. He happened to be at my married sister's place...Jake was away from home, too. Johnny and Tina (who was just a baby), and I (always the delicate one) escaped. Clerks in the store got it. John Schroeder, was sick a long, long time...

"You can imagine what a time they had. Johnny, I, and Tina (the baby), were given breakfast...Tina got ready for the day, put into a baby carriage with enough feedings of milk...for the day, Johnny's and my lunch was there, too, and we were...not allowed in all day. Perhaps being...away from the infection and all the fresh air saved us. We could always find shelter, if necessary, in the carriage house. Father, in building it, had inserted a couple of very strong beams in the middle of the roof and here we had one of those Russian double rope swings, and that helped a lot. I must have been about six and Johnny about nine or ten...

"One incident of that siege I remember very well. It used to be a belief among people that, if a sick person had a great desire for something to eat, and you could get it for him, it would help them to get better. Margaret was passionately fond of grapes, which...were a great luxury. Well, we asked if there was anything she would like, she said, "Grapes." Father went all the way to Winnipeg [and] managed to find some, but by the time he got back, she no longer cared for anything. It was a terrible blow, but there was more to follow.

"The loss of those children meant a great deal to them. They had never experienced anything like that before. They had lost three babies before, but all three right at birth and in the early stages of their married life. Those little ones had not had time to worm themselves into their affections like these three beautiful, thriving, specially gifted, and robust children had...but time is a great healer.

"When the railroad that Father and Mr. Schultz had tried to anticipate at Tannenu finally came through Niverville, 12 miles from where they were, they immediately built a store there and put John Hiebert in as manager. In 1882, when I was eight years old, we moved to the town of Gretna."

Life in Gretna.

In Gretna, Helena Penner's life was shaped in part by the notables entertained by the family: Russian Prince Nicholas Galizien, General Karopaltin who served in the Russo-Japanese war, Klassen, the son of a rich Mennonite banker, a brother of Senator Jansen from Nebraska, Mormon agents boarding at the Penner home and, in part, by less fortunate individuals whom the family helped. In equal measure, Helena was influenced by her father's frequent business trips to Montreal and Chicago, his trip to Russia in 1884 and her parents' travel to the World Fair in New Orleans.

Helena attended schools in Tannenu, Edenburg and Gretna. At age twelve she studied in Mountain Lake, Minnesota followed later by a period of tutelage under H.H. Ewert in Gretna and music lessons in Winnipeg.

In 1899 Helena graduated with a BA from Wesley College (later University of Winnipeg) to become the first Mennonite woman with a degree from a Manitoba university. Helena also helped organize the Modern Languages Club which was later incorporated into the University Women's Club at the University of Manitoba.

Immediately on graduation Helena Penner joined the faculty of Wesley College. Unfortunately, she had to resign in February due to the death of her mother. She continued to take an interest in her alma mater, however, and returned to teach for one more year in 1924-25 (Note Two).

Marriage, 1902.

On July 10, 1902 Helena Penner married Gerhard Hiebert from Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Gerhard had been an eighteen year old clerk in his father's store where twelve year old Helena bought candy in 1887. Fresh out of college in Minnesota, Gerhard had come to Manitoba in 1889.

Studying first at Manitoba College in Winnipeg, he had graduated with a degree in medicine from McGill University in Montreal in 1900 and opened an office in Winnipeg.

After their wedding Dr. and Mrs. Hiebert honeymooned in eastern Canada. On their return, they moved into a home on the corner of Edmonton and Sargent, across from Central Park, a wedding present from Helena's father. In 1905 Dr. Hiebert took post-graduate studies in Berlin. Returning from Europe in 1906, Dr. Hiebert, C.M., F.A.C.S., served as surgeon at Winnipeg General Hospital and, from 1917-1919, as chief surgeon. He taught clinical surgery to students at Manitoba Medical College and became an Honorary Member of the American Society of Physicians and Surgeons.

Retirement.

After the death of her husband in 1934, Helena Hiebert continued to live in Winnipeg. She served on the Winnipeg school board from 1935-38. Later she moved to Beloeil, Quebec to be with her daughter. Here, at the age of 86, she wrote her memoirs from which the above extracts are taken. Her memoirs have sometimes been referred to as the "Granny Stories."

Helena Penner Hiebert died on February 12, 1970 at the age of 95.

Endnotes:

Note One: Much of the material for this article is taken from the memoirs of Helena Penner Hiebert, written when she was 86-87 years old. That document, titled "Granny Stories," can be seen at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg and will be published in Volume Four of the East Reserve Historical Series.

Note Two: Gerald A. Bedford, *The University of Winnipeg*, (Winnipeg: The Faculty, 1976), 48, 51, 161.

Note Three: *Der Nordwesten*, 30 Oct 1902.

Sources:

John Dyck, "Erdmann Penner: Entrepreneur in Winnipeg, Tannenu and Gretna," in John Dyck, editor, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve 1874-1910* (Steinbach, 1994, HSHS), pages 187-294. This article provides information regarding the multi-million dollar business operations of Helena's father.

"Preservings" is the Newsletter of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, published semi-annually at Steinbach, Manitoba. Acting Editor, Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba. The publication of the Newsletter is funded by "D.F. Plett Foundation Fund." We are always looking for more individuals who may want to contribute articles and/or photographs. Please send subscriptions, articles and/or photographs to HSHS c/o Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba R0A 2A0. Annual subscription membership fee is \$10.00.

Rachel Mack Laing: Clearsprings Pioneer

by Ed and Alice Laing, Box 1088, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, Clearsprings history buffs.

Background.

Rachel Melvina Mack was born in Hensall, Huron County, Ontario, in 1852, born to David Mack and Rachel Hamilton. Rachel Melvina, named after her mother, was one of a family of eleven children.

In 1874, Rachel, a girl of 22 years, married Scottish, Presbyterian William Laing who had returned to Ontario to marry the sweetheart he left there four years earlier. William Laing, originally from Hensell, Ontario, had earlier answered to the call of the west and had homesteaded in Clearsprings, Manitoba with other family members in 1872.



Rachel Melvina (Mack) Laing as a young woman. Photo courtesy of Mackie's book p. 64.

Dawson Trail, 1872.

After their wedding, Rachel with her new husband William, returned to Clearsprings, Manitoba. On this return trip to Manitoba they left Goderich, Ontario by boat during a big thunder storm and, after a harrowing voyage, landed safely at Dawson Landing, today known as Thunder Bay. Rachel Laing was the only passenger on the boat who was not sick. From Dawson Landing the newly weds took the Dawson Trail to the Red River Region in the company of several other immigrant families. Rachel was one of the first women to travel over the make-shift trail that took them over lakes, portages, swamps, and rough corduroy roads to Clearsprings via Fort

Garry, now Winnipeg.

Clearsprings.

The happy ending to the trip was that Rachel, with her new husband, joined their siblings in Clearsprings. The family included Rachel's brother, John and Bertha (Stelch) Mack SW 13-7-6E, William's brother Thomas and Mary (Mack) Laing NW 12-7-6, now Laingspring Farm, and another sister Jane (Mack) and her husband John Langill SE 10-7-6, now occupied by the "Brookdale Pontiac" car dealership and Clearsprings Shopping Centre.

The Laings were one of four families who were largely responsible for the settling of Clearsprings. By the late 1880s one in every four children in the Clearspring school was a Laing, Mack or Langill. "The Manitoba Directory for the years 1877-78 gives a brief description of Clearsprings located in Township 7, Range 6, East and was partially surrounded by the Mennonite Reserves."

Pioneering.

The Clearspring Laings were truly pioneer Manitobans. Their Post Office was c/o The Hudson Bay Company, Fort Garry. In 1874, when William and Rachel Laing arrived they claimed to have seen "a string of Red River Carts leave on the last buffalo hunt that chased the last buffalo herd from the Red River Region to the North West Territories, currently known as Saskatchewan.

Soon Mr. and Mrs. Laing settled down on William's original quarter of land SE 13-7-6 and matured with the country. Being real pioneers they soon had the usual stock of cattle, pigs, sheep and hens. The coulee was ditched and drained, the land broken and wheat was grown, log buildings erected. Life as you can imagine was



William Laing soon after his arrival in Canada. Photo courtesy of Mackie's book p. 64.

very hard in the early 1870s but still very interesting. William was largely responsible for the naming of "Clearsprings" because of the many springs found in the area.

For many years unploughed fields were scattered with buffalo bones. As late as 1970, 100 hundred years later, a buffalo skull came to surface during cultivation and was retrieved by fourth generation Valerie Laing, the present family naturalist, and is preserved to this day. Because William Laing was a great hunter, he was able to provide much meat for the table. Moose meat, commonly known as "native beef" was delicately prepared by Rachel. Besides meat for the table, the wild animal hides were often sold for the price of



Clearsprings home, built by William and Rachel Laing. This was also the home where the first Presbyterian church service was held, 1877. SE13-7-6E. Photo courtesy of Alice and Ed Alice Laing.

continued on next page

continued from previous page

one dollar each. Among Rachel's treasures was a mink cape she fashioned from a hide trapped, skinned and tanned by her husband.

Rachel Laing was also a wonderful seamstress. In addition to making the family clothing, she made beautiful quilts, rugs, embroidery and other needle work. She washed, carded and spun into yarn, the wool from their own sheep and knitted socks, stockings, mitts, mufflers and smaller garments. "The Queen of the kitchen" as she was often referred to, made her own cheese, soap, tallow candles, pickled and preserved different kinds of wild fruit. Although nothing seemed impossible to the wives of the old-timers, Rachel had one strict rule and that was "whoever brought game into the kitchen, whether fur or feathers, had to skin or pluck it, and that meant gut it too."

Mrs. Laing was a splendid baker and butter maker. Her butter sold at a premium to her customers in Winnipeg, a 3 day drive either sleigh or wagon. The coming of the Mennonite settlement, and the forming of Steinbach with its stores and grist mill, brought a great measure of relief to the Scottish settlers for the trading partners they now had nearby.

Family Life.

Rachel and William Laing raised 5 children. Rachel demonstrated through her strict upbringing among eleven children, that she was a powerful character and well suited to the life of a prairie farmer's wife. Rachel was also a strict disciplinarian in the matter of child raising. Her son, Hamilton, even at the age of 95 remembered "that he could still feel the glow in his "sit downer" when he received discipline by the stout arm of his mother who was always in splendid condition from



Picture of young folks socializing. Rachel and other pioneer mothers and children on a Sunday afternoon. Photo courtesy of Alice and Ed Laing.



Rachel Laing and her family: Back Row l-r: Rachel, Mrs. Rachel Laing, Hamilton; front row: James, William Laing, Jean. Photo courtesy of Mackie book, bookplates.



Buffalo skull found on "Laingspring Farm" in 1970 by Valerie Laing, family naturalist. Photo courtesy of Alice and Ed Laing.

spanking the butter in the big wooden tray”.

This pioneer couple ran a very strict Presbyterian household where education was taken seriously. They were pillars of the community, donating land for the construction of a school, a cemetery and a church. The first church service of the community was held in their home in 1877. Teachers of Clearsprings school boarded in the Laing home, as did one Presbyterian minister.

Besides all the hard work this pioneer woman had to endure she still had time and energy for a social life. Rachel would ready their home for frequent social events while William, because of his musical talents and love for singing often had young people in to teach them to sing or for evenings of fun and dancing, when Mr. Laing would play his fiddle till the wee hours of the morning, but, “never on Sunday”.

Retirement.

The constant dream, of the people of Clearsprings, of the coming of the railroad remained only a hope until 1898 when the Canadian Northern Railroad came through Ste Anne to Giroux. Unfortunately it really came too late to be of much service for Rachel and William Laing as they sold their farm in 1901 to William Ostberg and moved to Winnipeg, where they lived for 10 years operating a boarding house on Portage Avenue next to the Free Press Building. The Laings subsequently moved to Portland, Oregon, USA in search of a warmer climate to spend their retirement years.

An unfortunate turn of events in Rachel's story was that during the depression of 1930, at age 78, following her husband's death in 1924, she had run out of money. Fortunately, daughter Jean sent some unsolicited dollars to assist her over these difficult times. In Jean's opinion, her mother was a woman of ambition and one with tireless energy. Rachel Laing passed away at the age of 84, ten years after her husband and their ashes now rest in the mausoleum in Portland, Oregon.

Descendants.

The Laing name is still present in Clearsprings today. “Laingspring Farm” is owned and operated by fourth generation Ray and Bertha Laing, with their sons Ted and Tyrone. The work ethic demonstrated by great-great aunt Rachel has continued through the generations and is still evident in a successful farming enterprise today.

We are indebted to the Manitoba Archives and Richard Mackie who wrote the book about Hamilton Mack Laing, son of Rachel Mack Laing.

Sources:

Richard Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing: Hunter - Naturalist* (Victoria, 1985), 234 pages.

renewal ad

Katherina Hiebert (1855-1910): Midwife

**Katharina Hiebert Hiebert (1855-1910): Pioneer Midwife and medical practitioner,
by granddaughter Regina Doerksen Neufeld, Box 1034, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0.**

Background.

How I wish that I could have known my Grandmother Katherina Hiebert Hiebert. She was my maternal grandparent who died three years before I was born. If God had granted her ten more years this wish would have been granted. However she died, a young woman of 61 years. Most of my information about her is from stories told by my mother Helena Hiebert Doerksen and my auntie Anna Hiebert Klippenstein.

Katherina F. Hiebert was born in the village of Schoenthal, South Russia, on May 28, 1855 to Abram Hiebert (1827-1907) and Maria (nee) Falk (1829-). Her grandfather Abram Hiebert (1806-74) married a widow Aganetha (Buhr) Schwarz (1787-1841), 19 years older than he. She had a family of nine children. We presume he was either a very aggressive man or he was badly in need of a mother figure.

Katherina was an exceptionally attractive woman. Very noticeable were her eyes, one of which was brown and the other blue. She had dark dark, brown hair. She was definitely not of Dutch descent but rather believed to have French ancestors.

Marriage and Emigration, 1875.

One day in winter she had gone to the next village with her father. He instructed her to watch his horses while he went shopping. While she was waiting for her father, a certain Jacob Hiebert, stopped and hitched his horses to the hitching post beside theirs. He asked, "Will you watch my horses too?" She agreed.

Jakob was a widower of 8 or 9 months. He noticed her pleasant willingness and although she was 22 years younger than he, he courageously asked for her hand in marriage.

They were married on Feb. 16, 1875. He had 5 young children and was thankful for this tall, strong, spirited woman who would capably mother his little family. Jacob's oldest daughter, Helena was only 2 years younger than her new mother. Besides her, there were 4 sons, the youngest being 5 years old. Helena and Katherina became the best of friends. They sewed and cooked and worked harmoniously together.

Just four months after their wedding, Katherina with her new husband and family emigrated to Canada. After a stressful time of selling their farm and property and preparing for the journey, they left their beloved Russia and sailed for America on June 8, 1875.

Schantzenfeld, Man.

After they arrived in Canada, the Hieberts and a few other families stayed in Ontario with relatives. They earned their keep by working in the orchards, picking and drying fruit. Grandmother was allowed to dry enough fruit for their family. In fall most of these families sailed via



Jakob Hiebert (1833-1906) and Katharina Hiebert (1855-1916) with son Johann, circa 1896. Photo courtesy of Regina Neufeld, Niverville, Manitoba.

the Great Lakes to Manitoba, arriving at the junction of the Red and Rat Rivers. From here they walked or relatives got them and their belongings with oxen and cart, 6 miles east to the immigration sheds. The sheds were built by Mr. Schantz, a Mennonite from Berlin, Ontario. Hence the district where the sheds were built was called Schantzenburg. Just 1/2 mile west on Section 18-7-4E, is where Jacob and Katherina Hiebert took up their homestead.

The first winter in Manitoba was spent with Grandfather's brother, Abram Hiebert, who had built a small house on his homestead near what is now known as Kleefeld.

Jakob and Katharina made it through the first bitterly cold Manitoba winter and were relieved when spring arrived. They were anxious to build their own home. They worked hard--the oldest 2 sons 11 and 9 years old helped. In fall of 1876 they moved into their new frame home. Their attempt to grow a crop or garden the next year was futile because the grasshoppers came in such hoards that all growth was destroyed.

Medical Care.

Katharina was keenly interested in helping the sick. Even in her first winter in Canada there were desperate demands for a midwife to help the young pioneer mothers at childbirth. It is not known whether she had any training in Russia but out of the great need and experiences gained, she became the first midwife to the pioneers women for miles around, not only in the East Reserve but in the entire area. To English, French and Mennonites alike, she became their ray of hope and help. Katharina rejoiced as each

healthy life came into this world and must have often felt akin with God, "The Giver of Life."

Grandfather Hiebert was extremely lonely in this wild, mosquito infested prairie. Grandmother, however, was thrilled with each bush, shrub, or even weeds she discovered. She experimented and cooked up her own herbs for medicines.

Her own first baby was born in December 1876. She took her own babies along in the early years of midwifery. She was hungry for knowledge--what to do in case of infections? Broken bones? What herbs were good for what? So Katherina ordered medical books from Germany and from a German publishing house in Elkhart, Indiana.

In spring of 1877-78, she and grandfather planted rows and rows of maple trees around their home. They planted choke cherries, wild plums, gooseberries and currants. Grandmother roamed the woods and meadows, collecting herbs - Swedish bitters, camomile, and thyme. She tried different recipes (some handed her by an Indian squaw). In 1877 the crop was very meagre. Because of flooding, drainage was badly needed.

In 1878 God blessed the pioneers with a good crop. Daughter Helena was by now married to Johann Leppky (1876) and in Sept. 1878 their first son Johann was born. Only two months later Katherina's second daughter Katherina, was born. We can easily imagine how intimately the two ladies shared their cares and concerns.

When Helena died in childbirth it was heartbreaking. Each life was so very precious during those early pioneering years when only the barest necessities were available. Katherina herself was nursing her third child--a boy, Peter.

Life had to go on. Almost every day somebody called for Katherina. Grieving was done in silence and seclusion.

Katherina was a very special person. She enjoyed pioneering and her family. She was quite fond of children and wanted for them to grow up as courageous, enduring, never giving up, doing what you can to help others. A cousin tells how she helped him learn the alphabet in the *Fiebel* when she stayed at the house when his little brother was born. Comfortably supported in the scissors of her large warm legs, she had him repeat the letters of the alphabet. He agreed that learning with her was fast and fun. Someday, Canada would have schools and churches and hospitals. She never gave up her dreams.

Anecdotes.

In the first spring, grandfather, Jakob, went out to the swamp one morning. He was going to shoot a wild goose or two for his young bride to prepare that special meal. The only gun he had was a mouser but that would do. He hid carefully and when a flock of geese settled on

the swamp, he pulled the trigger! But the gun did not fire. Resting his forefinger on the muzzle, he sadly watched the geese fly away.

Suddenly--Bang! The gun's delayed action shot away his finger. He walked to the house and told Katherina to amputate his shredded finger with chisel and hammer. What nerve and what courage! She refused to use the hammer but volunteered to hold the chisel in place. Jacob himself with steady hand brought down the hammer and the finger was off. Katherina cleaned and disinfected and dressed his hand. Healing took place.

That was not the end of Jakob's adventures or suffering. After a number of years he had another similar accident when one of his sons brought down the sledge hammer on his fingers, when he was holding the fence pole. Out came the chisel and hammer again and a second operation was performed. This time Katherina hid his pants so he would have to stay in bed: at least for the rest of that day.

Grandmother was a good cook and she had a tremendous appetite. She was sturdy and tall and when she grew older is supposed to have been close to 300 pounds. Grandfather had a specially strong buggy built for them.

Occasionally it happened that some poor soul with a raggedy buggy came to call for her to assist his wife. Grandfather would make him hitch his horse to his own special buggy to assure grandmother a safe ride to her patient.

One day 2 Englishmen came for her help in a new 2-seater buggy. They gallantly and politely helped her in. Thinking she did not understand their language one said to the other, "Well, we got her on but how will we get her off?" In her keen and quick way she retorted, "Like this!" and she hopped off the buggy and lightly stepped up again. Quickly she ordered the men to be on their way. In spite of her weight she was quite agile.

Bedside Manner.

Because grandmother visited so many different homes where she often experienced their misery and mismanagement and poverty, she became quite aggressive in advice and instructing folks--actually, boldly correcting especially men who were abusive to their women.

One time in particular she was very perturbed. The wife had just successfully delivered her new baby, when the husband opened the door and brought in the cow--demanding that she milk it--it was her duty. Well, Grandmother Katherina told him where to go with that cow! Prove yourself man enough to milk your cow. Furthermore she gave the wife instructions to rest in bed. She made sure her husband was present at the time.

Katherina expected her decisions and in-

structions to be respected--obeyed. One day it concerned Grandfather's favourite cat. The cat was a real pest and a nuisance that day. She had asked grandfather to take the cat to the barn since it was a bitterly cold day but grandfather wanted to nap first. When he woke up and looked out the window--there sat that cat--quietly on the snow drift. After a while the cat was still sitting in the same spot.

"What's with that cat?" he asked.

"It won't bother me any more," Katherina answered defiantly. "I s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d it and put it there to stay till spring."

Yes sir, Grandma meant business when she spoke up.



The children of Jakob and Katharina Hiebert: l.to r rear - Susanna, Mrs. Jakob Hiebert, and Helena, Mrs. Johann Doerksen; seated - Katharina, Mrs. Peter Loepky, and Maria, Mrs. Erdman Penner; standing between them is Anna, the youngest, Mrs. Abram Klippenstein; lying in front are the brothers, Peter, Jakob and David. Photo courtesy of Regina Neufeld, Niverville. Regina is the daughter of Helena. Photo taken circa 1900 or 1902.

In spite of her size and strength and aggressiveness, Katherina had a gentle and compassionate heart. When she went to a poverty stricken home she always remembered to take sheets, baby blankets, extra clothes and even food to them. In one case, twins were to be born--the babies were in a twisted position. No doctors were available. Katherina did not hesitate to go to her "Higher Help". She stepped into the winter night and cried to God for help! When she came back to her patient, God had performed the impossible. The babies were born without further complications.

A neighbour, Peter Kehler, who grew up across the road from the Jakob Hiebert farm later recalled how his sister had a blemish on her cheek and went to see "Katharina Meum". Grandma sent her home and wept because there was nothing she could do. There was blood poisoning in the cheek and the child would die. She died a few days later.

Peter Kehler also recalled there were many

times that he watched as an anxious father galloped up the driveway. The next sight was Grandmother roaring down the road in her buggy, sitting in the middle of the seat to balance it out, urging her greys to move faster. The soon-to-be father was left to fend for himself.

Tragic Experiences.

Every birth was a miracle--every new life was precious. There is no count of how many babies she delivered but there must have been hundreds. My mother Helena (Hiebert) Doerksen was one of the youngest daughters and she remembered that Grandmother was seldom at home. She was always away, day and night summer and winter, tending the sick. To our knowledge, she never charged for her services.

As mentioned, her step-daughter, Helena Hiebert Leppy (1858-81) died during childbirth when Katherina (my Grandmother) assisted her. The baby girl died a day later. This death effected the Hiebert family especially Grandmother Katharina, very harshly. They had just been in this new country for six years. Besides losing a daughter she felt she had lost her best friend. Helena's husband Johann Leppy was left alone, dismayed and hurting, with one little son John, 3 years old.

Just six years later, in 1887, her step-son Jacob (married to Eva Leppy) died leaving his young widow. To my knowledge, the cause of his death is unknown--maybe tuberculosis? He had been sickly for years.

Then only two years after that, step-son Johann--engaged to be married to Katherine Friesen (who later became Mrs. Cornelius C. F. Toews) passed away accidentally. He had been riding home from a Sunday evening visit to his bride, when his horse

stumbled and Johann fell. Unfortunately the horse stomped on his stomach. Grandmother tried her best to nurse him to health, but infection set in, and Johann died Aug. 18, 1889.

The grandparents were still hurting and grieving when in 1895 their four year old daughter Aganetha died. This was followed by the death of two more of their babies in the next 6 years.

Epidemics.

In those early pioneer years diphtheria was a deadly killer disease (a severe throat infection). The dreaded typhoid was another horrible killer.

Grandmother Katherina had successfully helped a few through various diseases but she knew that for diphtheria an immunization would be the only cure. When in 1905 or 6 the disease broke out again in their own district she called a doctor from Winnipeg who came and immunized all the children. Her son-in-law, Johann

continued on next page

E. Doerksen, married to their daughter Helena Hiebert, was teaching in the Schantzenburg private school. Katherina took sulphur powder to the school and lit it on the stove to smoke out or kill the diphtheria germs. Only one child died of the disease that year. How Grandmother longed to see more cures of sickness.

When her son Peter (1881-1974) was a youth, he had the misfortune of having both his legs crushed in a steam engine accident. His mother splinted the legs and for six weeks, stretched out on his back, she nursed him back to health. With much difficulty and determination he learned to walk again.

Cancer.

Yes "determination and endurance" was the Hiebert families' strength and character. Grandmother herself developed breast cancer. Her entire breast was a big open sore. Grandfather was determined not to lose her. He brought her to an Indian Squaw's home who was famous for healing with herbs and claimed to be able to heal cancer. She applied poultices made from herbs and bark she gathered in the bush. Katharina had to stay there for several weeks. The herb poultices worked and she was healed of cancer. In a couple of weeks the cancer (root and all) emerged leaving Grandmother completely healed.

Grandmother never was able to beg the recipe from this Indian lady. But she gained considerable herb healing information from her. She has handed some recipes on to her sons and

daughters. My mother used to gather a bitter weed, wormwood, a silvery weed that grew in the fields. She would stuff a gallon jar full of this weed and cover it with home-made wine (usually made from choke cherries). This was allowed to sit for two or three weeks. She would then strain this juice into a clean bottle. This medicine was very effective for weak or inflamed lungs. She also made her own poison ivy ointment by mixing lard and sulphur powder.

Widowhood, 1906.

When Grandfather Hiebert passed away in 1906, Grandmother Katherina was fairly young, only 51 years. By this time her services as midwife were very demanding. Also by now 5 of her children were married. Peter, the oldest son was left in charge of the farming. Jacob was a youth but Anna (later Mrs. Abram Klippenstein) was only 8 years old.

Anna told me this heart warming story. Grandmother was frequently called away, and often on days when she would rather have been with her family. Once it happened on Christmas Day. Son Jacob had gone to visit friends. There was Anna, all alone - Christmas day, no family, no gifts! She threw herself on her mother's bed and wept bitterly. Just then her mother came home. She gathered Anna into her arms and presented her with a gift - a beautiful china doll and cradle. Anna was happy for the gift but appreciated most of all her mother, all to herself!

Anna had promised her father that she would take care of her mother. Grandmother Katherina had a severe case of diabetes. Towards her end she had a stroke that left her partially paralyzed. She was very heavy and her legs broke out in large open sores. Anna patiently stayed by her side. Grandmother died at only 61 years of age, on July 28, 1916.

Katharina Hiebert left a legacy of years of selfless service to her community. Her medical practice and midwifery was continued after her death by her daughters, Maria Hiebert Penner and Susanna Hiebert Hiebert, see article elsewhere in this newsletter. Maria and Susanna were well trained by their mother and carried on in her footsteps. Most of the Hieberts were good at bone setting and chiropractors. Among her grandchildren there were a number of talented nurses and chiropractors.

Grandmother Katherina Hiebert left us with a legacy of service to our community and an example of courage and caring for others: see also article by Peter Hiebert, "Jakob S. Hiebert Cemetery, NW18-7-4E," in *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 50-52.

Sources:

This biography of Katharina Hiebert (1855-1916) is based on an earlier article by Regina Neufeld which was published in *Hiebert Heritage* (Steinbach, 1993), pages 18-20 and in *Niverville: A History 1878-1986*, pages 122.

Letters: Anna Klassen Goossen 1839-1927

by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Family background.

Anna Klassen was the daughter of Franz and Anna Klassen of Neukirch, Molotschna, who are listed as the owners of Wirtschaft 18 in the 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), who was a career school teacher. Gerhard P. Goossen was also a teacher, and served in the villages of Paulsheim, Fischau, Liebenau and Lindenau. In 1866 Gerhard was elected as a minister of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), a position he served with great dedication and vigor: for a detailed biography of Rev. Gerhard P. Goossen and translations of 20 letters written by him, see *Leaders*, pages 707-740.

Anna Klassen Goossen.

In November of 1868 the Goossen family

moved to the village of Friedensfeld, 30 miles north of Nikopol. Here Gerhard turned his hand to farming and continued his active involvement in the ministry. He died a premature death on Sept 1, 1872.

Anna Klassen Goossen was not left a wealthy widow, nor was she very well physically. Her husband's death was very hard on her so that she was unable to take care of her family. 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 Isaac L. Warkentin family, and son Franz K. Goossen was with the Johann P. Isaac family. On Sept. 24, 1873, Anna Klassen Goossen held an auction sale selling her "cow, hogs and things, for which she received 350 ruble": Abr. F. Reimer, "Journal".

In 1874 Anna Klassen Goossen immigrated to Manitoba with the rest of the KG and settled in the village of Gruenfeld. On December 7, 1874, Anna wrote a lengthy letter to Aeltester Peter P. Toews, who was still living in Blumenhoff, Russia, at this time.

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." Isaac 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 of Gruenfeld, Manitoba. She had three more 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, Kansas. She died in 1927 and is buried in the Alexanderfeld cemetery 2 miles southwest of Hillsboro. The Johann L. Warkentin family belonged to the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

Letter Dec. 7, 1874.

Today, Monday, the 7th of December

(1874, J.W.) Baergs came from Steinbach and brought letters with them. The one from you brother Toews, we read most eagerly and saw therefrom, that you are still in Russia. I, therefore, take the pen and will tell you a little of how things are out here, for tomorrow they want to go to Winnipeg, and I wish to send this letter with them. Greatly beloved brother and sister, I wish you the grace and love of our heavenly Father and a living faith in Christ Jesus, the crucified One.

Dear sisters, Mrs. Heinrich Reimer, Mrs. Peter Toews, Mrs. Johann Warkentin, and Mrs. Isaac Warkentin, and all relatives; you have had to give up your dear mother. This also falls very heavily upon my heart, but we can console ourselves, as we all have the hope that she passed away in blessed peace, and is now in that everlasting Fatherland. She now rejoices in Paradise where the multitudes are nourished by mana, the living tree, the crystal fountain, whereof the Revelation speaks. Before the throne of the Lamb, her tears are wiped from her sorrowful countenance. She is refreshed in her heavenly abode, where no second death intrudes.

Oh! That we were there too already, where we would not have to weep any more tears. However, our God and Father, who knows all things, will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. I know not how I am to survive the time, if it is to take until next year, before you come. Our God and Father whom I serve, knows our plight, and will help us, as He has helped before. He knows the answer to all our needs. He alone knows whether we will ever see each other face to face again.

Brother and sister Isaac Warkentins, is my dear Mariechen alive? Is she well and healthy? May the Lord grant you His blessings with her, and give you wisdom to truly nurture her in the ways of truth, for it is so important in these last and evil days, that we keep a watchful eye over our children, that we may be able to say on that great day, when we shall face God the Father, "Lord, here am I and those whom Thou hast given me."

I will have to break off, for it is getting late. I must also tell you yet, that I live in the middle, between Abraham Loewens and Peter Baergs. I have had to give away all my children, except Peter, whom I still have with me. We are all well. I have many reasons to be thankful. During the night when I, in my lonesome state, begin to think of how much, and in how many ways the Lord has led me, I cannot tell enough of His great goodness and mercy. I am mindful of my children, whose welfare weighs so heavily upon my heart, and how I had to give them up to others, and now they are receiving such good care. When I get together with them, they console and comfort me, and tell me not to worry about them; and also that I should not cry when I go to bed, or during the night, for they are all in very good circumstances. I was at Katarina's lately, and I had to promise her, that I would not cry. The Lord, our Redeemer, always in-

tercedes for us with inexpressible pleadings unto His Father.

Now, my dear Johann Goossens, how are you? Are you all healthy? My beloved sister, I have heard that the Lord has given you twin sons. It was so hard for you with your son, Johann. Now He has given him back to you and another with him. What are you going to give your Lord for him? Yield your heart in love that you might be filled with peace.



Peter D. Goossen (1890-1972) circa, 1920, grandson of Anna Klassen Goossen. Peter D. Goossen was a farmer in Greenland, Manitoba. He was the father of Linda, Mrs. Klaas F. Janzen, Blumenort. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, Steinbach, Manitoba.

And Grandmother, are you also among the living? How are matters going with you? I imagine you will often think of us and wonder what we might be doing. We are not walking on soft roses and often hurt ourselves on the thorns of life. This mortal journey is quite hard. Oh! If I were but in heaven! Now I must quit, for the others, are all sleeping.

Dear Johann Warkentins, I must turn to you a little. Are you all healthy, together with your little children? I have to tell you dear ones, also Johann Goossens, that as far as I know,

Cornelius Goossens are well. Sister-in-law is still the same. My two oldest children are there to help them.

Adieu my dear ones, this is written in great haste. Whatever you cannot read, you shall have to guess, for I have little time. Sister Mrs. Regehr is here for the night, and before she went to bed, she said to tell you, Mother, and the others, that they are all well. Her husband went to Winnipeg, and she came over to hear the letter, and asked to send you her hearty greetings. They want to write soon.

Now beloved ones, I entrust you all unto God's loving care and grace. He does such great wonders unto us and for all. Let us praise Him and spread His fame, all of us that are His own, for His grace and mercy last forever. He will eternally enfold us in His arms with sweet love, and remember our shortcomings no more. Beloved ones, write as soon as you have read this. Goodbye.

"Widow Gerhard Goossen"

Descendants.

Sons **Peter K. Goossen** and **Gerhard K. Goossen** married daughters of Franz Froese, Rosenort, where many of their family live to this day. Peter K. Goossen was the grandfather of Victor Goossen of Prairie View Press in Rosenort. Daughter **Maria K. Goossen** married Johann K. Esau (1867-1946) Gruenfeld, 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. Their children included: son Notary Public John D. Goossen, Steinbach: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, pages 75-76, father of lawyer Ernest R. Goossen; son Pool Hall owner George D. Goossen, father of Clara Goossen, Mrs. J.D. Reimer of the Steinbach Credit Union; son Peter D. Goossen, farmer in Greenland, and father of John R. Goossen, Greenland; son Frank D. Goossen who farmed in Clearsprings, in NE12-7-6E. He was the father of Jonas Goossen, long-time Secretary-Treasurer of R. M. of Ste. Annes.

Sources:

Anna Klassen Goossen, letter to Peter P. Toews, December 7, 1874, in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 45-46, translated by John W. Wohlgenuth.

Albert H. Hiebert and John H. Toews, compilers, *The Family of Johann Hiebert 1816-1875* (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1975), 113-120.

John R. Goossen, *Gerhard Goossen Family Book* (Rosenort, Manitoba, 1982), 187 pages.

Sara Siemens Janzen (1809-85)

by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Biography.

Sara Siemens Janzen (1809-88) was the daughter Claasz Siemens (1758-1834), a wealthy Vollwirt and owner of Wirtschaft 15 in Rosenort, Molotschna Colony, South Russia, which village had a substantial Kleine Gemeinde (KG) community. Sara had 4 sisters and 4 brothers, of whom 1 brother and 2 sisters continued in the KG tradition.

In 1832 Sarah married Cornelius Janzen (1812-64) and the family owned a Wirtschaft in Neukirch where Cornelius died in 1864 (Note One).

By 1871 Sara was living with her children in Steinbach, Borosenko, where her sister Katharina wrote her 3 letters. In 1874 she immigrated to Jansen, Nebraska, with her daughters Katharina, Sarah and Aganetha. It was from here that she wrote letters to her 2 children Elisabeth, Mrs. Isaac W. Loewen, and Johann S. Janzen who had chosen to settle in Rosenort, Manitoba.

Letter One was written to her son Johann S. Janzen (1840-1905) at the time living in Rosenort, Manitoba. The second letter, written 6 years later, was again addressed to son Johann by now living in Blumenhof, 4 miles northeast of Steinbach.

In 1885 Sara decided to come to Manitoba to visit her children here. Ironically she died while staying with her son Johann in Blumenhof. Presumably she is buried in the "old" Blumenhof village cemetery located on NW24-7-6E.

Letter One.

Blumenort [Jansen, Neb.], December 23, 1875.

A heartfelt greeting, first of all, to my beloved children Johann Janzens, also the grandchildren. Today is the first holiday, and the children have gone to Heuboden, to visit their siblings. Presently I am completely alone, hence I will see if I cannot make a little visit with you. Of course it will be very imperfect, but love inspires thereto. I do not know what to write, and also find it rather difficult.

Otherwise I am relatively well, with the exception that I had a bad cough for a time, which makes me very exhausted. Now my beloved, what are all of you up to there in the far distance? I do not get to see you at all! This saddens me, but there is no other way in this respect, than to be resigned to the situation, or what do you suggest?

I am in need of the interest on my money. If you can move here, I would like to make my lodging with you, then it would be settled. If not, perhaps, you could send me some money. Have you finished your dwelling? You do not write at all! I have learnt about your living quarters from the letter by Gerhard Siemens. Do please write me for once.

I wish to conclude my imperfect writing, yet, I must ask about the elderly Abram Reimers. Are they still living and well? Their children Abram Friesens, Abram Penners? What is Mrs. Penner up to? Is she healthier than in Russia? At that time I frequently went over to her place, and now I hear only little of any of you. Abram Rempel and his children, are they also well? Siemen's children, Johann Friesen? What are all of you up to there in the far distance?

All of you, receive a heartfelt greeting from me. Now I return again to my grandchildren. What are you doing? Are you all learning? You do not write at all anymore! Cornelius, you are really a good writer already. I believe that Johann and Margaretha also know how to write already. What is the little Katherina up to? Is she still so very lovable? If only, I could get to see her again!

In closing a heartfelt greeting to all of you. I commit you unto God and His grace. Adieu and God bless. It is cold here in the winter. It is freezing here 17 degrees, and snow on the ground. I bid you for an early reply.

"Sara Janzen"

Letter Two.

Blumenhof/ Heuboden,
June 26, 1881.

Beloved children, since I have an opportunity, I will visit you with a few lines. I wish you every well being; physically and above, all spiritually. My health seems to be relatively tolerable, although occasionally my breathing is difficult, but I cannot be otherwise than thankful in everything.

Greetings, I wish you the fullness of peace, which is in our Lord, in so far as it is comprehensible or realizable with our human understanding. Ohm Plett has visited us all (Note Two). I happened to be at Klassen's. I must say it was truly a great encouragement and joy for me. If only you could come, it would be an even greater encouragement! But I will resign myself to the realities as they are. Most important is that the loving Heavenly Father, would be gracious and redeem us. This is my innermost wish.

I will close, my mind is weak. Please forgive my imperfect writing, since it is done in love. Also you, my beloved grandchildren, you should be obedient to your parents, which is the first commandment. I have truly had much occasion to reflect on the promises, how everything has developed, but it is history now, we must resign ourselves. How it can be, I for my part cannot say very much. Good intentions I have plenty, but in the doing, I am deficient. Often times; indeed, daily I must admit within myself, that I am so weak spiritually to pursue virtue. In God everything is a mystery, he maketh matters to be as it pleaseth Him.

Descendants.

The descendants of Sara Siemens Janzen

in the Steinbach area include: Cornie Janzen, Janzen Garage, Blumenort; Mrs. Ernie Penner, Penco Construction, Steinbach; Don Fast, Fast Bros., Blumenort; Dr. Royden Loewen, Mennonite Chair, U. of W.; John J. Loewen, founder of Steinbach Furniture; Pat, Mrs. Wes Plett, Blumenort, and many others.

Endnotes:

Note One: There is no known relationship between this Janzen family, formerly of Neukirch, Russia, and that of Consul Cornelius Jansen, formerly of Berdjansk, Russia, and later of Beatrice, Nebraska.

Note Two: Sarah Siemens Janzen here is referring to the trip which Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) of Blumenhof, Manitoba made to Nebraska and Kansas in June 1881 to investigate the Holdeman movement and to visit relatives and friends.

Sources:

The Sara Siemens Janzen letters were preserved in the Johann K. Loewen Collection, courtesy of Marvin Loewen/Jacob Peters, 1983. These letters were translated and published in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 78-9.

Lorna Penner, *Johann S. Janzen Family Book 1840-1905* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1993), 49 pages.



Margaretha P. Janzen (1867-1936) and her husband Peter F. Thiessen (1859-1937). Margaretha was the daughter of Johann Siemens Jansen (1842-1905) of Blumenhof and the granddaughter of Sara Siemens Janzen. Her husband was the son of Johann W. Thiessen (1813-88), see article elsewhere in this newsletter. In 1889 Peter sold his farm in Jansen, Neb., and moved to Blumenhof, Manitoba, to marry Margaretha, an example of matrilocality. Their descendants include Elden Penner, K.K. Penner & Sons, Blumenort, and Dr. Myron Thiessen, Steinbach Medical Clinic. Photo courtesy of Mrs. K. K. Penner and published in *Loewen, Blumenort*, page 313, also in *Historical Sketches*, page 644. For biographies of Mr. and Mrs. Peter F. Thiessen see article by Carol Thiessen, *Historical Sketches*, pages 642-663.

Aganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht 1825-1912

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

Family Background.

Anganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht was born in Neukirch, Molotschna in 1825, daughter of Jakob Thiessen and Anna Enns who were married at Czatkau, Prussia, in 1817. Jakob was the son of Isaac Thiessen who is listed in the 1776 Konsignation at Czatkau, West Prussia (Note One). Jakob and Anna emigrated to Russia in 1819 where they settled in Neukirch, Molotschna Colony, acquiring Wirtschaft 20. The family is listed in the 1835 census: "Jakob Isaac Thiessen, age 49, wife Anna 37, children: Isaac 17, Maria 16, Anna 11, Agneta 9, Katerina 8, Margareta 6, Jakob 3 and Peter 1."

Neukirch had a large Kleine Gemeinde (KG) fellowship which included Bishop Johann F. Friesen (1808-72), brothers Rev. Abram and deacon Klaas, 3 Thielmann brothers, Cornelius Janzen (1812-64) and Jakob Bartel, to name a few.

Anganetha's family was also connected to the KG through the Enns family as some of the children of her uncle Peter (1791-1857), Neukirch, a Grosse Gemeinde minister, were associated with the reform movement: daughter Maria Enns married Jakob L. Friesen, later of Jansen, Neb., son Peter Enns 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 Gnadenu, Kansas (Note Two).

Anna's sister Katharina married three times to KG-ers: firstly to Peter Warkentin, secondly to Rev. Jakob M. Barkman (1824-75), see article in Dec 1996 *Preservings*, and, thirdly, to Kornelius Loewen (1827-93).

Marriage, 1847.

Anganetha Thiessen was baptised on the confession of her faith in 1844.

In 1847 she married Gerhard Giesbrecht, whose first wife Eva Ratzlaff died earlier that year. Gerhard was the son of Jakob Gerhard Giesbrecht (b. 1787) who owned Wirtschaft 17 in Muntau where Gerhard grew up. Ironically Gerhard's sister Elisabeth was the first wife of Jakob M. Barkman who would later marry Anna's sister Katharina. For more information about the Giesbrecht family see article by Henry Schapansky in *Preservings*, Dec. 1996.

Anganetha and her husband lived in Prangenu. 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 was not sufficient and the family also received assistance from the KG treasury. The KG practised the traditional teaching of "community of sharing". This meant that all the members of the congregation gave of their property

as required "to attend to the necessities of the saints" as KG elder Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) so eloquently put it. Less fortunate people were to be provided for not only on a sustenance basis but were to be given means whereby they could earn their own livelihood (Note Three).

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: "1848 cash 50; received rye 2.74; 1852 money for purchase of rye 163.26; 1854 money for Jahrmak (an exhibition where goods were displayed for purchase) 87.05; 1853 received in money and rye; 1853 applied for linen cloth and rye; Aug 27, 1857 to pay debts 176.55; Sept 1858 borrowed money 105; total banko 658.58; May 21, 1861 to pay for flour and straw 9.80."

In 1908 the KG deaconry struck out the Giesbrecht account on the grounds that the recipient was long deceased and that the church treasury was in a very sound position. It was also noted that since no interest charges had been paid by the deaconry since 1888 all interest charges to recipients were cancelled: *Golden Years*, 345. Obviously the Giesbrecht family was fortunate to have belonged to the KG as over 80 per cent of the Russian Mennonites by this time had no land and with no bread winner in the family, life would have been a miserable existence at best.

Widowhood, 1863.

Gerhard Giesbrecht died in Feb. 27, 1863, leaving Anganetha, age 32, a widow with 5 children between the ages of 15 and 2. In many such circumstances, children were taken from their mother and put into foster homes. Anganetha was a determined woman who was able to muster sufficient resources to meet the needs of her young family herself.

By the late 1860s her children were getting married and establishing places of their own. Some of them took advantage of the KG church resettlement program whereby young landless farmers could borrow money and have loans guaranteed so they could purchase their own farms in new settlements established by the church. Daughter Anganetha moved to Rosenfeld and son Wilhelm to Blumenhof; both villages were located in Borosenko, a KG settlement of 18,000 acres founded in 1865.

However, daughter Margaretha and her husband were living with her in-laws in Nikolaithal, Cherson Province, a new settlement about which little is known at this time. Another daughter Elisabeth and her husband Gerhard E. Kornelsen remained in the Molotschna, living with his father, veteran teacher Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94), on the ancestral Wirtschaft in Lichtenau.

Anganetha continued to reside in her home in Prangenu, Mol. On Feb. 4, 1873, her daughter Anganetha wrote her a letter, writing, "Re-

ceive a sincere greeting beloved mother... you are often in my thoughts, especially when I am alone with the children...."

Anganetha referred to her mother's illness and the uncertainty of life. She mentioned that Bishop Peter Toews "has promised to stop by to see" her mother. Mother Anganetha was planning to hold an auction sale and in her previous letter she 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."

Emigration, 1874.

After her auction sale Anganetha may have lived with her son Wilhelm with whom she emigrated to Manitoba in 1874. They travelled with the first contingent of 65 Mennonite families who arrived at the confluence of the Rat and Red Rivers on August 1, 1874.

Anganetha and son Jakob, age 13, settled in the village of Lichtenau, 1 1/2 miles west of Steinbach, where her daughter Elisabeth and son-in-law pioneer school teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen, also settled. Daughters Anganetha, 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 Grunfeld, but moved to Steinbach as well in 1879. Thus Anganetha had her whole family living nearby.

Anganetha took out a homestead in Lichtenau, the NW 22-6-6E, 1 mile south and 1/2 mile west of Steinbach. She must have been a strong and courageous woman to Homestead on her own in an untamed wilderness. She filed for her Homestead on Sept. 2, 1876. Here she farmed together with her bachelor son Jakob. Anganetha's farm was located where John F. Wiebe lives today. It is possible that Anganetha 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.

Anganetha 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. R.M. of Hanover tax records for 1883 show that she had 80 acres of land, 2 oxen, 2 cows, etc.

Church division, 1882.

The peaceful lifestyle surrounded by family and friends which Anganetha no doubt had longed for was not to last. In 1882 an 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 ar-

continued on next page

continued from previous page

guments 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, Menno-nite (Holdeman).

Anganetha preferred to remain with her faith once received as did her daughters Anganetha, Elisabeth and bachelor son Jakob.

One can only imagine the pain which the separation in fellowship within the family must have caused: days of pleading tearfully with children, sleepless nights of crying and weeping!

But Anganetha was a woman of deep emotional strength and courage; she obviously dealt with her problems and went on with life.

House, 1889.

In 1889 Anganetha Giesbrecht bought a house belonging to neighbour Abram R. Friesen who had passed away in 1884 and whose widow had remarried Johann W. Thiessen of Nebraska. The couple had bought a house in Steinbach and no longer required the place in Lichtenau.

The moving of the house caught the attention of Blumenort chronicler Abraham F. Reimer (a.k.a. Lazy R.) who recorded on June 7: "The old Mrs. Giesbrecht has bought the house of J. [A?] Friesen in Lichtenau for \$100. [Sentence is not clear]. They used 5 big oxen and 3 horses." June 8: "Mrs. Giesbrecht's house remained out on the field overnight until today. It was too heavy. They had 8 pairs of oxen hitched to it."

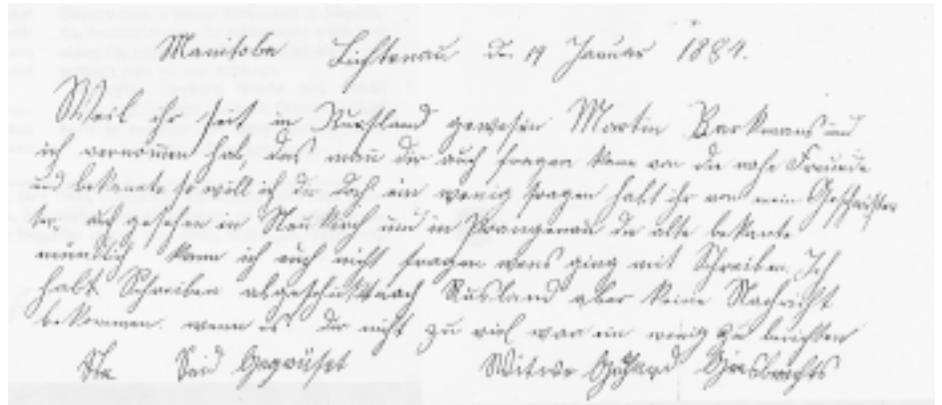
It is possible that this was the retirement home in which Anganetha later lived, although it seems too small to require 8 oxen to move. The new house was insured in 1889 for \$75 with an additional \$25 for the stable. For photographs of her cottage-style retirement home and son Jakob, see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, Part One, page 21-22.

On Aug. 6, 1891, Anganetha received insurance coverage of \$30.00 for an ox killed by lightning.

Correspondence.

Anganetha Giesbrecht was a vivacious woman with an genuine interest in life. She valued her extended family network highly and corresponded with relatives back in Russia and elsewhere. Her letters open a window on the mind of this important pioneer matriarch.

Her letters were given to son Wilhelm, passed on to grandson David, and are presently in the possession of great-granddaughter Dolores Giesbrecht Pankratz, who has graciously made them available for the writing of this article. The collection is obviously not complete consisting of 4 letters written by her and 14 letters received by her. In traditional Menno-nite families personal memorabilia such as letters and journals were divided equally among the children and so what is extant is possibly



Copy of Anganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht's letter of 1884 shows a sample of her handwriting. Courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, 1996.

only the part which went to son Wilhelm.

These letters tell us a great deal about the matriarchal networks of conservative intellectual women in the Hanover Steinbach area and how they functioned.

The letter written by Anganetha in 1884 will be reproduced here in full. The other letters will be surveyed for their contents.

Letter One:

Letter One was written to Martin M. Barkman (1821-94) a wealthy KG farmer in Jansen, Nebraska, older brother to Rev. Jakob M. B. (1824-75), Steinbach, who drowned in the Red River in 1875. Martin and his wife were able to return to Russia for a visit in 1883. Being anxious for news about her relatives, Anganetha Giesbrecht wrote to Martin M. B. for information:

Manitoba, Lichtenau, January 14, 1884.

Since you have been in Russia, Martin Barkman, and since I have been given to understand that one can ask you about close friends and acquaintances, I wish to ask you, have you seen anything of my siblings in Neukirch and Prangenau, the old and familiar?

I can not ask you in person, and if possible [reply] in writing. I have sent letters to Russia but have received no replies. [I hope] it is not asking too much for you to reply with news.

With greetings, -widow Gerhard Giesbrecht

Letter Two:

"Beloved aunt: We received your letter of May 30, 1882.... even though we may live far apart, yet it is only for the short time of our pilgrimage here on earth...."

"You may already know that my sister Elisabeth married Jakob Janzen from Kleefeld, which will be 8 years now in the month of November....for a time they lived in the Crimea, but now they again live here by us."

"Of the other friends I do not know much to write you, except the Tante Peter Wallsche died and was buried on May 12, 1883...."

The writer Maria Thiessen mentioned the family of Johann Siemens in the Crimea: their oldest daughter Margaretha married widower Abraham Giesbrecht; Anna married to Peter Isaac; Johann married Maria Esau; Peter in the

Forstei; and Jakob at home.

Maria referred to Jakob Bekkers, "their oldest daughter is married to Martin Hamm, but there is always disputation and strife so that they cannot live together. Elisabeth also had a bridegroom but they were so dishonourable they were not betrothed; and Gerhard Thiessens live in Hamburg where he serves as the night watchman. Aron Thiessen is well and still lives here in Neukirch.... also Wilhelm Giesbrecht, wrote that he would write again, if we wanted, and I bid all friends, please write us often for it is a great joy for us to receive a letter." "Maria Thiessen May 12, 1884"

Letter Three:

Letter datelined; "niece Katharina Thiessen, March 12, 1884, Neukirch", related of a fire which destroyed her parents' house. No one was home but son Jakob had rushed home and saved the livestock from the barn, but nothing could be saved from the house. Also related of very serious injuries which occurred to the father. "Dr." Wiebe in Lichtfeld referred them to the doctor, etc.

Letter Four:

From niece Katharina Thiessen, Neukirch, January 18, 1885. "We have received your letter. Beloved aunt, I thank-you for your letter and that you still think of us....It seems so long since we last heard from you. Beloved aunt, I heartily affirm the song which you have quoted." Katharina Thiessen described the bountiful crop they have harvested with the words, "The Lord has blessed us richly." She closed with "a greeting with the words of song 658."

Katharina Thiessen also enclosed a note for "friends Barkmans, Friesens, Giesbrechts, Kornelsens, what are you all up to there in the far away distance? I ask you for letters. I can yet well remember of Friesens and Barkmans that they once visited at our place. And you Wilhelm Giesbrecht..."

Katharina Thiessen also writes to her cousin Jakob and describes many deaths in the Molotschna Colony.

Letter Five:

From niece Maria Thiessen January 18,

1885. "We have received your letter of June 3rd on the 22nd of June. You ask about the Peter Wallsche; she is Heinrich's daughter who used to live with the herdsman in Prangenau; but we have not yet seen her once, they do not come here. All 3 of his children are grown up. Peter is presently serving in Alexanderwohl on a treadmill.... Heinrich serves in Liebenau, and Katharina serves in the Crimea. For 2 years she served at Siemens, but then they engaged Maria Hiebert here from Neukirch, who mislead their son Jakob...[she had] a little daughter... and they got married....also cousin Peter Wall dissipates his wages with drinking, etc...."

"Johann Siemens were both here to visit this summer, and then our parents took Siemens along to Gerhard Thiessens in Hamburg who were well. Their children are: Abraham, Helena, Jakob and Anna.... The aunt Aron Thiessche is well as far as I know. Bernhard Thiessen lives in Sagraadowka...."

"I must close, but a song comes to mind, "Sind mit Sorgen wir beladen...."

Letter Six:

Neukirch December 1, 1887, from sister-in-law widow Jakob Thiessen. "...love compels me to talk to you--and as we can not do so in person, I will do so in writing....I will inform you about the situation in our home....It hath pleased the Lord...to take my dearly beloved husband from my side....we buried him on the 23rd of July. Johann Siemens were also here...I was at their place for a visit this fall. My children are all healthy. Katharina married Johann Berg from Muntau, and they live in Kleefeld where they have a small Wirtschaft, and Jakob Janzens, my children, also live in Kleefeld....And Jakob, Heinrich and Maria are still at home with me. Gerhard is apprenticed.... I hope to continue the Wirtschaft.... I will close, also enclose a portrait; the faces may still seem familiar to you...."

Letter Seven:

Undated letter from a niece in Neukirch. "Firstly, I will write you about our burning down which will be 3 years in April....It was on a Sunday, we were not at home. Maria and I had gone visiting at the other end of the village, and Jakob had gone across the street to Gerhard Thiessens who were living in Gerhard Neufelds' small house [Neben Haus]....we rushed home as fast as we could.... nothing could be seen regarding father who showed us his hand and said that he had bumped it, and then he got very sick,... we brought him inside at Koops, ...he had extreme pain in the hands which were ... burns, Dietrich Wiebe prescribed oil, but it helped nothing, ...about our new house: 28 feet wide, 47 long, the barn is 40 feet long, and the hay shed 20 feet long which cost us 1500 ruble. Insurance money we received 1283 ruble."

Letter Eight:

Letter of Jan 18, 1888, written by Anganetha to her sister-in-law in Russia who has recently been widowed. Anganetha refers her sister-in-law to Jesus, "the friendly refuge, who receives the orphans unto Himself, and hears the cry of the

widow." She quoted 2 Cor. 4 as a comfort. Since Anganetha herself has been widowed it is understandable that others turned to her for solace in their grief.

Anganetha also mentions that she has not heard anything from "our only brother Gerhard" and sister Thiessen. "I guess I can omit the friends in the Crimea as they do not remember us."

Letter Nine:

Letted datelined, Neukirch, Feb 14, 1889, by Heinrich and Maria Janzen is addressed "Beloved aunt." "...We were married here [in Neukirch] on May 1, 1888, at the home of our beloved mother."..."Uncle Gerhard died on Jan 9 and was buried on the 12th." "A number of childrenand adults have died of diphtheria." "Beloved aunt, in your previous letter you write that you have received the portrait...Jakob is standing on the left side of father, behind father is Gerhard, Heinrich is standing behind the beloved mother, and my beloved wife Maria at mother's side."

"Joh. Siemens Jr. has a windmill there in Karrasan [Crimea] which was destroyed by fire... now they have sold their buildings for 1225 ruble and together with Peter Siemens they have bought the parents Joh. Siemens' Wirtschaft for 10,000 ruble. The parents want to move to Jakob Siemens in Marienthal where Jakob Bekkers are also living."

Letter Ten:

Letter written circa March 12, 1889, by Anganetha Giesbrecht to her sister-in-law in Russia. "Grace be with you" is her opening greeting. "I have frequently been convicted to write and now I have taken the pen to hand...We had actually been planning to drive to Steinbach, but it is presently too cold for us."

Like any proud grandmother, Anganetha wrote about the health of her children: "We have heard that the Barkmansche is sick, she has been blessed with a small daughter, maybe Elisabeth. They now have 2 sons and 3 daughters alive: 2 Jakobs have died for them here."

"We are not all very healthy: Kornelsens have also doctored this winter with Mrs. Thiessen from Prangenau. The Jakob Friesche has also been taking medicine but she has not recovered and has been confined to a sick bed this winter. The Lord has also blessed her with a little daughter Maria. She is currently also under medical care. Friesens have 5 daughters and 1 son alive; 4 sons have predeceased them."

"Wilhelm Giesbrecht is also not very well. Please write me to let me know whether you have received his letters."

"Kornelsens presently also live in Steinbach in the school, where he has engaged himself for the school year. They have a new dwelling house here in Lichtenau, in which they have not even lived for a whole year yet. There are renters living in the house now, Colonists (ethnic Germans); they want to move onto their own land in spring."

"We drove to Barkmans for a visit and they were quite happy, and had a fine healthy child.

But a week later they notified us that we should come for a funeral, as the little one had died. So we drove there on Monday, March 25th, for the funeral. Their little Johann was also sickly, but they had him there with them. And Wilhelm Giesbrecht was also very sick. Jakob Friesens' small child was also very sick, but they were not there at Barkmans."

"Saturday Kornelsens had school examinations. We also received the letters and the portrait on the 30th of March. I thank-you for the love which you have demonstrated towards us. I immediately recognized the sister, but the brother-in-law not so definitely."

"And yes, I had also heard that brother Gerhard Thiessen has died. I had heard this winter already that he was very sickly and that he might die. I have also wished him from the heart, that he could die, to be with the Lord. I had also heard that he had wanted to build in Neukirch. Is the sister-in-law living there in Neukirch? Please greet her also from us."

"May the Lord be with you all."

Letter Eleven:

A sheet with no dateline or name, being part of a letter from Russia, which opens with a genealogy of the unnamed writer: "Of my siblings who are alive: Abraham 79; Johann--the youngest brother; Anganetha--the widow Gerhard Thiessche, has 3 daughters and 1 son; Agatha--the widow Reimer, has 1 son Aron--she lives with her siblings in the Colony, her son is in Memrik; and Susanna--the widow Kliewer has 2 daughters and a son...."

"Oh, I had forgotten about your sister Thiessche, who is still alive. Anna David Friesen, her oldest daughter Anna, she lives in Rückenau and has a Hiebert for a husband. I have heard they belong to the assemblies of the Brethren. Bernhard lives in the Old Colony.... they are very poor...."

"Yet one can reminisce about many things of siblings and friends, but time over arches everything, those who were young are now old-married children; no one is left any more in the village from the old days, even old Jakob Janzen has also died, he was the same age as brother Abraham."

"In closing, a greeting to all acquaintances and friends who think of us, we commit you unto God and His grace, and well-being upon our life's pilgrimage, and remember us in love." "Anna Har...[?]"

"Gerhard Thiesche has married Jakob Wall."

Letter Twelve:

Undated, written by Anganetha Giesbrecht. She comforts someone who has lost a loved one, possibly the widow of her brother Jakob Thiessen: "Who would have thought that Jakob would be the first [to die]. But the separation imposed by God is done for the best..." Anganetha quoted several lyrics of a song from the Gesangbuch.

"I can not definitively recognize all the people on the portrait which you had enclosed. On you husband's side, is that your son Jakob? And on your side, is that your daughter

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Elisabeth? Is that her husband standing beside her? I cannot recall as much about Gerhard and Heinrich.”

“You have aged somewhat, which many have also said about me this past summer. I have aged much.”

“We are healthy, may God be thanked for our health, nourishment and apparel. We have also seeded a little wheat this summer, also we have already raised potatoes, and slaughtered a fine pig. Milk we receive from a cow, we have 3, this summer all 3 were giving lots of milk.”

“Now, receive a heartfelt greeting from us. I also thank-you sincerely for your writing, that you have shared this with me. Whether you have received our letters.....”

Letter Thirteen:

From sister-in-law Jakob Thiessche, no date. “Beloved sister-in-law: Since my children are writing I must make a small addendum. Johann Siemens, Karrasan, have always wanted to send you their portrait, which has not happened till now, and so they asked me to do so....but with the request that you let us know soon whether it arrived or not, ... and you beloved nephew Jakob, you ask what Gerhard is doing, he is currently at home and is working on the planer bench. Yes, yes, we do not know what his luck will be, as he has to cast the lot this fall... I also report to you regarding our livestock, we have 7 horses for spring, we sold the stallion this winter for 285 ruble, we have 4 cows, a yearling and a calf, we have 2 cows that are come fresh milk,....”

Letter Fourteen:

A note from Jakob Bekker, no date. Appears to have been copied from the *Rundschau*.

“Our beloved daughter Aganeta ...died January 4, 1887. She was 21 years old.”

“It is also made public to all *Rundschau* readers that ...I , village Marienfeld, Crimea, wish to sell my Wirtschaft , good buildings 100 desjation of free hold land, fine orchard and rented land, good water,” etc.

Letter Fifteen:

Hillsboro, Marion County, April 17, 1903. “Beloved niece, together with your children. I want to answer your wish in so far as I can. Julius Barkmans are living in the former Wirtschaft of your brother and a Bergen lives in Siemens [old place]. Your sister is still living there but is senile....She was at Maria’s Isaac Brauns, who have a Kleinwirtschaft in Neukirch, ...We were at Siemens in the Crimea, both of them are still alive,they are well-off and well looked after by their children Jakob....the Bekkersche is still alive but it is 40 werst, so we could not get there, they are scattered all over there, just like here. We met the Gerhard Thiessche on the train, she was going to Schönwiese, her son came to meet her, he is in the store there and summoned her to come, they are poor and live in Tiede on the Chutor, where they water the cattle,the Jakob Thiessche was [visiting] at her [daughter]

Elisabeth Janzen in Kleefeld....She said she had written everything to you about her husband’s dying....”

Letter Sixteen:

Letter from Abr. and Anna Harms, Gnadenu, Kansas. Undated. Anna nee Enns was a cousin to Anganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht. The letter is a sermonette emphasizing certain Pietist distinctives. Since Abraham Harms had forsaken the KG and joined the Krimmer Brethren he was likely proselytising. Widows were seen as good candidates for these efforts as they might be vulnerable and seduced to leave the faith once received. No doubt these efforts were well intentioned but misguided.

Letter Seventeen:

Jalantusch, December 28, 1911, from Johann and Anna Bekker. “Beloved aunt. ...you will want to know about our beloved grandmother, your sister. She is still...quite well.” The letter again is a sermonette.

“I will also report something of our circumstances. Our crop was only average, .. we have no deficiency in our material circumstances, ... dear cousin, you will no doubt have read in the *Rundschau* that the beloved cousin Siemens is expecting to emigrate to America. If they also move so far away, we will be the only cousins left here in Russia, from Mamas’ side. The beloved Thiessens are in Orenberg but we never hear anything from them. Peter Isaacs from Siberia were here this fall, ... his wife is our beloved niece [cousin] nee Anna Siemens, ...for many years they lived here by us in the village and they were quite poor, but then through the grace of God they were able to acquire 100 desjation of land in Siberia, partially through inheritance, and partially through the blessing of their own effort. Also they have given themselves over to the Lord with body and soul. I will share this with you but please keep it secret, he suffers [or had suffered?] from alcoholism....”

Bekkers wrote about the Siemens cousins

who have lost many children by death the previous winter. Johann 2 or 3, Peter 5 or 6.

“We also bid you from the heart, to write us as soon as possible for especially our beloved Mama so dearly wishes to know how things are with you beloved aunt.”

Letter Eighteen:

Hukovannokm March 30, 1912. “Beloved aunt. Since we have finally obtained your address from the *Rundschau*... we will send you a few lines. I am Peter Bekker, the eldest of my brothers. We presently live in Siberia.”

Peter Bekker describes how his first wife died and left him with 2 children Jakob 6 and Anna 4. His second wife was Justina Penner from Lichtfelde, whom he married 8 years ago.

“Since we had nothing of our own in the Crimea,... the last 4 years we looked after the church in Schönthal, Crimea, ... then we bought a lot [Loos] and now live in Bor naul. My beloved mother and brothers Johan and Jakob are still farming there [in the Crimea]...”

“All beginnings are hard, which is also the case here. The winters are long and cold, and then it is like being in jail.... “Peter was sick that winter and could not work. “The first year here we built our dwelling, a sod house, ... this winter our barn collapsed, ... here we build with bricks and mortar, ... the land here is good once there are enough horses to work it properly, ... we have 4 horses, 2 cows and 8 hens.”

“Beloved aunt, we must beg you from our hearts, perhaps you could send us something [money], so that we can build. The summer is here and one must hurry.”

“Is uncle Johann Bekker in America still alive? Or of our cousins, please let us know, as we know nothing for certain? [Tell us] whether aunt Giesbrecht is still alive, and so we address the letter to you, from your cousin Peter Bekker.”

“If any of our friends live in your neighbourhood perhaps give them the letter to read as well, and if so, perhaps they could also send us something.”

Aganetha Thiessen’s children and spouses.

Gen	Name	Birth	Marriage	Death
5	Aganeta Thiessen	Jul 18,1825	1847	Jun 7,1912
m	Gerhard Giesbrecht	Mar 25,1816		Feb 27,1863
6	Aganetha Giesbrecht	Feb 18,1848		Nov 26,1918
m	Jakob T. Barkman	Nov 2,1848	Sep 21,1869	Jul 11,1935
6	Wilhelm Giesbrecht	Jul 4,1849		Jul 8,1917
m	Elisabeth Harms	Oct 1,1854	Jan 6,1873	May 11,1874
2m	Katharina Friesen	Oct 1,1855	Jan 10,1875	Oct 22,1938
6	Anna Giesbrecht	Jul 2,1850		Nov 9,1853
6	Marg. T. Giesbrecht	Oct 26,1852		Dec 15,1936
m	Jakob S. Friesen	Oct 31,1850	Feb 12,1872	Nov 26,1921
6	Elis. T. Giesbrecht	Apr 27,1855		Jan 9,1910
m	Gerh. E. Kornelsen	May 28,1857		Feb 2,1933
6	Peter T. Giesbrecht	Jul 21,1856		Oct 4,1857
6	Johann Giesbrecht	May 13,1858		Nov 2,1859
6	Maria T. Giesbrecht	Feb 10,1860		Apr 6,1860
6	Jakob T. Giesbrecht	Jun 30,1861		Nov 11,1953

Conclusion.

The letter collection of Anganetha Thiessen Giesbrecht is far more significant than may meet the eye of a casual observer. These letters tell not only the story of the family members who remained in Russia after 1874 but also provide a social history of the entire Mennonite community. Historians have tended to follow the “forever summer, forever Sunday” theme, emphasizing the wealth of the paradise lost, and ignoring the 80 per cent who were landless and frequently in miserable straights.

The rise and fall of the fortunes of the Thiessen family, as revealed through the letter collection of Anganetha, illustrates that although the children and a few grandchildren of Jacob Thiessen (b. 1786) followed in his footsteps as wealthy Vollwirthen, they were only a fortunate minority. The others frequently struggled severely at least partially because of the surplus of cheap local labour available in Czarist Russia, probably somewhat comparable to modern-day Mennonite communities in

Latin America.

Prophetically, the last item in the collection is a desperate appeal for help from a nephew who had moved to Siberia in pursuit of the dream where he was now stranded and forgotten. This was a side of the Russian Mennonite commonwealth only too frequently seen by the KG and other conservative groups in North America who tried to help financially as many as they could.

An interesting side note is the wide use of photographs or more correctly portraits as the writers call them, i.e. posed pictures. Anganetha expressed appreciation for the photographs and displayed no concerns or scruples about receiving them. This confirms the view that photographs in the KG were only prohibited after the “Diener-Konferenz” of July 1, 1899.

Last, but far from least, these letters reveal Anganetha as a woman of genuine faith and good breeding. She comforted and supported her friends and relatives in Russia, Kansas, and elsewhere through her letters. She

was a conservative but intellectual woman who knew no other way than to live a wholistic faith which informed every moment of her life.

Notes:

Note One: Courtesy of Henry Schapansky, letter to the author Dec. 12, 1994.

Note Two: For a more complete listing of the KG fellowship in Neukirch see my article “Peter Enns (born 1753),” unpublished paper, 1995, 11 pages, where I have identified 22 family who had some KG connections during the 1830s and 40s.

Note Three: At a brotherhood meeting on July 29, 1873, at Blumenhoff, Borosenko, this principal was affirmed: “... our regulation was to be retained as it had previously been, namely, that support was not only to be given when people are impoverished: rather the poor should be given means so that (provided they are otherwise healthy), they can make their own livelihood”: *Profile*, 162.

Anna: The Bishop's Wife

Anna Warkentin Toews (1843-1925): “The Bishops Wife”; by Margaret Penner Toews, Box 3451, Nielburg, Saskatchewan, S0M 2C0.

Introduction.

I sit and ponder my assignment. How does one write her history? How do I record the story of a person I have never met, whose role is so enmeshed with her husband's one cannot separate the two, who has left no record of the things she herself thought, felt and experienced, and has long since left for her Long Awaited Home?

I proceed to phone a few elderly people, grandchildren who remember her. What was she like? They hand me small shards of old memories, caressing her name, groping back for details that are both elusive and tantalising.

“She was kind.”

“She told stories.”

What stories?

“I remember she talked of bees. Her father was a keeper of bees. When the bees would swarm and threaten to relocate elsewhere, they would call them and the bees would come back.”

Hmmm. Interesting. Do you recall any details?

“I can't remember. Perhaps ... perhaps I got the bee story wrong. But she talked of a teacher she once had whom she dearly loved. All the children would run to meet him when he approached the school, each eager to be the one to hold a hand. They loved their lessons when he was there. And then another teacher was hired, this one a cruel man. Learning was no longer a joy. For small misdemeanours a child would have to hold aloft their textbook, a Bible. If an arm slackened and an elbow gave way he would flog them.”

She was old when she related this; and I cringe. I think of how long it takes, for a child to forget old injustices and pain.

I fish for more details.

“She had a rope above her bed.”

A rope?

“A green velvet rope with a knot at the end to help her get up, or turn over in bed.”

“She was short. I remember her sitting in her rocker on the verandah, her bosom kind of cradled in her lap, shelling peas.”

She told me about a fancy cup she once had. She dearly wanted to bring it to Canada, but Peter said no, there would be too much freight as it was. So the cup stayed in Russia.”

I pore through history books that tell peripherally about this woman's journey and conclude that the story of the grandmother of my husband is one that must be largely written with the heart.

Family Background.

I learn some facts, that Anna Warkentin was born Feb. 12, (by the Russian calendar), in 1843, (there seems to be some discrepancy about her date of birth: one record pegs it at Jan. 31); that she is the second daughter of Johann and Anna (Loewen) Warkentin; I learn that her father was a prosperous farmer in the Molotschna Colony of Mennonites in Russia in the village of Blumstein. And he is verily a keeper of bees.

Marriage.

I read that not far from Blumstein in the village of Fischau, (both enclaves of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites,) lives Peter Plett Toews, a young man of 22 years of age. He asks for Anna's hand in marriage. A serious fellow, fond of books, kindly, yet direct and persuasive, he has come through a period of trial. His twenty-year-old brother whom he loved fondly has died. Furthermore, Peter had been planning on mar-

rying another girl, but the engagement has been broken. This has left him devastated, but in his heart of hearts he knows he has not consulted God on the matter the way he ought to have. He becomes very earnest about wanting a touch of the Lord and His direction. He experiences a special encounter with God. These things I learn, but nothing of how Anna felt...except that one of the grandchildren all these years later relates, she spoke of being very sure God led her to marry him.

The wedding takes place on November 12, 1863. Small of stature, erect, clear-eyed, intelligent, a born leader, Peter has captured her heart. With her warm understanding personality, she has won his. They live in with her parents for a few weeks, and then leave to live under Peter's parents' wing at Fischau.

Getting Started.

I further follow her sketchy history and conclude that life for Anna as Peter's wife was anything but uneventful.

A farming opportunity presents itself when several Kleine Gemeinde families collectively enter into a six-year land lease in Markuslandt, an area about a hundred kilometres north of the Molotschna Colony. Peter and Anna, among the first settlers, make their move about six months after their wedding, their new village named Andreasfeld.

In my mind's eye I see them loading their small cache of goods on the low cart (drawn by oxen? horses?) and trundle across the shimmering face of a large land.

I learn that after a year-and-a-half, on March 26, 1865, a little boy is born to them. They name him Johann after Peter's father and Anna's fa-

continued on next page

ther. When the child is a year old Anna's father together with some other well-to-do farmers buys an estate at Borosenko, an area about 100 kilometres to the west situated by the Solenaya river. Both sets of parents move there, so Peter and Anna follow suit. The several families settle in a village which they name Blumenhof, reminiscent of the village of Blumstein they had left in Molotschna.

Death of Children.

One-and-a-half years pass. Anna's husband has left for Molotschna for a general meeting of the scattered churches. A minister's election is held, and the vote falls on him. Solemn, and sensitive to the impact of his calling, he returns home, the journey taking several days. On arriving, he finds his wife in a state; their son is lying feverish and very ill. Two days and two nights they sit with him, praying, yearning, anxious. And then the baby dies, the date Oct. 30, 1866.

Peter's sorrow for the child is surpassed only by his sorrow at Anna's grief. I can hear her sobbing as their little boy lies silent, his body growing cold. Over a century and two continents away, I weep with her, aware of how heavy empty arms can be. I wonder if she knows by then that a new little heart is forming under hers? On May 3, 1867, a little Anna is born to fill the void.

Peter becomes increasingly involved in his ministry. Trying to evoke peace and bring about a unity among various factions, his absences from home to the different far flung congregations are frequent and tiring. The young mother, in her early twenties, must have ambivalent feelings about it all. Further, when Peter is home he reads and studies prodigiously. And writes. Sermons, letters, poetry, history. Does she ever feel a bit abandoned, emotionally distanced by his responsibilities? His intellectual pursuits?

And then her little girl dies.

O God, am I never to be allowed to keep a baby? Little Johann was eighteen months with me, little Anna only fifteen. Restrain me, Lord, from bitterness.

May 11, 1869 marks the date of another small Anna's birth. On her third birthday their second Johann is born. Moreover, on September 10, 1870 an event has occurred that affects her dramatically: Peter has been elected as an Aeltester (bishop) by an overwhelming majority. Only 29 years of age, he is the youngest minister ever ordained in their church into this office. His responsibilities burgeon. The implications for Anna can only be imagined.

Emigration, 1875.

An unrest is sweeping through the Kleine Gemeinde Church as well as other Mennonites. There is a threat by the government to rescind the promises made to them by Catherine the Great when they immigrated to Russia, concerning basic things like autonomy and exemption from military service. No longer will they be allowed to practice freely the tenets of their faith. It is worrisome, and Peter is deeply involved in discussions with other church leaders and gov-

ernment officials.

On May 31, 1873, a Tuesday, the little family ventures out on a trip by wagon to visit the churches back in Molotschna. By the next Tuesday Mother Anna becomes very ill, in bed at some friends named Hiebert in Alexanderkron. The next Monday little Anna comes down with scarlet fever and by Wednesday morning she is gone. The next day she is buried, a long way from home. Not only that. Baby John has come down with smallpox. Come Monday, Anna seems to be well enough to start out for home, cradling her sick little boy tenderly as they jolt along their tedious trip homeward. They arrive the next day, to be informed that some friends have died of small pox. They keep nursing their baby, but the next Monday evening he also dies.

I contemplate how Anna must feel. Weak after her illness, spent from an exhausting trip, leaving her daughter in a far-off grave, letting go of her precious son, my heart grows numb



Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) in his retirement years in Swalwell, Alberta. He was the Bishop of the 136 Kleine Gemeinde families which emigrated to Manitoba in 1874-5. Based on an old photograph by artist Henry Fehr, Steinbach, Manitoba. No photo or sketch of Anna is available.

in thinking of her pain. Once more she is bereft of children. Does she ever get inured to grief?

While her husband is preoccupied with dealing with dissensions, fanaticism, the divisiveness of the preaching of the German pietists, the rebellions caused by land reformers among his people (I am reading this from "Leaders" by Delbert Plett), Anna must be very lonely dealing with her private pain. To address the emptiness they foster two motherless children, Isaac Wiens and Anna Broeski. They are the age her older children would have been if they had lived.

Meanwhile, the delegation (including Peter's brother Cornelius) that has gone to Canada, there to investigate material opportunity and the matter of religious freedom, returns with a good report. With due process it is decided that the Kleine Gemeinde church involving 1000 people, regardless of hardships and privations, will be bodily transplanted to America. They will emigrate in two groups.

The first group leaves in May of 1874. Peter is away in Nikopol helping them board a steamship on the first leg of their monumental journey. Meanwhile Anna, now 31 years old, is at home giving birth to another boy. This one is named Peter, destined to be the first child of theirs to survive his parents.

I wonder, did she have a sense of futility when she bore this son?

Peter and Anna spend another year in Russia. With the greater part of his people now overseas, Peter has time to study, write his long informative Journals, and keep in touch with those in Canada with lengthy letters.

Among the historic Holland Dutch tomes in Peter's possession is one called "*The United Undivided Church of God*" by Class Ganlofs, once a minister of the Gospel among the Flemish Anabaptist Mennonites. Written in 1591, the book deeply impresses Peter as he pores over it in context with his Bible. Its message will have far-reaching effects on him as well as Anna.

On May 4, 1875 the second group comprised of thirty families starts out on their voyage to Canada. Anna is there with her one-year old and the two older foster children. The journey takes almost two months. Finally they, too, reach the confluence of the Rat and Red rivers in their new land of adoption. The former group has built a house in the village of Gruenfeld for their beloved bishop. His coming has been yearningly awaited, for their minister Jakob M. Barkman has tragically drowned just a few days before.

Life in Manitoba.

Anna's life, inextricably bound up with Peter's, must be lonely as he immediately becomes involved in reconnecting with his parishioners and establishing schools for the children. It has always been important to him that all children learn to read, and he loses no time in setting this in motion. The school system he implements is widely regarded as first rate.

Another baby boy whom they once more name Johann is born to Anna a year later on October 18, 1876, but is theirs only for six months when he too is taken by death. A little girl, Maria, born December 17, 1877, another son named Johann (January 6, 1880) and one, Cornelius (October 21, 1892) all grow to adulthood. A boy named Isaac is born in 1884 and dies in infancy, as well as one named Jacob in 1885.

Peter and Anna's last child, a son they also name Isaac, born August 7, 1887 later becomes the father of two daughters and seven sons, the second youngest of them my husband, Milton Toews.

The Church of God, 1882.

After their move to Canada something is troubling Peter, and necessarily Anna as well. Having experienced the new birth himself, he knows that to many of his flock this is an alien concept. The schisms and conflicts, the differences in doctrine and thought and practice are eloquent of that. His studies of the previous year have changed him. He has worked unflaggingly in his ministry to bring about unity, but to how

much avail? He discerns a flaw in the very foundation.

Peter meets a man by the name of Johann Holdeman with whom he has corresponded for some time, finds a oneness of spirit, aim and doctrine with him.

It is not a sudden nor light decision. With a weight of conviction, with fasting and much earnest prayer, the die is cast. At the age of forty-one, Peter cedes his office, his reputation, his prestige, his past achievements and his whole future to God in a new commitment, a devout Anna steadily keeping pace with him. They join ranks with Holdeman in an embryo of renewal. Over half of his flock, each making a personal commitment, come with him. To their end Peter and Anna do not veer from this decision.

Peter is again ordained into the ministry and is deeply involved with Johann Holdeman in re-establishing and nurturing the church. Countless hours are spent together in their "grotte schtoave" (large room). Peter's youngest son, Isaac, quiet and studious, lies on a bench watching the two men pace the three strides from corner to corner, passing each other in the centre. He listens avidly while they are engrossed, deep in discussion on the scriptures and what the Church of God should be like in spirit and in practice.

A hymnal is needed. Peter compiles one, and writes many of the lyrics. In 1897 a church periodical, the *Botschafter der Wahrheit*, is started, the first denominational publication by any Russian Mennonite group [in America or Russia]. Peter is the editor, and does a lot of writ-

ing. The "care of the churches" is his vocation and calling as well as Anna's.

Alberta, 1911.

When Isaac marries Helena Bartel in 1911 Peter and Anna are in their mid-sixties. All four sons live in Alberta, homesteading in the Swalwell area. They and their daughter Maria go to join them there. Moving is something they have done before!

The books go with them, the journals, the sermons, the records. While Grandmother Anna busies herself with the grandchildren and the flowers, Grandfather Peter ministers to the church, applies himself to his pet interest of horticulture, pores over his papers and writes poetry.

As they age both Peter and Anna have trouble with their eyesight. He takes her to Minneapolis to have cataract surgery performed. Instead of improving her vision she becomes completely blind. Peter builds a fence along the walk to the outhouse so she can retain a measure of her privacy by feeling her way from picket to picket.

They are always concerned for the well-being of their children, in this case Maria, who until then has remained single. For a small source of income for her, they have the first telephone switchboard installed in their home. It consists of three lines, a primitive affair. They also take in a granddaughter who has a need, and nurture her.

The end, 1925.

It is November 2, 1922. A funeral is being

conducted at church, and a granddaughter stays at home with her aged grandparents. Anna, sitting on her rocker, is startled by a thud close to her. Peter has fallen, and there is no further sound, no breath. The people at the funeral cannot soon be alerted to their need for help. Her husband, her love, of late her nurse, with whom she has lived just ten days short of fifty-nine years, has been called Home.

Two-and-a-half years later Anna follows him in death, reunited with the seven children who have preceded her.

Memorial.

Eight evergreens mark the place of their burial at Linden, Alberta. It is the only monument they've ever wanted.

I never knew this grandmother but, following her thread through the past, I think I know her now. She was a strong woman, strong in faith, in devotion, in endurance, constant in her giving. Peering from behind the fragments of her story I see a selfless wife. If she had been a carper and complainer, her husband could never have achieved and met the challenges in what he had been called to do. A courageous woman, she took in children to nurture when her own were snatched away. I conclude that she was made of tough but tender stuff.

But I can't help quietly wishing she had crammed that fancy cup into the sack of dry black bread they took across the Atlantic.

Sources:

Biography of Peter P. Toews in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde*, pages 818-922.

Cornelia Harms Friesen (1853-1938)

Cornelia "Nelke" Warkentin Harms Friesen (1853-1938), by grandson Walter Braun, Box 51, Sinclair, Manitoba, R0M 2A0.

Introduction.

The story of my grandmother Mrs. Abram T. H. Friesen nee Cornelia Warkentin Harms, is one of those where you cannot, necessarily, put time and place together, so that the reader is at times left with mixed feelings.

Cornelia Warkentin Harms was born on April 24, 1853 to Peter and Cornelia nee Warkentin Harms of Sparrau, South Russia, where she also grew up. She was also known as "Nelke."

According to some source material in *Pioneers and Pilgrims* by D.F. Plett, her parents were average farming folk. Peter Harms passed away on July 19, 1870.

By this time the family was living in Borosenko, northwest of Nikopol. Nelke and her sister Elisabeth were two of 14 candidates presented for baptism after a worship service in Blumenhof, Borosenko, on May 14, 1872. But Nelke was not baptised together with the others on August 6, 1872. She was baptised some eight months later on May 18, 1873. Evidently she had some concerns about her spiritual journey and waited until she was

ready.

On October 14, 1872, Cornelia's mother married for the second time Gerhard S. Kornelson, a distinguished school teacher of Lichtenau, Molotschna.

Marriage, 1873.

After her mother's second marriage, Cornelia was either working for or staying at the home of her brother Gerhard, Heuboden, Borosenko. On May 10, 1873, Cornelia wrote a letter to her mother and step-father in Lichtenau, Molotschna. In this letter she wrote about a marriage proposal she had received from a young man, Abram Toews Friesen (1854-1908), a neighbour in the village.

Abraham was the son of a distinguished family, namely, that of Jacob F. Friesen a well-established farmer in the same village of Heuboden, Borosenko, formerly a Vollwirt in Kleefeld, Molotschna. The Friesen family were known as the "large" Friesens being quite tall. Abram's mother nee Margaretha Toews (1819-60) was a sister to Bishop Peter Toews.

Abram had some difficulties in his early

years as a brother in the Church and was excommunicated and reaccepted and excommunicated again. He was reaccepted for the second time on Sunday May 10, 1873: see Peter Toews, *Diary, Profile*, page 158-162.

Nelke was concerned about the proposal by young Abram and wrote her parents to help her decide whether this was of God or not. In this she was an example to her children and grandchildren, that would at some time in the future be in the same situation.

In her letter of May 10, 1873, Nelke writes, "Giesbrecht and Jakob Friesen and Abraham Friesen have also asked Gerhard [Harms] that he should ask me as to my intentions as he [Abraham] has asked for me. I have told him that I have given it over to the Lord. Therefore I pray that He will grant me strength to know His will. I will earnestly beseech Him to grant me strength....Beloved parents do write me back at once."

Cornelia resolved her misgivings and on June 3, 1873, she married Abraham. The young couple lived in Heuboden, Borosenko.

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Emigration, 1874.

The young couple emigrated to Manitoba in 1874 and settled in the village of Rosenort near Morris. On December 31, 1874, Abraham and Cornelia wrote a letter to his uncle Bishop Peter Toews still living in Russia. In this letter Abraham explained his reasons for leaving the larger group under the leadership of uncle Cornelius P. Toews and settling in Rosenort. They also write that a little daughter Cornelia was born to them on August 4.

During this period 1874-75 Abraham had some concerns about the church fellowship and resigned but "having been strengthened anew, is again favourably inclined." It appears that he was of like mind with Abraham Klassen who later moved to Kansas and settled in Alexanderfeld near Hillsboro: *Pioneers*, pages 56, 66 and 70.

Steinbach, 1875.

Nelke and Abram moved to Steinbach from Rosenort after only having lived there for about a year. In Steinbach Abraham T. Friesen served as the first teacher of the pioneer community. It must have been an interesting year as the school building had just been built and everything was new and had to be established for the first time. Abram taught in a small log block building 20 by 14 feet which served both as school and living quarters. They were living in Steinbach in the winter of 1875-76. Proof of this is a small Arithmetic book, which I have in my possession.

While living in Steinbach, Cornelia's mother and step-father, the Gerhard S. Kornelsens, came to Canada and settled in a small village one mile west of Steinbach by the name of Lichtenau in 1875. Son Gerhard was born in Steinbach on October 21, 1877.

Rosenort, 1877.

They were back in the Rosenort area by 1877 and naturally Cornelia corresponded with her mother still living in Lichtenau, near Steinbach.

In a letter of June 23, Cornelia wrote as follows: "During the church holidays (Feuertage) we were at Johann Niessens [half-sister]...beloved parents.... Do not build, rather come with us, I like it there better than here or by you, woods more than enough, building material, firewood,...if you move there with us my man will help you build [the proposed destination is not stated]....if we receive some money we intend to take up some land as well....our daughter will possibly soon learn how to walk....she already wants to speak, she already says "no"....she is very happy and very smart... none of our children so far has

been that precocious...our chicken flock is only small, I have 3 hens and 2 chicks, 2 hens are brooding on eggs and our cow has been sick for a long time already and the calf is dead, the cow only gives little milk,... my man still goes to work at his parents, they have already finished erecting their buildings, I have also been there, right at this time each and everyone is eating as much fish as they want,...a railway is being built here and now there is competition between Rosenhof and Rosenort, many people have already been here, 5 tents were set up....Adje, Adje."

On June 25, 1880 their daughter Sarah was born. It may have been while they were living in Rosenort/Rosenhof area that grandmother

us like when one plants an orchard which cannot immediately bear fruit and can only produce when after it has received affirmation, slowly it increases and then one receives plum and then one receives apples, and this is how things are with us...for we need to prune so that it no longer is a bad tree, but I submit it all to God, He will lead and direct, but we must remain true unto the end....Thanks be to God I am well, but I am very weak, one time per day I can attend the worship service, many thanks, I always feel strengthened, we have had visitations, brothers Seiler, Isaak Warkentin and Johann Plett, already blessed times...."

In this lengthy letter Cornelia discusses her reasons for joining the Holdeman Gemeinde and asks her mother to join as well. This did not occur.

Teacher's wife.

As mentioned earlier, they moved around a lot because of grandfather being a teacher would sometimes only teach for a year at one place. This caused grandmother added burdens besides raising their family. Grandmother Friesen was a very frugal and conscientious person. These traits would show up in the way that she managed when her husband, who was an itinerant teacher, would be away from home during the 5-day school week.

Based on his letters it is evident that Cornelia's husband Abram was an intelligent sensitive man. In 1891 he forwarded to the periodical *Die Gemeinde Unterm Kreuz* a copy of *Verstand und Vernunft* ("Faith and Reason"), a theological treatise about the essence of faith written by

Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Kleine Gemeinde theologian. It is possible that he was encouraged in this regard by his uncle Peter P. Toews, former KG Bishop and leader of the Canadian Holdemans.

In 1895 they took up a homestead southwest of present-day Kleefeld, in the village of Hochstadt, NE18-6-5. It was while living here that they adopted a little girl, Lena, who later was to become my mother, Mrs. Peter A. Braun. The reason for adopting her was that having lost six children in infancy, they wanted another child.

One incident, which an older friend of mine told me about, was that of my grandmother having gone to her neighbours to unload some of her concerns. In doing so she let her impulsive nature take over, and left in a rather huffy manner. However, she had only reached the end of the lane, when she suddenly turned around and came back and confessed, with a true remorse over her way of behaviour. This sudden outburst was a shortcoming she had to contend with all her life, however, confession usually followed immediately.



Mr. & Mrs. Abram T. Friesen, nee Cornelia Harms, together with daughter Lena, later Mrs. Peter A. Braun, 1904. Abraham T. Friesen was the first teacher in the village of Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of John Braun, 1210 Hawksbrow Point NW, Calgary, Alberta, T3G 4C9.

broke either her hip or leg, anyway, she walked with a limp from that time on.

Church of God, 1882.

Although Cornelia and her husband were trying in weakness to serve their Lord, grandmother reported in a letter written to her mother of the lack of spirituality they felt and the uncertainty of salvation. During the winter of 1881-82 a spiritual revival took place in their area. Ministers Johann Holdeman and Mark Seiler from Ohio, U.S.A., were conducting evangelistic meetings in both the East and West Reserves. According to grandmother's testimony she had now found what her soul was looking for. She and her husband were added to the Church of God in Christ, Menonite in the following year.

In a letter of March 11, 1882, Cornelia expressed some of her concerns. She writes, "We have had a good time this winter and have received much light. Oh, how merciful is our great God, and for how long has He not gone before us, He has never forsaken us, He has knocked on the door....it is presently with

Rose Farm 1901.

Their stay on the homestead was short-lived and in 1901 they moved to a place near Plum Coulee. Grandfather taught here and in the districts of Rome, Gnadenfeld and Rose Farm near Lowe Farm.

While living at Rose Farm grandfather was working for Aaron Esau. One day one of the Esau sons was, apparently, out on a ditch, probably boating. At any rate Mr. Esau noticed that his son was in danger of drowning and went to help him and in the process both father and son were drowned: *Profile*, page 50.

Having been struck by lightning while living at Rome, grandfather had been suffering the after effects of the same.

In the spring of 1908, grandfather had a premonition that his days were numbered and desiring to be buried near their daughter Cornelia, they got ready to go to Grunthal, however on their way there he suffered a stroke. He didn't make it to Grunthal. He passed away at his brother Johann's home at Rosenhof, and was also buried, I think, as the first grave in the new cemetery.

Widowhood, 1908.

Grandmother and her two daughters, Sarah and Lena, did continue their trek to Grunthal about a month after grandfather's demise.

Arriving at Grunthal with their cargo, which consisted of their few earthly belongings plus their horses and wagon and some cattle, they moved into a small house which Johann Peters offered them. They worked for the Peters in return for feed for their livestock and other essentials.

In 1910 daughter Sarah married Jacob D. R. Loewen of Sunnyslope, Alberta. The Loewens then took grandmother and her daughter Lena along with them to sunny Alberta, and made their stay with them until 1911, when Lena got married to Peter A. Braun of Grunthal, Manitoba.

Grandmother stayed with Peter and Lena Braun for the next eight years. The Brauns having lived these eight years in the Sunnyslope and Swalwell areas, moved to Grunthal in the spring of 1919.

Grandmother made her home with the Loewens for the rest of her life. She would help out at her son Gerhard's place, who also lived briefly in Alberta. She also came out to Grunthal at the time my brother Glen was born in November of 1927. Now and then she would make short excursions, however, her health began to fail.

While helping out in the fall of 1927, I clearly remember that my older brother and I had misbehaved during one day. This made grandmother very sad. Somehow my mother got wind of our boyish pranks and made us feel very ill-at-ease. The result was, although grandmother had already retired for the night, we went to her room and confessed our sins. Here upon she took us in her arms and with tears streaming down her face forgave us. A

memory like this cannot be erased. It still speaks to me, after seventy years.

In an old *Botschafter der Wahrheit*, a church paper, I found a fairly complete obituary of my grandmother. It will follow further down.

Her summons from on high came on July 21, 1938. She had been anxious to go to her heavenly home for some time, and shortly before her release came she had quoted a few lines of a song, "Schon viele sind an jenem Ort, Ach, waer ich auch schon da." Trans. "Already, many are over there, Oh! that I could be there now.

The Obituary.

It has pleased the Lord over life and death to call our dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother Cornelia Friesen, nee Harms, from her earthly sojourn, and as we firmly believe, has transported her to a better home and life in heaven. She passed away on July 21, 1938 at 8:00 AM at the home of her children, the Jacob D.R. Loewens, Sunnyslope, Alberta after a 38 hour siege of intense suffering, of which the last eight hours were comatose.

Born on April 24, 1853 in the village of Sparrau, South Russia, she reached the age of 85 years, 2 months and 27 days. She was married to Abram Toews Friesen who, after 34 years of marital life, preceded her in death in 1908. As a newly married couple, they were among those that came to Canada in the 1874 immigration of Mennonites and were of the first group to arrive here.

Since father had been actively engaged in school-teaching in Russia, he continued the same vocation in Manitoba. This resulted in their having to change locations quite frequently. Because of this Mr. Friesen was known to many as "Schullehrer Friesen" (Schoolteacher Friesen).

Our dear mother was a widow for 31 years and braved the hardships of life in both good and bad times. During these years she spent much time in sighing and praying, for she always felt her undoneness and need. Often she would bemoan the fact of her lack of patience and charity. She would share this with her children both orally and in letters,

encouraging them to fight the good fight of faith, and to strive to enter the "Pearly Gates" adding, that it isn't as simple as many one thinks, but rather a seriousness and a sincerity are required to someday be saved. These reports, whether at the right time or otherwise will be etched in our memories as long as we live.

After a two year stay in Grunthal she moved along with her children the J.D.R. Loewens to Sunnyslope, Alberta, and stayed there until her daughter, Lena, was married to P.A. Braun in 1911. She then made her home at the Brauns for the next eight years until 1919 after which she moved back to the J.D.R. Loewens, where she stayed until her demise.

Mother was converted in 1883 and became a member of the Church of God in Christ to which she remained faithful until her passing.

She leaves to mourn or rather to remember fondly and pay tribute to, one son and two daughters: Gerhard H. Friesen, Montana, Sarah, Mrs. J.D.R. Loewen, Alberta and Lena, Mrs. P.A. Braun, Manitoba, which were all present at the funeral, one daughter-in-law, two sons-in-law, 33 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren, and many friends and acquaintances. Those preceding her in death were: her husband, seven children, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Shortly before her passing she repeated the words of a song, "Schon viele sind an jenem Ort, O, waer ich auch schon da" (Let us strive to live so that we shall meet again, where there will be no more parting).

Her remains were put to rest in the cemetery at Linden, Alberta, on July 24, 1938. Ministers Frank Hiebert and Daniel Boese officiated.

Sources:

Letters by Cornelia Harms Friesen are found in the Gerhard S. Kornelson letter collection, courtesy of John K. Schellenberg, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1984.

"Johann Harms 1771 Genealogy," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 387-414.

Descendants.

Names and dates of birth and death

1 Abram Toews Friesen	Apr 6,1854	Apr 12,1908
m Cornelia Harms Friesen	Apr 24,1853	Jul 21,1938
2 Cornelia Friesen	August ?,1874	? 1901-2
m Julius Toews	?	?
2 Jacob H. Friesen		In infancy
2 Gerhard H. Friesen	Oct 21,1877	May 15,1956
m Anna Doerksen	Sep 3,1884	Feb 26,1977
2 Sarah Friesen	Jun 25,1880	Aug 9,1973
m Jacob D.R. Loewen	Apr 30,1871	Mar 28,1958
2 Lena Friesen	Jan 19,1893	Feb 4,1991
m Peter A. Braun	Apr 16,1890	Aug 14,1971

All told there were six children that died quite young. This the total number of the Abram T. H. Friesen family.

Elisabeth Schultz Kehler (1866-1943)

Elisabeth Schultz Kehler (1866-1943): A Personal Memory; by grandson Al Reimer, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Introduction.

The movements of history, as lived by human beings, are not neatly divided into hundred-year calendar segments called centuries, but run in uncontrolled waves like the sea, lapping at and overlapping each other. The Mennonite generation of my Grandma Kehler was in all essentials a nineteenth-century generation even though she and others like her lived well into the twentieth century.

Mennonite women of her generation lived utterly private domestic lives for the most part, spoke only Plautdietsch but also understood primitive church German, were schooled to suffer in silence, were endlessly resourceful in rearing their large families, including the inculcation of moral, ethical and spiritual values, and were unquestioningly devoted to their church and faith. They did not vote, were hardly aware that government existed, read only the German bible and perhaps the *Steinbach Post* and had no direct contact with the "English" world outside the narrow confines of village, farm and community.

Born in Russia in 1866, Grandma Kehler came to Manitoba with her family in 1875 as Elisabeth Schultz, a girl of nine. In later years she couldn't remember much about the Atlantic crossing except that she had been sea-sick at first but recovered in time to enjoy the sea biscuits she either received from a friendly crew member or snatched out of a barrel--I can no longer remember which it was.

She grew up on a farm at Hochfeld, not far from Blumenort, and at age 18 married my grandfather Jacob K. Kehler, whose family had also emigrated from Russia in 1875. For the first few years the young couple lived two miles east of Hochfeld, then moved on to their own farm at Ebenfeld (just north of Mitchell). Grandma Kehler bore 13 children, of whom 11 survived into adulthood, my mother Elisabeth being the second youngest.

"Berliner" Kehler.

In 1923 Grandpa Kehler died of stomach cancer at the age of sixty. "Berliner" Kehler, as he was known throughout both Reserves, was by all reports a highly colourful character. Small, dark and round in his prime, he had a magnetic personality and was a wonderful raconteur famous for his quick wit and jovial manner.

How he acquired his unique nickname is an amusing story in itself. He knew that no Mennonite of his generation could escape a nickname. So when people began calling him "Bush" Kehler because of the large amount of scrub brush growing on his farm, he decided to select a more favourable nickname for himself. Having as a twelve-year-old boy travelled through Berlin on his way from Russia to Canada, he declared himself jestingly to be a "Berliner." The sobriquet caught on and the

"Bush" was forgotten. Although without much formal education, Berliner Kehler spoke half a dozen languages and was much in demand as an interpreter for political candidates in local election campaigns. With a squad of eight husky sons at home to look after the farm, he



Elisabeth Schultz Kehler (1866-1943). Photo courtesy of Louise Reimer Olsen, Rosenort, Manitoba.

could afford the time for such pleasant activities.

Elisabeth Kehler.

His wife Elisabeth was very different from her flamboyant, gregarious husband. She was a small, delicate woman, quiet and shy by nature, but she raised her large brood with calm efficiency. The oldest was Marie, who died early after giving birth to a daughter. Then came a long line of boys: Jacob, George, Aaron, John, Peter and David. Then Susan, followed by Henry, Elisabeth and Neil. By the time Grandpa died the children were all grown up and most of the boys were on farms of their own. And busy raising their own large families.

When my parents were married in 1926, Grandma sold the farm and moved in with her youngest daughter, who was very close to her. For the next 15 years she lived in our home, did most of the cooking and looked after us kids while my mother, as long as her health permitted, did the housecleaning, put up the preserves, and did a great deal of sewing for her growing family.

"Groosmame", as we always called her, was

a tiny lady who usually wore a black dress covered by a patterned apron, a kerchief for everyday and a Huw (the traditional flat, black lace cap) for dress-up, and soft, felt slippers (Schlorre). My earliest memories of Groosmame are of her feeding me at the table. Her delicately furrowed, small-boned face was the first human map I can recall exploring with my greedy little hands.

And she fed me as she later fed my siblings, by following the ancient peasant custom of pre-masticating morsels of food which she would pop deftly into our straining mouths. Baby foods? She had never heard of them and would probably have regarded them as unnatural and unhealthy if she had. I loved watching her cook and bake in our huge, woodburning kitchen range. When she pulled her fluffy brown loaves (Bultje) out of the oven she would slice off a crust (I love crust to this day) and let a generous spread of butter soak into it before she handed it to me. And when my mother wasn't looking she might even let me have a sip of her coffee or Prijs when she sat down to rest her bad legs.

Those suppurating legs were the bane of Groosmame's life, the physical cross she bore patiently and uncomplainingly all the years I knew her. Her bad case of varicose veins had never received proper medical attention, and so she had to keep her legs tightly wrapped from ankle to knee with strips of cotton that looked like a soldier's puttees. When she unwound her red-scored dressings, the purple blotches and open sores of her lower legs shocked my boyish senses. But her stoical capacity to bear the pain and discomfort that plagued her days strikes me now as amazing.

She usually remained on her feet for a full working day. When the pain got to be unbearable she would retreat briefly to her little room just off our living room, open her large, wooden chest and take out her bottle of Alpenkrauter. Sometimes she would give me a tiny sip too and I would share her misery in silent sympathy.

Groosmame's coolness in a crisis, I recall, was dramatically and painfully illustrated during a violent thunderstorm one summer night. When the storm broke she got up to close the window in our dining room. Groping in the dark, she wrenched the window down so sharply that the pane shattered and a sharp dagger of glass pierced the artery in her leg. When I entered the room a few minutes later the first thing I saw was an ugly trail of spattered bloodstains running across the floor and up the wall right to the ceiling. While my father frantically tried to phone the doctor amidst blinding sheets of lightning and loud claps of thunder, Groosmame sat calmly and quietly in a chair with her finger clamped tightly over the hole in her leg.

But life for Groosmame was not all pain and suffering. She had worked hard all her life

and did not like sitting around idle. I don't recall ever seeing her reading and she could not listen to the radio because she did not know a word of English, even though she had spent all but the first nine years of her life in Canada. Mennonite women of her generation lived in a world totally enclosed by Plautdietsch.

She enjoyed cooking and was endlessly inventive in converting rather meagre foodstuffs into tasty meals during the lean thirties when my schoolteacher father's monthly salary often went unpaid and even the barest groceries had to be charged. In summer our diet was enriched from the huge vegetable garden Groosmame tended with loving care. The size of our garden and orchard can be gauged from the fact that it provided lots for three houses in later years.

Groosmame Kehler seldom attended church for the simple reason that she was a "Sommafelda," that is, she belonged to the conservative Chortitzer church, which at that time had no congregation in Steinbach. My guess is that she would have felt uncomfortable in our family's Kleine Gemeinde (EMC) church. I know that even my fun-loving mother, who had been allowed to attend barn dances as a girl, found the transition to the sober, no-nonsense Kleingemeinde difficult at first. But I suspect that Groosmame knew how to meditate spiritually at home on Sunday mornings while the rest of us were at church. I recall that on Good Friday and other high holidays she would sternly upbraid us children when we got boisterous or laughed out loud.

Entertaining.

Groosmame had her times of relaxed enjoyment as well. She loved to entertain an old friend or two at Faspa, especially on a weekday afternoon when the house was free of pesky grandchildren--at least until they got home from school. The intimate little Faspas she prepared for her close friends never varied in format: they consisted of thick slices of Bultje, preferably warm from the oven so that the pats of home-made butter could soak into their fragrant texture, and freshly baked, lightly crusted Tweeback served with slices of mild local cheddar cheese and home-made plum, raspberry or strawberry jam. For dessert there were the small, dark, store-bought gingersnaps she kept hidden in her chest to protect them from marauding grandchildren. These delicacies were, of course, served with cup after cup of unsweetened coffee.

Of her regular Faspa guests the ones I remember are Mrs. Hiebert, Mrs. Nickel, and Mrs. Isaac (the mother of the eccentric "Isaacke Hauns"), all of whom lived farther up on Hanover. They were lively, talkative ladies in whose presence my reserved grandmother could bask and listen to neighbourhood gossip.

The one male friend I recall was old Mr. Funk, probably because to my childish eyes and ears he was a most unusual specimen. He was also a Sommafelda and smoked and I knew him from H. W. Reimer's store, where he had some sort of employment even though he was



Elisabeth Kehler Reimer (1903-46), daughter of Elisabeth Schulz Kehler holding daughter Loiuise, husband Peter J. B. Reimer; to her right, son Elmer (Al) looking out of window of Model A, visiting with Johann W. Reimer daughters, Marie--later Mrs. Peter R. Unger, and Katherine Reimer, later Mrs. David F. Giesbrecht. Photo courtesy of Dolores Pankratz, Steinbach, daughter of Katherine Reimer in photo.

getting on in years. It was said that he had a dry sense of humour and that he liked to play verbal tricks on unsuspecting farmer customers. One such trick was that as he carried a load of eggs or butter down the basement steps in the store he would say in his gravelly voice: "Nah, jo, Butta enn Eia gone aul wada 'rauf-daut's schod'" (Yeah, butter and eggs are going down again--that's too bad). And the naive farmers who overheard the remark would assume that dirty-thirties prices were going down again for their products.

To me Mr. Funk's presence at the Faspa table was unsettling, an alien presence that seemed to overwhelm my gentle little Groosmame. His appearance was so unusual that I could only stare at him in helpless fascination. His face was long and plain, his blotchy nose enormous and his lower lip thick and pendulous. Across that lip rumbled a bass voice of alarming sonority. But Mr. Funk's most arresting feature was his hair, for the old gentleman had found a way of defeating baldness by letting his hair grow out in the back and combing it forward across his shiny dome. His bangs in front were much like my own, I decided, except that his were more straggly and uneven. Whenever Mr. Funk was there I felt protective towards Groosmame, as though she were being threatened by a force quite beyond her strength to resist.

The Kehler Clan.

In contrast to Groosmame's private Faspas, there were gatherings of the Kehler clan at our house that for sheer noise and size and turbulent chaos surpassed anything I have ever experienced since. Except for Uncle Neil and Aunt Susan ("Taunte Saun de Wielasche"), who lived in Steinbach, all the Kehler's lived on farms in surrounding districts a few miles away.

They were fond of their little mother and came often to visit her, especially in summer. And when it came to talking and telling stories they were a match for old Berliner himself, except for the oldest two brothers, Jacob and George, who were more sedate and less vocal. Friendly, warm and personable, the brothers regaled each other, friends and acquaintances with an endless stream of jokes, anecdotes and stories. Everyone knew that the Kehler boys stretched the truth (not to mention Taunte Saun and my mother), but no one minded because they were so entertaining.

The Kehler's stretched the truth so often, people said of them, that they must have the biggest rubberband collection in Manitoba.

Since most of my Kehler uncles were as prolific in producing offspring as they were in producing jokes and stories, our little bungalow could hardly hold them when they all came for special events like Christmas or Groosmame's birthday, or even when they just came visiting spontaneously on Sunday afternoons. Being at one of these Kehler gatherings was like being stuck on the top floor of the Tower of Babel, except that here everyone spoke the same language and everyone spoke at once. My uncles needed no artificial stimulants like alcoholic beverages. Whenever two or more of them got together they immediately shifted into vocal high gear, as though on cue from an invisible stage director. Indeed, it may well have been the spirit of the inimitable Berliner Kehler hovering over this social bedlam.

He would have been proud of his sons in full cry, eyes rolling roguishly, neck veins bulging as they leaned forward for another merry sally, heaving waves of mirth and crying out in simulated astonishment as they told each other ever more whopping and outrageous stories, all the while threshing sunflower seeds and cracking nuts as their wives and children

continued on next page

continued from previous page

surged and streamed around them in one happy, excited mass of humanity.

In the eye of this social hurricane sat Groosmame, looking a little lost and bewildered amidst the din, and probably wondering whether the women folk in the kitchen were keeping the stove properly stoked or whether they had put the proper spices in the Heenasupp. Dressed in her Sunday best, she was expected to sit still for once and let younger family members complete the food preparations. Had she been given a choice she would probably have preferred to bustle around the stove herself while the Kehler women, most of whom were as talkative as their men, regaled each other with their own feminine brand of gossip and playful banter.

And the many grandchildren spread through every room of our house, twittering and poking, laughing and talking in effortless imitation of their elders. (Note: At a special gathering of the Kehler in 1979, the clan already numbered 610 descendants of Grandpa and Grandma Kehler. By now that number may well have reached a thousand.)

The End.

Then, finally, they would all be gone and the walls and ceilings of our house stopped reverberating and came to rest again. And the silence would be deafening as you crunched your way through the solid carpet of sunflower and peanut shells that covered the living room floor and flowed out beyond to the dining room, kitchen and hallway. My dignified young teacher father would look shell-shocked as he ruefully recalled the raucous teasing he had once more undergone from his brothers-in-law for being a “lazy” schoolteacher instead of a “useful” farmer. Groosmame, also looking stunned, would sigh and reach for the broom while my outgoing mother, who loved these occasions, loudly deplored the look of the place with a face still animated from Kehler talk.

Those happy times became less frequent as Groosmame’s health began to fail. On one occasion, I remember, she was so sick that the whole Kehler clan gathered in our home waiting for the end to come. For once there was no laughing or joking and all those doleful Kehler faces and unnatural silences were eerie, to say the least. But Groosmame survived, and gaunt and feeble she managed to get to her feet again. By 1941, however, my mother’s health had also deteriorated to the point where it was deemed necessary to have Groosmame move in with Aunt Susan Wieler, where she died on February 10, 1943, followed by my mother’s death three years later at the much too early age of forty-two.

Reflections.

When I compare my two grandmothers, Elisabeth Schultz Kehler and Aganetha Barkman Reimer (1863-1938) (whose story is told by Harvey Kroeker in *Preservings*, No.6, June, 1995, pages 23-24), I can see that they represent somewhat different sides of the Men-

nonite women of that generation. Both were farm wives descended from a long line of farmers and both came to Manitoba from Russia as young girls, settling with their families in the East Reserve. But there the similarities end.

Grandma Kehler came from a Bergthaler church background--after 1890 called the Chortitzer church in the East Reserve. The Chortitzer church, while extremely conservative in church practises, allowed for fairly liberal social customs such as smoking, moderate drinking and dancing. Grandma Reimer came from the very strict and staid



Elisabeth Schultz Kehler (1866-1943). Photo courtesy of Louise Reimer Olsen, Rosenort, Manitoba,

Kleingemeinde church, which was conservative in church practises and ultra-conservative in social customs.

There were more personal differences as well. Grandmother Kehler was the traditional Mennonite wife and mother who confined her work interests entirely to house and garden, at least in her later years when I knew her. She was a tireless worker who lived for her family and friends, allowed herself few, if any, luxuries, was God-fearing and devout, deferred to the men in her life, was gracefully feminine in manner and outlook but possessed of a tough resiliency, kept her pain and aches largely to herself and accepted what life did to her with a stoical endurance buttressed by her simple, unwavering faith in God and the church.

Grandma Reimer, while also a good wife and loving mother, was less compliantly feminine; she had a tough masculine side, enjoyed doing

manual work on the farm, and pursued an active career as a midwife. After Grandpa Reimer died in 1918 (for my biographical sketch of Johann R. Reimer see *Preservings*, No. 9, December, 1996, Part Two, pages 39-43), she continued to operate the family farm and did much of the manual labour on it, including milking, feeding the stock, shovelling manure and helping her son Klaas with the haying.

She was also a devoted midwife in the Steinbach area for 35 years and delivered almost 700 babies. For all that she never lost her femininity and could come into the house at noon from mucking out the barn, wash her hands, and whip up a batch of waffles for dinner with the easy competence she brought to everything she did.

The Mennonite women of my grandmothers’ generation were anything but feminists in the modern sense, but they were strong, resilient women who knew exactly who they were and what their roles were in the related spheres of family and community. They brought to their lives what I think of as a nineteenth-century sense of security and purpose. Their lives had not yet been undermined by the confusing array of technology we have to cope with. Their wills had not yet been weakened nor their moral faculties blunted by the affluent lifestyles we follow in a materialistic world of ever proliferating things which tend to detach us from our natural surroundings and make our world ever more superficial and impersonal. My grandmothers belonged to a world in which people, unsophisticated as they may have been, still listened to each other with attention, refreshed themselves and each other with close personal contacts, kept their feet--quite literally--connected to the ground, lived close to animals which they used respectfully and trusted. Their Mennonite faith may have been too simple and unquestioning by our standards, but they also escaped and were blissfully unaware of the endless political manoeuvring which takes place in our society at every level, where even in our church life we seem to require the constant stimulation of conferences, debates and “retreats” to stave off endemic boredom and growing disillusionment.

To look back at the ever receding world of our ancestors is no idle pastime. The study of family history offers a vital lifeline that can energize us, like an oxygen tank, with a much-needed supply of a purer social and spiritual air than our own. It can give us the vital essence of what once was and of who we were before we became what we are. My grandmothers lived before me in time, but in memory they are alive and timeless and I celebrate them not only for having been but for still being now.

Sources:

The foregoing article is partly drawn from material previously published in the following articles: Al Reimer, “A Century in the Life of Steinbach’s Kehler Clan,” in *Mennonite Mirror*, October 1979, pages 11-13; and Al Reimer, “Grandmas are Forever,” in *Mennonite Mirror*, March 1973, pages 11-14.

Katharina Barkman Koop 1832-1923

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

Family Background.

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).

Marriage.

In 1853 Katharina K. Barkman married Johann M. Koop (1831-97) from Muntau, Mol., where his father and grandfather before him had owned Wirtschaft 14: "New Years Wish of Johann Koop, Muntau, 1808," *Preservings*, No. 3, Jan 1994, page 8.

Katharina and Johann M. Koop took over the parental Wirtschaft after their marriage. The oldest 9 Koop siblings including Maria were born in Muntau. Sometime around 1870 the Wirtschaft in Muntau

was sold and Johann Koop purchased a tract of land in the Borosenko area, northwest of Nikopol. Koop, together with half a dozen other families, established a new settlement called Neuanlage.

Oral tradition holds that the Koop family had many servants and maids back in Russia. The custom among the Mennonites was that servants and employees were fed separately from the employers. The Koops did not follow this practice, and workers ate at the same table. Among the KG it was also forbidden to punish employees physically, a common practice at the time.

Emigration.

In 1874 Kartharina 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."

"Son Jakob and many other stayed in Winnipeg where the ship had docked the day before in order to purchase oxen and cows. Jakob arrived at the emigration sheds a week later with oxen, wagon and cows."

For a week the settlers considered their options. Should they also go to Scratching River, where some of the KG were settling? But Katharina and her family decided to

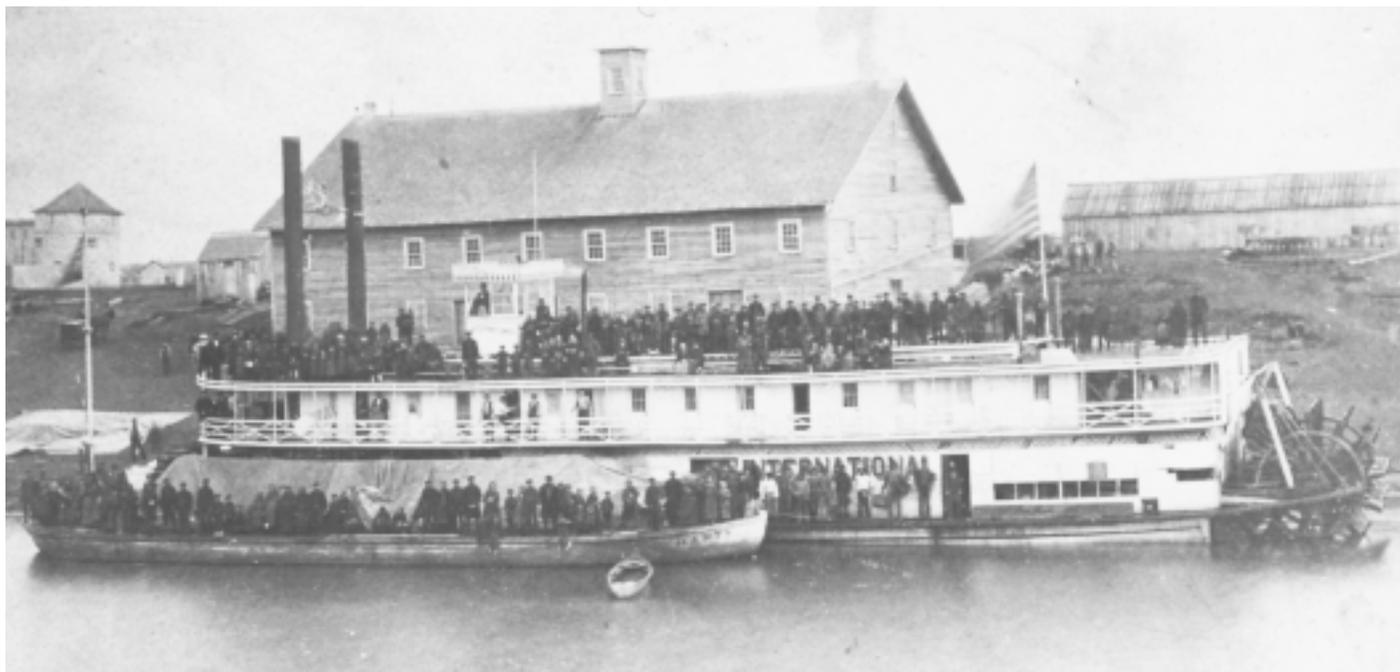
remain in the E. Reserve. Together with some 22 other families they proceeded to the northeast corner of the East Reserve where they established the village of Blumenort on Section 22-7-6E. "Here the Koop family pitched their tent. Then the boys drove to Winnipeg to purchase lumber and built themselves a dwelling house in which they lived for some 8 years."

Johann Koop had taken out a Homestead on Section 17-6-7E and a Pre-emption Quarter as well, known as a double farm or Wirtschaft. This land was part of the village of Blumenort. "Then they discovered that the village was too large for this region, as 34 quarters of land belonged to this village." Johann M. Koop was an independent Vollwirt and was given permission establish a separate settlement. In 1879 6 Wirthen or farmers, including the senior Koop, 2 sons, 2 son-in-law and Peter B. Friesens, established a village 2 miles to the southwest of Blumenort, again called Neuanlage. Later this became the Twin creek school district.

According to the 1883 assessment records, Johann Koop was the wealthiest farmer in the Blumenort area north of Steinbach. He was 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



1897. Jakob B. Koop and Mrs. Koop, nee Helena Nickel, with their family and 2 workers pose in front of their farmyard in Neuanlage, later Twin creek. Children l. to r. Cornelius, Peter, Jakob and Johann. Mother is holding baby daughter Helena. This rare photograph displays the family's burgeoning success. The photograph was taken in 1897 by a travelling photographer, predating the 1899 KG Diener Konferenz which prohibited photography. Nevertheless it caused quite a stir in the Gemeinde and Jakob B. Koop was called before the brotherhood, the "Dunaschdach", where he was chastised for the picture incident. Consequently Jakob kept the photographs in his chest and never took them out until 1926. Photo courtesy of Peter S. Koop, Steinbach.



The "International" docking at Lower Fort Gary on July 31, 1874, presently known as "The Forks". This was the first ship load of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Canada, members of the KG. On board were Katharina and Johann M. Koop. Standing at the stern of the ship, on the upper deck is David Klassen and his wife, nee Aganetha S. Brandt. Mr. Klassen was a tall man over 6 feet tall, while his wife was barely 5 feet, a typical Brandt. This is an original reproduction of the photograph which appears on the masthead of *Preservings*. Photo courtesy of Peter S. Koop, Steinbach.

continued from previous page

oxen "for \$115.00 and used the money to buy a team of horses."

Johann M. Koop was Vollwirt through and through. He became ill if he was not busy from morning till night with his large farming operation which he expanded to cover 4 quarters of land. A granddaughter recalled that he could be irritable and highstrung. Sometimes his daughters had to be careful not to clank the dishes too loud when they were washing up. On another occasion the girls were sent outside to close the shutters which were banging in the wind during the night so that father could not sleep.

Recollections.

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.

During the last years of her life she made her home with daughter Gertrude, Mrs. Abraham L. Plett, where she had 2 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 Abram 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, one of whom was my mother Gertrude Friesen Plett.

When daughter Maria, Mrs. Jakob L. Plett died, during the influenza time in 1918, the coffin was brought to the Abraham L. Plett home so that her mother

could see her once more. Katharina is to have remarked that it was so 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 "Schlaope 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, hardly a grey hair were visible as she lay in her coffin.

There was a long standing family tradition that the mothers and daughters alternated the names Gertrude and Katharina. This tradition has been traced back six generations: Gertrude Klassen Barkman, Katharina Barkman Koop, Gertrude Koop Plett, Katharina Plett Friesen and my mother Gertrude Friesen Plett. The tradition was broken when my sister Katherine named her daughter Roberta.

Descendants.

For more information regarding the 4 daughters Aganetha, Gertrude, Helena and

Maria who married the L. Plett brothers from Blumenhof, see article regarding Maria Koop Plett, following.

Katharina had 3 sons Jakob, Johann and Peter. A coffin picture of Jakob B. Koop was published in *Preservings*, No. 9, Part 2, page 47. Jakob, the oldest son, was the grandfather to Tim Plett of the Carillon News, Art and Allen Koop, Blumenort, Jake K. Koop, formerly of C.T. Loewens, Steinbach, and many others.

Johann B. Koop was the father of Jakob B. Koop of Koop's Nursery in Kleefeld, who passed away in January of 1997.

Daughter Katherine B. Koop married Peter B. Klassen, great-grandfather of Leonard Klassen of "Klassen Financial Services".

Daughter Anna B. Koop married KG minister Peter W. Loewen of Neuanlage and they were the grandparents of John J. Loewen, founder of Steinbach Furniture and Terry Loewen, Steinbach lawyer.

Sources

The Koop Family Register 1801-1975 (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1975), 296 pages.

Interview with Peter S. and Elizabeth Koop, February 17, 1997.

Jakob B. Koop, "Journal," courtesy of Helena S. Koop, Blumenort, Manitoba.

Maria Koop Plett 1868-1918 Journal

by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, R0A 2A0

Family Background.

Maria Koop Plett (1868-1918) was the daughter of Johann M. Koop (1831-97) and Katharina Klassen Barkman (1832-1923); see article elsewhere in this newsletter. Maria was born on the parental Wirtschaft in Muntau, Molotschna Colony, South Russia. She started attending the village school in Neuanlage, northwest of Nikopol, where her parents moved when she was only a youngster. In 1874 she came with her parents to Manitoba, where they settled in Blumenort, at first, and in 1878, in Neuanlage.

Marriage, 1885.

Maria grew up in a family where entrepreneurship and farming on a large scale was a long standing tradition. Her 3 older sisters had married the sons of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900), another wealthy Vollwirt family. In 1885, at the age of 17, she decided to follow the lead of Aganetha, Gertrude and Helena, and married Jakob, youngest son of C. S. Plett who was 4 years her senior.

In the same year Jakob L. Plett together with his brother David acquired a Wirtschaft in the village of Blumenhof, 3 miles north of Steinbach. Here they established their home farming together with Jakob's father and brother. In 1887 the village plan was dissolved and Jakob L. Plett received the NE 24-67-6E as his share of the village land. This also happened to be the Homestead quarter of his father.

The young couple established their home on the ridge along the north side of the quarter, adjacent to the road named in honour of C. S. Plett in 1996. In 1890 they built a new house-barn combination in which they lived until 1920, when a modern house was built, occupied to this day by Maria's granddaughter Ruth and her husband Wally Doerksen.

Maria and Jakob L. Plett obviously enjoyed the Vollwirt lifestyle. The 1891 census shows that 13 year Johann Riedel was listed with the family as a domestic servant.

The Pletts also acquired additional land: 240 acres in Ekron, east of Steinbach: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 63; together with brothers David and Abram, he bought 240 acres of hayland west of Ste. Anne, part W 1/2 Section 21-8-6E; and in 1914 when members of the Plett family were considering a move to Kansas, he bought a half section in Satanta.

As a young man Jakob had helped with his father's threshing outfit and in the 1890s Jakob and brother Abram L. Plett bought an upright steam engine and operated a threshing gang. In 1904 Jakob went

on his own and bought a new Case 15/30 steam engine. He continued in the threshing business until 1930, a total of 50 years.

Maria and Jakob had a family of 15 children of whom 12 reached adulthood. Only 2 of them were boys and so in the Plett family the girls had to do the work of boys. This meant choring, making hay, plowing, and whatever else needed to be done.

Maria obviously enjoyed the lifestyle. On March 6, 1895, she and their employee Clements Richter went to neighbours and brother-in-law Cornelius L. Plett to help

Journal, 1905-6.

At the centre of this large family and impressive enterprise was Maria, a dynamic well organized woman, intricately involved in every facet of these goings on. What makes Maria stand out among pioneer women is her journal which she kept faithfully from 1905 until her death.

Her journal opens with the matter-of-fact title; "noteworthy events". Her mind for the first several days was obviously preoccupied with the forthcoming marriage of her daughter Sara--she writes: "On Nov 11, Sara held her Verlobung [engagement party]. On the 12th we were in Blumenort for the worship services. On the 11th we took the bridal couple to Neuanlage and visited at [brother] Johann Koops and [sister] Peter Klassen. On the 14th the bridal couple went to Heuboden [near New Bothwell and Kleefeld] and Katharina and Margaretha went to Penners. It snowed very hard. On the 19 November David Siemens, Sara Plett, Johan R. Toews and Anna B. Reimer were betrothed."

On December 3, Maria noted that her niece Katharina, daughter of her sister Gertrude and Abraham L. Plett, married Martin K. Friesen. This notation heralds the filial relationship which existed between the 3 brothers Plett--Abraham, David and Jakob, married to the 3 sisters Koop--Gertrude, Helena and Maria, all 3 of whom were large scale farm operators.

Even their families were similar: Maria and Gertrude had 12 children each, Helena had 13, all 37 of the triple cousins having several playmate cousins similar in age, outlook and resembling each other. They



Opening page of Maria Koop Plett's "Journal", November 11, 1905. Courtesy of Helena Reimer Plett, Steinbach, who preserved the Journal for many years.

butcher hogs. It seems that Jakob was busy elsewhere that day.



The house-barn of the Jakob L. Plett family built in the 1880s. There was no gangway or breezeway between the house and barn which sometimes resulted in odours in the house. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 134.

also shared the same names and in order to keep everyone separate, they added the initial of their father's first names before their mother's maiden name, so that the Jakob L. Plett children, for example, were known as Maria J. K. Plett, etc.

The 3 couples were so close they sometimes stayed overnight when they visited each other, even though they only lived a mile and a half apart. It was said that when the 3 sisters got together to visit they would talk and laugh so hard that their stomachs and bodies would shake.

On Dec 8, 1905, the relationship became even closer when daughter Maria, age 19, married Klaas K. Friesen, twin brother to Martin who had married Maria's closest friend and cousin Katharina A. K. Plett only 5 days earlier: see *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 55-58, for the story of the Friesen family. The strong Vollwirt tradition among the Plett and Koop clans was evident from the fact that both Katharina and Maria Jr. were subject to some chastisement from siblings and others regarding their unsuitable marriages to the sons of a "poor" pioneer school teacher.

By the 20th of December the flood of marriages amongst the extended Plett cousins in Blumenhof (4) abated somewhat, and Maria turned her attention to more routine matters. On the 20th they slaughtered pigs, on the 25th--Christmas Day, "visiting at David Pletts". On January 29th, 1906, father and [son-in-law] Klaas go to the forest returning on Feb 3, leaving Maria in charge of the large Wirtschaft and family. On the 5th they went again.

Maria was also conscious of events in the community. She noted when Senior Klaas Reimer died Feb 9 and that his funeral was held on the 13th. The 21st and 22nd they ground feed, "they" referring presumably to father and son-in-law Klaas. On the 22nd Klaas went to the forest, joined the next day by a second son-in-law David Siemens. On the 24th, David Pletts together with Maria's widowed mother Katharina Koop came for a visit. On the 26th the men folk went to the forest returning the next day.

Maria developed a relatively consistent pattern in her recording: the cyclical operations of the farm, the activities of the children often as related to farm work, visiting and visitors, attendances at worship services usually in Blumenort or Steinbach, deaths, births and marriages in the community, weather, etc. Taking the months of April and May for example Maria is preoccupied with seeding operations although on April 11, she makes a relatively rare reference to domestic operations: "fa-

ther split wood and we washed." The next day a more typical entry, May 12, "we cleaned seed wheat" indicating that she herself was involved in the process.

Easter was upon them and like traditional Mennonites everywhere they followed the ecclesiastical calendar, celebrating the birth of Christ over a 1 week period. May 12, was Good Friday, and "worship services were held here." Although the Blumenhoffers, technically came under the



Maria Koop Plett (1868-1918) in 1918. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Henry B. Peters, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Blumenort church district, they were independent and occasionally held their own worship services in the school house. May 14, father wrote a letter to Heinrich Loewen [cousin and KG minister in Jansen, Neb.] On the 15 Easter, Jakob and Maria visited at Abraham Pletts. The next day, they attended worship services in Blumenort and visited her brother Jakob after church. On the 17th they attended an auction sale at the Klaas Reimer store and "father wrote a letter to Johann Friesens. After faspas, we went to the railway [Giroux]". On April 18th, they were again at the railway and "father started to seed."



Verlobungs picture of Helena Plett Reimer and her husband Jakob J. K. Plett, 1925. It was daughter-in-law Helena who preserved her mother-in-law's journal. Photo courtesy of Plett Picture Book, page 144.

Maria's entry for the 19th revealed that the Pletts had gone to the railway station several times in order to help her younger sibling Peter B. Koop, nephew Abraham

A. K. Plett, and neighbour Jakob Schellenberg, entrain for Herbert, Saskatchewan, as they left at "3 o'clock in the night."

On April 23rd "father finished seeding the wheat." On the 25th, a nice rain; on the 26th they ploughed the garden and started making garden, on the 28th, finished seeding oats, and received a card from H. Loewen. The 29th, worship services and "Jakob Reimers from Steinbach were here".

And so on and so forth, Maria recorded the passing of the seasons, the lives of the family, all in a factual and undramatic way: "May 1, planted potatoes, May 2, a fine rain, May 3, I planted in the garden." She obviously loved horses as on May 14th she noted that "Dall's foal died". Maria generally noted only 1 or perhaps 2 significant things in an entry.

On May 15th father left for Herbert, Saskatchewan, again leaving Maria with full responsibility for the farm. On the 16th she and daughter Maria went visiting at brother Jakob Koops. On the 20th, she and daughter Tien were in the worship services in Steinbach. On the 21st and 22nd, "we washed". On the 23rd, daughter Maria and her husband Klaas went to Winnipeg. The 24th was Ascension Day and "there were 2 worship services here [Blumenort]. The ministers Cornelius and Jakob Friesen [from Nebraska] preached. Mother came here for night. On the 25th, mother, the David Plettsche, and I went to Johann Janzens." On the 26th "Peter Pletts had returned from Herbert." On the 27th "I attended worship services 2 times in Steinbach. Jakob Kroeker [Bishop from Rosenort] and Martin Doerksen [Meade, Kansas] preached. On the 28th "father returned from Herbert and we were at David Pletts. The girls cleaned in the church."

One wonders what inspired Maria to start her journal. The immediate event clearly was the marriage of her oldest daughters. But this begs the question. Her husband Jakob was a quiet, introspective man much given to deep contemplation. He was also a poet of some note filling a number of journals with his slightly melancholy, religious poetry, hand written in Gothic script.

Is it possible that Maria was looking for an activity which would complement her husband's intellectual and literary bent?

Journal, 1916.

Maria's journal started in 1905 when her family was relatively young. It seems worthwhile to take another extract from the journal from about 10 years later, to



The Jakob L. Plett threshing outfit near Ste. Annes circa 1918. The photograph of the threshing outfit ready to move out illustrated the burgeoning scope of the farming operation established by Maria and Jakob. Photo courtesy of John C. Reimer who worked for the Pletts as steam engine engineer for a number of seasons. John C. Reimer later was the founder of the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach.

see if any changing patterns are evident.

Certainly the farm and the family have grown significantly during the decade. Aug 14, "We again drove to the other farm, I went along to Klaas Friesens" who by now had purchased part of the Ekron farm. "We were also in Steinbach at the store and I stopped in at uncle Peter [K.] Barkman." Sunday, the 16th, "We were at Abram L. Pletts to visit grandmother", meaning Maria's mother who made her home with her sister Gertrude. The 22nd, "We were at the funeral for the Tante Abr. Reimer. I plucked the old goose." The 24th "They went with the threshing outfit to Cor. P. Wohlgenuths and started with the threshing. The 25th, "[Daughter] Marie was here." The 27th, "I went to Heinrich R. Reimers." The 28th, "I went to David L. Pletts, and in the evening to Klaas R. Reimers to pick up father, Cor. and Jakob." The 28th, "Father cut the last seeded oats. After dinner Cor. again went to the threshing machine."

Sept 2, 1916. "They came to Klaas Friesens with the threshing machine and threshed. The 5th, "They threshed at Peter Klassens." On the 6th, "They started threshing on the farm at our place."... Sept. 13th, "Cor. was plowing. Jakob was working the summerfallow." Sept 22. "Grandmother was here. In the evening the girls went to Klaas Friesens to bring their children to our place." The 28th, "We started to dig out potatoes." Oct. 5, 1916. "Father and Johann again went to the threshing machine."

It seems that Maria is less involved with the actual farm operations than she had been 10 years earlier. To some extent this reflects the fact that the family had done well financially. For example, Jakob--who had poor eyesight--now hired a foreman to run his large threshing outfit for him.

Maria is obviously very involved with her family which by now includes numerous grandchildren. She has more time for visiting with her sisters and other women in the community. The Pletts are also receiving more company. This is very much the time when Jakob's older brothers, Cornelius and Peter, and their families

moved to Satanta, Kansas, and the Pletts are sure to attend any worship services when the Ohms from Kansas are visiting.

Character.

Maria's journal revealed certain aspects of her character. However, her organized, matter-of-fact recording of day-to-day events, does not tell a great deal about who she was as a person.

Physically Maria was of medium build with blue eyes. Her facial features were resembled a lot by grandson Jakob P. Friesen. She generally wore long wide skirts with a pleated top and usually wore a kerchief.

We are fortunate that 2 of Maria's daughters--Elisabeth, Mrs. Jakob K. Dueck, born 1902, and Aganetha, Mrs. John F. Warkentin, born 1907 are still alive and able to shed additional light. Elisabeth and Aganetha also have the distinction of being the last surviving of the 75 grandchildren of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) and Elisabeth Loewen (1822-1903), prominent Manitoba pioneers in 1875.

Aganetha recalled that she and sister Minna, being only a year apart, always slept together in the parent's bedroom on the main floor. Their parents would regularly kneel in prayer at night before retiring. In keeping with traditional practices, prayers at meal times were silent.

Evidently Maria suffered frequently from the "Kolcjhe" or colic. This was particularly problematic when they were plucking geese, which was done from time to time during the summer. Whenever she plucked geese she was sure to get nauseous almost as if she was allergic to something in the feathers. She suffered from *Kolcjhe* (colic) whenever she got upset, such as in 1916, when her daughters Sarah and Katharine and their families were boarding the train at the station in Giroux, on their way to new homes in Satanta, Kansas. Maria was so upset while they were saying goodbye that she got the *Kolcjhe* and vomited.

On one occasion, Maria had said something, to which her daughter Aganetha re-

plied, "Shame on you" being somewhat aggravated. To this Maria merely said, "Some day you will be sorry for what you said." Only rarely did Maria punish or threaten her children. One time, Aganetha and Minna, who were next to each other in age and always together, decided they would smoke and went to the outhouse where there were old catalogues which they used for rolling a cigarette made of dried leaves. This was the only time that Aganetha remembered that they were punished by their mother.

On another occasion, mother had found out that Minna had matches. She came to Minna, talked to her calmly and took the matches. The girls had enough respect for their mother so that punishment was usually not necessary.

Conclusion.

Maria's journal entries indicate that she was integrally involved in the farming operations and major decision making as well as in the raising of the family and management of the household economy.

Descendants.

Some of Maria's descendants include: Rev. Cornie R. Plett, Snow Flake; Manitoba, hog farmer Albert Friesen, Giroux; Norma Hiebert, Mrs. Floyd Hiebert, formerly Fairway Ford; Ruth Doerksen, Heritage Poultry Restaurant, Steinbach, poet Pat Friesen, Rev. John P. Kornelsen, Wymark, Sask., and many others.

Sources.

Interviews with granddaughter Maria Friesen Peters, Jan 15/97, daughter Aganetha Plett Warkentin, Jan 17/97, Abram P. Friesen, Jan. 20/97, Elizabeth Plett Dueck, Jan. 20/97.

Maria Koop Plett, Journal 1905-18, unpublished ledger. The journal was in the possession of daughter-in-law Mrs. Jakob J. K. Plett who was kind enough to allow me to photocopy it in 1980 at the time I was doing research for the *Plett Picture Book*.

Coming in the next issue. The story of Maria Koop Plett and her daughter Maria Plett Friesen, who died in the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Helena Dueck Friesen: *Die Gutmütige*

by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3L 1T4

Introduction.

My grandmother on my father's side, Helena Dueck Friesen (1876-1914), is an almost-forgotten woman. She died young, at age 37, and never saw any of the numerous grandchildren that were to come in later years. She has one surviving child today, my aunt Helen, who was only four when her mother died, and so has no clear memory of her. I have not been able to find anyone with any distinct recollection of her, nor did she leave any diary or letters behind.

The only existing photograph of her was taken in 1907, when she was 31. It is a view of the back of the Friesen house, and grandmother is seated on the porch, a baby in her lap, furthest away from the camera. A few of her other children stand off to the side while grandfather stands in the yard, gripping the handle of a lawn mower and looking proprietorial.

Grandmother wears a dark head covering and a long, utilitarian striped apron. Her rounded figure is visible, but her features are obscured in shadow. Her demeanour is calm, or perhaps weary; maybe she was grateful to be able to sit quietly for the camera and not be rushing about her chores.

Little is known of Helena Dueck Friesen. But from the few clues to her character that exist, a dim but nevertheless identifiable portrait emerges. She was known as "*die Gutmuetige*"—the cheerful one, she was devoted to her husband and children, and her neighbours liked her. Helena was the daughter of a prominent man, and some of her brothers in turn made their mark in their community. She herself married a man who became quite well-known. Devoted to her family, she worked hard to care for them, and then suddenly, without warning, her life was

over. It had been lived, not for herself, but for others.

Family Background.

Helena Dueck was born in Gruenfeld (now Kleefeld), Manitoba, on July 4, 1876. She was the daughter of Abraham L. Dueck (1841-99) and Elisabeth Rempel (1841-1901). The Duecks had lived in the village of Annafeld, Borosenko, where their *Wirtschaft* inventory was among the top 3 assessed in the village. They emigrated to Manitoba in the summer of 1874 (Note 1).

In all, there were 13 siblings in the family, of whom 5 died in childhood. Of the remaining 8—4 boys and 4 girls—Helena was the fifth, and the first child to be born in Canada.

Helena's grandfather on her father's side was Johann Dueck (1801-66) of the village of Muntau, Molotschna, a leading minister of the *Kleine Gemeinde* (KG) in South Russia. Her grandfather on her mother's side was Peter Rempel (1814-72) of the village of Paulshelm, a man of about 300 pounds who was the twin brother of Elisabeth Rempel, the renowned seamstress and midwife who became Mrs. Abraham F. Relmer.

Emigration.

When Helena's parents settled in Gruenfeld in the fall of 1874, they built a *sarrei*, a kind of canvas tent covered with straw, heated with an iron cook stove, and shared with the Peter L. Dueck family, as well as oxen and other cattle. The structure would have burned down that winter because of an overheated stove, except for Abraham's efforts in throwing snow on the steaming canvas. In subsequent years, Abraham L. Dueck established a farm and be-

came the leading Aeltester for the East Reserve KG.

Marriage.

Helena was only 18 when she married Klaas R. Friesen (1870-1942), the second son of prominent Steinbach citizens Abraham S. and Katharina Friesen, on September 13, 1894 (Note 2). The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Peter R. Reimer, Klaas' uncle.

It was a logical, conventional match—the elder Duecks and Friesens would certainly have known each other well, as they had lived in neighbouring villages in Borosenko, and both families maintained long-standing traditions of leadership in the KG. Helena's mother Elisabeth was a first cousin to Klaas' mother Katharina, a daughter of the Abraham F. Reimers, making them second cousins. As well, Helena's older brother Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937) had married Maria K. Friesen (1869-1933), A. S. Friesen's first cousin (Note 3). The Dueck and Friesen families were already strongly connected before the union of Helena and Klaas.

It was not the first marriage for Klaas, whose young wife Katharina Janzen, had died in childbirth in February of the same year. "It seems that I will once more experience happiness and consolation, as I will marry for the second time," wrote Klaas in his diary. He had been devastated by the death of his wife and baby, and so Helena was put into the difficult position of having to comfort her husband for the loss of his first love. It is impossible to know, of course, whether she felt hurt by this, or if she did, how long that feeling lasted.

Life in Steinbach.

Helena and Klaas moved into a modest building on the Friesen property in Steinbach after the marriage—this house was later used as a barn. For two years the young couple went childless; then, in October, 1896, a son, Abraham, was born.

In 1898, the year Helena's second son Klaas (who later became known as Nick) was born, Klaas Senior constructed a two-storey house on Main Street (Note 4). By the standards of the KG, it was almost too ostentatious, with decorative brick-work on the chimney and stylish window frames. After some years, an addition was made, comprised of a large kitchen, three upstairs bedrooms, and a summer kitchen. In the summer time, the family did its cooking and eating in the summer kitchen, while, in the house itself everything was cleaned, the floors were painted, and the blinds drawn.

Character Traits.

Helena's daughter-in-law Gertrude Friesen remembered that her parents described Helena as "a very nice girl," quiet and patient—not someone who would scold or nag. She was quite a stout woman, not very tall. Her nephew Isaac D. Plett, who lived with the Friesen family for a time, depicted Helena as a steady, pleasant person:

"I lived with Uncle and Aunt Klaas Friesen for two years, and Aunt Helena treated me as one of



The Klaas R. Friesen family in front of their home on Steinbach Main Street 1907. L-r: Klaas R. Friesen, children Elisabeth, Abe, Peter, Henry, mother Helena sitting in the shadows with Baby Henry on her lap, and Nick standing in front of the veranda, left. Photo and computerized scan courtesy of Hilton Friesen, 260 Henderson Hwy, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

the family. One day was like the next, and it seemed that all of us became so used to her happy, sunny nature, that we took it for granted. . . [she was] sometimes called "the cheerful one" (*die Gutmuetige--in* Low German, *gootmootijch*), perhaps because her natural character was expressed somewhat more in the superficial.... Of her brothers and sisters, Aunt Anna was most like her" (Note 5).

Not much is known about Helena's younger sister Anna either, but her character does seem to be encapsulated in the following description by her second husband Peter P. Relmer: "[She was] always a valuable help to me in my cares and concerns about my pastoral work in the church. Even on her deathbed... in spite of her great pain, she urged the children... to try at all times to ease the heavy burdens of their father" (Note 6).

There could hardly be a more striking testimony to the spirit of self-sacrifice than this. Such a trait would have been seen as praiseworthy by the Gemeinde, but also as something to be expected, especially of a woman. But in receiving that approval and meeting that expectation some women gave up too much, lost their claim to a distinct and definite selfhood.

Helena seems to have done exactly that, in supporting her husband and living for her family. Klaas Friesen was not a church pastor during the time that he was married to her (he became one 2 years after her death), but he was an extremely busy machinist and inventor, who often worked in his machine shop in the evenings, or was called to do jobs in surrounding communities: for a description of Klaas R. Friesen's business activities, see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 70-71.

Helena was busy in her own right: from 1896 to 1911, between the ages of 20 and 35, she bore 10 children, 7 boys and 3 girls. She must have been relieved when another female presence, her daughter Elisabeth, came into the household in 1901. The boys were to help their father with his tasks, leaving Helena and Elisabeth, when she got older, to do all the domestic work. One son, Johnny, died in 1911 at the age of 12.

It is not unusual for a self-effacing person to keep a hidden resentment. Helena's friendly, happy personality, however, is evidence that she did not do this. She sought meaning in service, in caring for others. Evidently, she made few claims for herself, and Klaas must have found her easy to live with. It is cruelly revealing, however, that Isaac D. Plett so blandly states that she was taken for granted. His assessment of her "natural character" as "superficial" (*oberflaechlich*) seemed unkind, but perhaps accurate insofar as she did not strongly assert her will or personality.

Death, 1914.

In May of 1914, after working hard one day at doing the laundry, Helena died very suddenly, at the age of 37 years, 10 months. Klaas had been away from home that week, as was not unusual for him, but instead of returning on a Saturday as he usually would have done, he had come back on Wednesday, "perhaps because of a deep presentiment and an inner unease" (Note 7).

Later he described what happened: "It was on a Wednesday, the 27th of May. I had been away a couple of days at a job 18 miles from home. When I came home it was after sunset. Before we went to bed we read in the newspaper with deep sympathy about the death of an old friend of ours [Mrs. Cornelius L. Fast of Winkler district].

"But we had no foreboding that, in less than an hour, Death would also come into our home. We had not been in bed very long when my dear wife had to sit up because she could hardly breathe. She had a spell like this a couple of months before but then it had not been so hard and soon was over. But not this time. It was now so severe that she soon said she would die this time."

"I got up immediately and lit the lamp. I said to her, 'If you have to die now, then hold fast to Jesus, who is our loving Saviour'; and then I asked her whether she could believe and comprehend that the loving Saviour had died for her too, whereupon she said that she believed it, and then again repeated: 'I believe that the loving Saviour died for me.' These were perhaps the last words she said. Her breathing became very difficult, and it sounded as if her heart or lungs were almost filled with water."

"The breath started to rattle in her throat. It sounded as though her heart had failed. Then, all at once, after a few futile attempts, her breathing stopped altogether. She wanted to reach for me but she could not see anymore. So the life passed from her. All of this did not last more than a quarter of an hour" (Note 8).

Legacy.

Klaas had phoned his parents and brothers and sisters, but no one arrived at the house until after Helena had passed away, at about half-past midnight. He had very little time to exchange farewells, and "only these few words [were] left to him as a legacy" (Note 9).

The words bespeak a simple, almost child-like faith. At the end, movingly, she tried to reach out for her husband. The marriage of Klaas and Helena lasted 19 years. She left nine children, ranging in age from two to 17.

The funeral was held on Saturday, May 30. Two correspondents to the *Rundschau*, Jacob D. Barkman, a friend of the family, and Heinrich Rempel, reported Helena's passing, but neither said anything about her as a person. Barkman took the occasion to give readers a moral reminder "to live more earnestly in order to be

ready when our last hour comes," as Helena had been "only half an hour sick and--dead!" (Note 10).

Rempel sympathized with Klaas, saying how hard a time he was having coping with the care of his numerous children since Death had entered the Friesen home and torn his dear wife from him. "Never more," declared Rempel, "will she take her place as mother of that house" (Note 11).

Conclusion.

Helena's cheerful and balanced nature was exceptional. She gave of herself uncomplainingly. Like many other women in her community, however, she received little recognition. Taking your wife for granted was certainly never identified by the Mennonite patriarchy as a sin, or even as a failing, as far as we know.

By today's light, if not yesterday's, it is in fact a grievous fault. There is not much we can do about the wrongs of previous generations.

But Grandmother, however inadequate this story of your life may be, it is all I have. I mean it as a way of starting to make things right. "Ekj well blooss emol dankscheen saje."

Notes:

1. *Abraham L. and Elizabeth Dueck and their Descendants 1841-1965*, p. 25.
2. The date provided in the Reimer *Familienregister*. But my Aunt Gertrude Friesen's records show that the marriage occurred on September 3 and was conducted by Bishop Peter R. Dueck, Helena's cousin.
3. See Plett, *Leaders*, pp. 439-440 for a summary of the Abraham L. Dueck family.
4. Date provided by Gertrude Friesen. It is corroborated by a bit from the local news in the April 20, 1939 *Steinbach Post* stating that Klaas had reshingled the northeast side of the roof, so the water should run off just as well as it had 40 years before.
5. *Abraham L. and Elizabeth Dueck and their Descendants 1841-1965*, pp. 47-48, my translation.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
8. This translation is an amalgam of accounts found in the obituary of K. R. Friesen in the *Steinbach Post*, April 15, 1942 and a short biography of Helena R. Dueck in *Abraham L. und Elisabeth Dueck Und Ihre Nachkommen 1841-1965*, p. 48.
9. *Memnonitische Rundschau*, June 10, 1914.
10. *Rundschau*, June 24, 1914.
11. *Rundschau*, June 10, 1914.

Children	Birth	Death
Abraham D. Friesen	Oct 12, 1896	Mar 8, 1963
Klaas D. Friesen	Mar 5, 1898	Jan 19, 1955
John D. Friesen	Sep 11, 1899	age 12
Elisabeth D. Friesen	Feb 23, 1901	Nov 20, 1918
Peter D. Friesen	Sept. 9, 1902	Jan 16, 1966
Heinrich D. Friesen	Oct. 17, 1904	Jan 7, 1972
Jacob D. Friesen	Nov. 14, 1906	Jul 6, 1987
Katharina D. Friesen	April 3, 1908	Jul 12, 1957
Helena D. Friesen	Mar 1, 1910	
Bernhard D. Friesen	Dec. 17, 1911	Nov. 6, 1987

Aganetha “Agnes” Fast

Aganetha “Agnes” Fast (1883-1977): “Florence Nightingale of Steinbach”, by Nettie Neufeld, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Introduction.

In January, 1997. I visited Eva Fast in her home in Blumenort. Present were her brother Cornie Fast and her cousin Viola Reimer Insley, Steinbach. My purpose was to acquire information about Aganetha “Agnes” Fast Anderson who was born on June 27, 1883 and died December 10, 1977. Let me offer some background to her life.

Family Background.

Agnes’ grandfather was Cornelius Fast (1813-1855) who lived in Friedensdorf and Tiegerwiede, Molotschna Colony, Russia. He was the village blacksmith. In 1854 he and his family moved to Kleefeld, but then moved on to Althirr, the chutar or estate of David Cornies where he served as blacksmith. It was here he came to an untimely death in 1855 when a bomb he was dismantling exploded unexpectedly: see Peter P. Isaac, *Pioneers*, page 187.

Agnes Fast’s father, Cornelius W. Fast (1840-1927) was born in the village of Friedensdorf. After his father died in 1855 young Cornelius W. was left with the responsibility of caring for his widowed mother and siblings. During this time he worked for 2 years for the famous Dr. Dietrich Wiebe in Lichtfelde, Mol. In 1861 he married Helena Born. By 1870 the family had moved to Steinbach in the new Kleine Gemeinde (KG) settlement of Borosenko northwest of Nikopol. Here he served as the village school teacher. Helena died of smallpox, May 2, 1873. The same year Cornelius married Helena Fehr, daughter of Jakob and Helena Fehr of Kronsthal, Chortitz Colony.

In 1874 Cornelius W. Fast with 6 children, some relatives and other families emigrated from Borosenko, Russia to Steinbach, Manitoba. Cornelius was the only one of his siblings to move to Canada; several sisters settled at Mt. Lake, Minnesota. It is rather significant that Cornelius was one of the first immigrants who learned to speak English in the old country which stood him in good stead during the pioneer years in Canada. For example, he made friends with John Peterson who was willing to give advice how to prepare for the coming Canadian winter.

The Fast family moved to the West Reserve where Cornelius W. again served as a school teacher. In 1892 the family returned to the East Reserve, where Cornelius taught in Heuboden, north of modern-day Kleefeld. In 1893 his second wife died and he married Anna Baerg Wiebe, daughter of a Peter Baerg, a prominent KG minister of Gruenfeld. Cornelius taught in a number of villages and then retired in Steinbach in 1916.

It is noteworthy that he retired in 1916 which was the year that the Christian private schools of the Mennonites were outlawed by the Provincial Government. The School Attendance Act was passed demanding that all children attend school in Government Schools and that English be the language of instruction. I conclude that he taught



Aganetha Fast and her siblings, 1915. L. to r. Justina Fast, Henry C. Fast (father of Cornie and Vern of Fast Bros.), Aganetha, Margaretha, Katharina Fast (Tien), David Fast and Anna Fast. Photo courtesy of nephew Cornie Fast, Blumenort.



Aganetha Fast and siblings, 1917. L. to r. Ben, Tien, Anna, Margaret, Henry, Agnes, and brother-in-law John Friesen. Standing in the rear behind the buggy is brother David Fast who served in the Canadian Army and was severely gassed on the Front lines in France. The photograph was probably taken while he was home on leave. Photo courtesy of nephew Cornie Fast, Blumenort.

only in the Private Mennonite Schools.

Cornelius W. Fast must have been somewhat of an enlightened man or perhaps also a bit of a rebel. In a personal biography of Cornelius, several statements caught my attention, e.g. “Fast was a separated from the Gemeinde”, and “he had resigned from the Gemeinde”. No information was given me what the conflict was about

but it appears his membership was later restored again.

In 1916 they were living in the house originally built by pioneer Franz Kroecker in Steinbach. They looked after Mrs. Peter B. Friesen, who was mentally ill, for which they were paid by the KG church, and “this church sponsored facility was the first care-home or hospital type

facility in the Steinbach area.” “No doubt his medical experience working for Dr. Dietrich Wiebe stood him in good stead as a caregiver”: see biography of Cornelius W. Fast in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 22-23.

Agnes Fast, Nurse in Training.

And now to the main character of this writing, Agnes Fast, daughter of Cornelius W. and Helena Fehr Fast (second wife). Little seems to be known about her childhood so I assume she received Private School education only. Considering her father's wider interests, such as learning English, teaching, plus his conflict with the church. I assume that Agnes inherited her father's spirit to move beyond the walls of tradition and aspire to greater and new experiences outside of Steinbach. Rollin Reimer, Agnes' nephew, considered her to have been an "individual". For this reason perhaps she decided to become a nurse, almost unheard of in that day.

Agnes chose to take training in Minneapolis. She travelled there by train, another courageous venture for a young Mennonite woman! It is not known why she went to Minneapolis since the Winnipeg General Hospital had opened a Training School for nurses in 1887, but she had aunts at Mt. Lake who might have been the "drawing card". Mrs. Elizabeth Penner, Fernwood Place, who knew Agnes well told me in an interview that Agnes had gone to Minneapolis with a friend who also wanted to train as a nurse. Elizabeth further related "Agnes was an interesting character...she did what she wanted....she was forward and a go-getter". Mrs. Penner also said that every church had been encouraged to send a woman/women to Minneapolis for a 6 week midwifery course because so many babies were dying at childbirth. Whatever her reason, there was a general consensus among persons I interviewed that Agnes had natural inclinations for nursing.

The following illustration will qualify that point. Vi Insley related, "Even before she trained, she had proven to be a good midwife. My mother, Agnes' sister, was born February 26, 1903 and Agnes had been there to assist with the delivery. Snow had been on the window sills inside of the house. The baby was put in a shoe box and placed on the oven door to keep warm". Frieda Reimer, Steinbach, says it this way, "regardless of how much training she had, she was knowledgeable about nursing and was qualified to do the task."

1918 Flu Epidemic.

Agnes Fast rose to fame during the flu epidemic of 1918. A Carillon News item of 1957 gives tribute to her and her ministry. Let me glean excerpts from that article:

"The fall of 1918 was wet and miserable...The first known case of flu in Steinbach was reported in September. The epidemic scoured the whole country and took more lives than the war that brought it in...it struck young and old...As the sickness spread and increased in intensity resourceful villagers turned the Kornelsen School into a makeshift hospital to care for cases where the entire family was sick".

The Kornelsen School was closed on Novem-



Wedding invitation for Agnes Fast and her bridegroom James Anderson.

ber 2, 1918. There were 2 rooms, a ward for males and one for females. The H.W. Reimer Store provided the cots. the light bulbs were borrowed from the mill, the only place generating its own light and power.

Agnes Fast at that time was "a healthy vivacious nurse-in-training in Minnesota who happened to be in Winnipeg at the time when the 'hospital' was being readied in Steinbach." Steinbach businessmen C. T. Loewen, J. R. Friesen and J. E. Regehr, are credited with turning the village school house, known as the Kornelsen School, into a hospital.

Agnes responded to the call to come home to help and was remembered by her superhuman efforts to fight the flu in her crude hospital. Apparently many men and women volunteered to help her but most of them soon caught the sickness and also became patients. According to the newspaper article only one person died in her makeshift hospital, namely Elizabeth Friesen, daughter of Klaas Friesen.

Agnes worked tirelessly. The cure for the raging flu was to keep the patient warm, to try to keep the fever down by packing ice around the patients throats and in some cases to administer small doses of brandy several times a day. Chicken noodle soup was the most potent medicine at her disposal until an intern from Winnipeg brought her a supply of aspirins. This new remedy was simply called the white pill.

Agnes was credited and praised for saving many people's lives. The following quote will help us understand with what dedication and commitment Agnes worked, "Time slipped by very quickly. I recall instances when I wondered why the electric lights had been left on, only to realize that night had been turned to day and I still working from the previous day."

"The flu left its victims weak and in a dazed condition. When Jakob W. Reimer died on Nov. 15 there were no funeral services, and not one member of the family was well enough to leave the house to attend the burial. The funeral wagon slowly passed the Reimer home, and his wife and children looked out of the window to catch a last glimpse of their father. Six men attended the burial, but together they did not have enough strength to close the grave."

"Mr. Reimer was the outstanding merchant in Steinbach at the time, employing some 20 men, and was known far and wide. It is safe to say that had his funeral been held any other time, no church in Steinbach would have been large enough to house the people who would have

come to pay their last respects."

The Jakob W. Reimer referred to in the *Carillon News* article was the grandfather of Roy Vogt who died so suddenly of a heart attack on March 30, 1997.

Many times no funeral service was held for the dead because no member of the family was well enough to attend. The flu hit with a sudden ferocity and people who died were not sick very long. "Jakob Reimer mentioned in the preceding paragraph was sick 30 hours." Vital Statistics show that no deaths attributed to the flu occurred in Hanover in September and October, but November recorded 30 deaths and from then on the sickness diminished.

Steinbach Post Reports, 1918.

I scanned the Steinbach Post newspaper issues from October-December 1918. The following are some quotes:

October 16, 1918 "Ten rules for those who have influenza; Don't kiss anyone.. use individual



Maria Fast and her husband James Anderson, photo from about 1968. Photo courtesy of Cornie Fast, Blumenort.

basins, towels and cutlery... stay in bed... don't cough or sneeze except when a mask or handkerchief is held before the face... avoid pneumonia by staying in bed... strictly observe the state and city rules and regulations for control of influenza".

October 23, 1918 "Influenza is now sweeping over Canada travelling from east to west... the mouth, throat and nose should be systematically disinfected by antiseptics... water may be sipped or "egg water" flavoured with salt and cinnamon".

In the November issues many of the names of people who died of the flu were listed.

December 4, 1918 "There are only 3 patients left in the hospital and Agnes Fast is tending to them and they are recovering rapidly under her care, as all the rest have been doing as Miss Fast proves to be an able nurse and has done a great and noble deed to the village of Steinbach. They will try to find places for the remaining patients so the school can be re-opened."

When the scourge of the flu subsided, Agnes left Steinbach in January 1919 herself a victim. She rented a room in Winnipeg and asked to be

continued on next page

continued from previous page

left alone. She is quoted as having said "I believe that I was chosen by God to look after these people... it was my holy duty. I prayed that He would protect me.

Agnes Fast did survive. She was viewed as Steinbach's Florence Nightingale and lovingly called "An Angel of Mercy".

Married Life, 1924.

On March 31, 1924, Agnes married James D. Anderson, ex-soldier. I tried to discover how her parents had felt about the marriage. Since Agnes was somewhat older and James seem to be a fine and caring gentleman, the parents loved him and didn't express any negative feeling towards him. Rollin Reimer added that James had not talked about the war or soldiering, in fact, he had felt disgust towards the killing. It also appears that Agnes had been proud that her husband was part of the military. No doubt this marriage would have conflicted with the beliefs and theology of her

home church. Interestingly though, no one seems to know whether Agnes was baptized or became a member of a church.

One source stated that church going had not been important to Agnes nor was it a vital part of her life. After retirement in Steinbach, they attended the United Church.

Agnes and James lived in various places in Manitoba but the home best remembered by Vi Insley and Rollin Reimer was the one at Domain James worked for a finance company as manager but also operated a huge sheep farm with about 1000 sheep and lots of cattle. He owned sheep dogs that were trained to respond promptly and correctly to their master's "whistle".

Agnes always remained a lady. Her nieces described her as being "style conscious". She also excelled in excellent cooking. She taught her Mennonite relatives to eat spinach, use better methods of cooking and preserving foods, e.g. canning. Her niece, Eva Fast, proudly exhibited the mallet her Aunt Agnes had used to tenderize her steaks. Rollin Reimer believed homemaking

had not been Agnes' "First love" but service in the medical field always rated highest.

Death and Legacy.

Agnes and James lived in Steinbach during their retirement years. Agnes died in 1977 and James in 1987, both in the Personal Care Home.

Agnes was buried in a cemetery in Winnipeg. Jimmy's body was cremated and his ashes were buried at her head.

Children of Henry Fast (Agnes' brother) family remember her generosity and concern for them, especially during the father's illness and after his death when she liberally shared her material and financial means with them.

May we as a community honour and remember this kind and benevolent woman, Agnes Fast, "the Florence Nightingale of Steinbach.

Sources:

Eugene Derksen/Gerald Wright, "When the Flu of 1918 Hit Steinbach District," *Carillon News*, 1957.

Sarah Sawatzky Funk: "Matriarch of Krongart"

Sarah Sawatzky Funk, born 1900: "Matriarch of Krongart", by Linda Buhler, Box 2895, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Introduction.

The following is the story of my husband's grandmother Sarah (Sawatzky) Funk whose life began at the dawning of this century. Though her quiet and unassuming nature would probably object to my comparison, she reminds me of the Queen Mother with whom she shares her birthyear. Surely, her quiet strength, her diligence and fortitude despite being suddenly widowed, and her devotion and continued interest in the ever increasing generations of her family have made her the loved matriarch that she is. Not only is she the matriarch of the Funk family but also of the Krongart area as she had connections, either through blood or through association, with the majority of the early Krongart settlers.

Family Background.

Sarah Sawatzky was born on Thursday, the 26th of April, 1900. With a sprinkle of rain early in the morning, the sky cleared, the sun shone and the temperature rose to a balmy 25 degrees Celsius. She was the firstborn child of Johann Wiebe Sawatzky (born December 17, 1872) and Barbara Penner (born February 8, 1880). She made her debut with the help of midwife Mrs. Peter Krahn in the home of her Sawatzky grandparents (Johann P. and Sara nee Wiebe) as her parents were living with them at the time of her birth. This house still stands on the west half of NW3-5-5E.

In 1903, her parents built a home of their own on the southeast quarter of the same section. Her life was similar to that of any other Mennonite child in the area. At the age of 5 she began attending the Krongart Private School located less than a mile north of their

farm. Her teachers during her seven years in school were Julius Toews who taught between 1905 and 1907, and Johann R. Funk who replaced Toews. The school term, which extended from the first day of November to the first day of April, accommodated the parents as children were needed to help on the farm

from spring to harvest time.

Most of the family's needs were met by the work of their hands. Wool from their 10 sheep was used for comforters, socks, stockings and scarves. Sarah learned to sew on the treddle sewing machine at the age of 9 as all clothes were sewn at home. Wooden



Photo 1902 Krongart. Back row: Franz Sawatzky, Barbara (Penner) Sawatzky, Sara Sawatzky (later Mrs. Wiens), Maria Sawatzky (later Mrs. Johann Penner), Grandpa Johann Sawatzky. Front row: Johann W. Sawatzky (husband to Barbara), their children Marie sitting on the stool and Sarah (future matriarch of Krongart), Grandma Sara Sawatzky (nee Wiebe).

“schlorre” (clogs) were made by her father during winter evenings when he hand-carved the wooden soles and nailed the strips of leather across the base. These “schlorre” were worn to school in summertime. Extra farm produce such as butter and eggs was brought to the Heinrich Reimer Store, in Steinbach where it was either sold or traded for fabric and other household items.

Christmas.

Christmas was a special time, even though their traditions may seem Spartan to us now. No one had a Christmas tree but after chores were done, Sarah and her siblings had to re-



Barbara (Penner) and Rev. Johann W. Sawatzky, circa 1922. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Sarah Funk, Grunthal.

cite their memorized verses before receiving their presents.

One present that she still talks about was a china doll that she received from her parents. Dressed in pants and matching jacket, this very precious doll was put into a trunk when it wasn't being played with but one day her younger 4 year-old brother Johann decided to take the liberty of playing with her doll without her knowledge. She was devastated when she found her broken doll that he had accidentally dropped in his enthusiasm.

There was no Christmas program at school but all the students had to recite a verse for their teacher after which they would receive a postcard-size floral picture or sometimes a candy. She remembered having to sit in a row on a bench at her Grandparents' home where they each again recited their verses and got a handkerchief or a candy as their present. Because her maternal grandmother Maria (nee Heinrichs) and second husband Peter Neufeld lived in Altona and someone had to stay home to care for the farm animals, only her step-grandfather would make the trip out from “Jantsied” in order to deliver Christmas greetings and gifts. The sack that he brought with him contained shoes for them all, as well as fruit, cookies and candies.

Family Responsibilities.

Sarah's father was ordained as a Minister in the Chortitzer Church in 1915 which meant that every year after Christmas, he and his fellow pastor Rev. Peter T. Toews went on their visitation circuit which took them from Gnadenfeld to Neu-Bergfeld. This, in turn, meant that Sarah's mother had to undertake

more of the duties while he was gone.

Because her mother's health was already beginning to decline due to a blood disorder, Sarah, being the eldest, had to assume more and more responsibility. Sarah's mother, Barbara, was hospitalized in Winnipeg on 3 different occasions, 2 of which were for blood transfusions. Barbara's sister, Maria (Mrs. Jakob Martens) who lived nearby in Sommerfeld died in 1922 at the age of 40 from the same blood disease.

Sarah lost the sight in her right eye when she was only 18 years old. They were making firewood when she was struck in the eye by a branch.

Marriage, 1919.

On June 9, 1919, at the age of 19, she was baptized by Aeltester Johann K. Dueck into the Chortitzer Church. The following month she became engaged to neighbour and school-mate Peter R. Funk, son of Peter T. Funk and Maria Rempel, known locally as the “Ricke Funke”. Peter T. Funk had a Massey Harris dealership from the late 1890s until approximately 1916.

As wedding dresses had to be in dark colours and were not to be fancy or ornate in any way and were used as their Sunday dresses after the wedding itself, she sewed herself a simple long-sleeved dress made out of black fabric.

After a 2 week engagement, they were



L-R: Sarah (Sawatzky) Funk and sisters Barbara and Maria Sawatzky, Kronsgart, 1920. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Sarah Funk, Grunthal.



Peter R. Funk and wife Sarah (nee Sawatzky), Kronsgart 1920. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Sarah Funk, Grunthal.

married by Rev. Cornelius Friesen in her parents' home on July 15, 1919. Witnesses on the Marriage Registration are listed as Peter Enns and Franz W. Sawatzky, both from Grunthal.

After the afternoon ceremony which was held in the house, the guests which numbered around 50 couples and their children, ate at long tables set up in the beautiful orchard. Their wedding gifts included 15 cups and saucers, a cream and sugar container, and some fabric.

Getting Established.

As Peter had been working at home for his parents until the time he got married, he received money from his father to purchase a wedding ring. Peter's older brother Johann went to St. Pierre to buy the 14kt gold band for \$5.00 which was engraved with their wedding date on the inside of the band.

The dowry that Sarah received from her parents consisted of 2 cows, 1 heifer, 1 calf, 2 quilts and 2 pillows. Peter was to receive his gift of horses from his parents once they moved onto their own farm.

For the first 3 years, they lived with Sarah's parents after which time they moved into their first “home” which was an empty granary that stood on the same yard. Measuring only about 10 by 12, they put up a stove and made do with what they had. Here their third child, Peter, was born in 1924 with the help of midwife Mrs. Jakob Martens.

Little Mary and John shared a bed beside their parents and above them hung a home-made cloth hammock with a down-filled ‘mattress’ where baby Peter slept until he was a year old. John, who was always full of mischief, once tipped the hammock upside-down

continued on next page

continued from previous page

in an attempt to peer at several month old baby Peter. (5 more children were born into the family with all but the youngest being born at home.)

The Farm.

Peter and Sarah purchased 240 acres for \$700 and proceeded to build their own home on NW35-4-5E. Wagon loads of felled lumber were taken to the sawmill in Neu-Bergfeld which was owned and operated by Friesen and Penner. Their first house was a 16 by 24 foot structure and was originally built with no dividing walls or staircase leading to the second level of the one and a half storey building.

When money became available, a wall was built dividing the house into 2 rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom which also served as a living room when guests came. The staircase and upper floor were likewise completed when funds allowed.

Life was not easy. In their early married years, they had 5 cows to milk and they sold the cream for 6 cents per gallon. Their 50 laying hens provided eggs which they sold to the store in Grunthal for 5 cents a dozen. However, it happened at times that the store was overstocked on eggs and they had to be brought back home again. But when they did sell the eggs, the money was used to buy dried fruit for *plumi moos*.

Farewells.

Sarah's mother passed away in 1925 at the age of 45 after a lengthy illness. The following year, Sarah's father led a group of area emigrants on their journey to Paraguay. This group included all of Sarah's brothers and sisters along with her father's brothers and sisters.

Sarah was beside herself with grief as she bid farewell to all of her family as she was now the only one to remain in the country. Often she would walk to her parents' yard and weep for the family she missed so dearly. Her father would have wanted to return to Canada but felt that because he was an ordained minister and a leader, he was not in a position to abandon his parishioners who were all suffering the same hardships as he.

Though they corresponded through the years, Sarah never saw her father again. He died in Paraguay in 1949 just a year after Sarah and Peter tried unsuccessfully to sell their land in order to join another migration to Paraguay.

Widowhood, 1960.

In May 1960, Peter suffered a heart attack while working in the field. Five months later, on October 20, he suffered a fatal heart attack while doing the chores.

Despite her grief, Sarah continued on. She and her unmarried children, Peter and Anne, continued to farm until 1971 at which time the farm was sold and they moved into Grunthal.



Peter R. Funk and wife Sarah (nee Sawatzky).

Recollections.

Blessed with an amazing memory, it is through Sarah Funk's recollections that the history of the Kronsgart/Neu-Hoffnung area has been preserved: see article by Linda Buhler, "Kronsgart and Neu-Hoffnung," in *Historical Sketches*, pages 153-177.

Grandma has given me a guided tour of the homestead where she was born, explaining what it once looked like and where her Grandfather's blacksmith shop was.

She has shown me where the unmarked cemetery is that holds the graves of three generations of the Sawatzky family, including Grandma's two youngest brothers who died in infancy. Through her stories, we now know who is buried in each of the unmarked graves and from what they died. Just across the property line, she identified the location of another Sawatzky burial plot and remembered the twins that were buried there in 1909 as well as the triplets buried there later.

Her stories tell of a different era when her Grandmother would polish the earthen floor with a mixture of fresh cow dung mixed with sand and water. This same grandmother decorated her house with self-made ornaments of birds that were made with a stiff rye-dough and feathers from the birds that her husband (known as "Jaeger" Sawatzky) had shot while hunting. She also made scatter rugs from wool socks that were beyond mending by cutting them into strips and curling up the open edge and arranging them in layers for a shingle effect.

Her recollections also include the death of

this same Grandmother whose body was surrounded by pails of ice water in order to keep it chilled in the warm June air. Only 14 years old at the time, Sarah did not know how or why the water turned blue but it was likely from the use of "bluestone" which was used freely as a possible disinfectant and preservative.

And because of her, copies of her father's sermons have been preserved for future generations.

Having seen a total of 7 generations come and go, Grandma is no stranger to grief and mourning as she lost her father and siblings to another country, was widowed at age 60, and has had 2 sons and 1 son-in-law predecease her due to illness.

Conclusion.

In her lifetime, she has progressed from outdoor bake ovens to microwave ovens, from the unbelievable invention and luxury of the radio to owning a TV and VCR. She has proven that odds can be beat and that her diminutive size is no handicap. Perhaps she will enjoy the same longevity as her paternal Aunt Maria who lived to be 4 months shy of 101 years.

At 80 plus years, she showed us her independence by shooting gophers that invaded her garden and at 90, she outlasted her daughters in physical endurance while shopping at the Malls in Winnipeg. Her fondness for Pepsi and her enjoyment of new experiences even in the last few years have kept her young at heart as she still looked forward to going out for supper and trying new foods like Tortilla Chips with Hot Salsa.

Despite failing health in the last year, Grandma continues to be the hub of the family and has been the cause of much celebration and family unity. She has been and continues to be an inspiration to all of us who are blessed to be a part of her family.



Mrs. Sarah (Sawatzky) Funk.

Helena Loewen Dueck Reimer

by great-great-grandson Henry Fast, Box 378, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 20A.

Introduction.

Like many women of the nineteenth century, my great-great grandmother, Helena did not leave her mark in history by the amount of writing she left behind or by any leadership functions that the church entrusted to her. In fact the only recorded words she spoke are in reply to her second husband's anguished question near the end of Helena's life, when he asked his wife, "What will happen to us two old people in the end?" Her answer was, "Yes beloved brothers and sisters, let us constantly remember that the earth is our abiding place till we again hear the call, 'Come children of man.'" These words were contained in a letter dated November 8, 1879 that her son Jacob L. Dueck sent to his brother-in-law, Peter Rempel in Russia (Note One).

Marriage, 1822.

Helena was born on February 12, 1806 to Jacob Elias Loewen (1776-?) and Catherine Loewen of Muntau in the Molotschna Colony, Russia. At the age of 18 she married Johann Klaas Dueck, also from Muntau. The family lived in Fischau for some years but by 1840 had acquired a *Wirtschaft* in Muntau where they made their home.

In 1848, her husband, Johann was elected as a deacon in the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) church and a year later he was elected as a minister. His first sermon was presented in the village of Rückenau on July 24, 1849 (Note Two). From the diary of husband Johann, we note that Helena at times accompanied him on the numerous pastoral visits he made to the various Molotschna villages where KG members lived (Note Three).

Descendants.

When Helena was not helping her husband with pastoral duties she was busy being a mother to 16 children. Unfortunately, only 7 children reached maturity. Son, Abraham L. Dueck, listed the names of his brothers and sisters in a family journal (Note Four):

Helena's spiritual nurture of her children is seen

in the leadership that the church entrusted to them in their adult years. Jacob and Abraham were elected as ministers in the KG, where Abraham later became the Aeltester of the East Reserve congregation. Son Peter became a school teacher and was called by the church as a song leader. Johann, who later joined the Holdeman church, was elected as a deacon as was also Bernhard who joined the Brüdergemeinde. Bernhard who remained in Russia kept up a prolific correspondence with his brothers in Manitoba, particularly with school teacher, Peter.

Daughter Helena married entrepreneur, Jacob Penner who also remained in Russia. This family for a time became very rich and gave cause for spiritual concern from the siblings in Manitoba. It was seen as a judgement on pride when the Penner family over extended their credit and were forced into bankruptcy. Nevertheless, the Dueck relatives in Manitoba were ready to offer aid in helping a number of their Penner cousins to immigrate to Canada (Note Five). Former Minister of Justice of Manitoba, Roland Penner, has his roots in this family: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 26-29.

Johann and Helen's second surviving daughter, Anna, married Johann Loewen. They also immigrated to Manitoba and settled in the Morris area in the village of Rosenhof. Husband, Johann, served as a deacon in the KG.

Helena's Second Marriage.

After the death of her husband, Johann, in 1866, Helena married Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) who also lived in the village of Muntau. Heinrich was the grandfather of two of Helen's daughter-in-laws, namely, Maria Rempel, the wife of Jacob L. Dueck and Elizabeth Rempel, the wife of Abraham L. Dueck.

Heinrich and Helena joined the great migration to Manitoba in 1875. They were accompanied by children Johann Dueck, Jacob Dueck and Johann Loewens (Anna) on the ship S. S. Prussian which

arrived in Quebec on June 18, 1875. They chose to settle in the village of Gruenfeld, East Reserve, where Helen's four sons secured homesteads. Here the elderly couple lived alternately with either Abraham or Jacob Dueck.

Helena, who was described by her grandson, Johann W. Dueck, as a small plump woman busied herself with spinning wool for the Dueck families and then knitting socks from the wool (Note Six).

Death of Helena, 1879.

Helena's last days were spent at her son, Jacob L. Dueck's place in Grünfeld, Manitoba. For a number of months she suffered from rheumatism in her legs. Her husband, Heinrich, tried to relieve her pain two times with 'schnellen' (Note Eight), but only with temporary results. She was confined to bed for the last 2 months with loss of appetite and memory.

Shortly before her death, church guest, Johannes Holdeman visited her before he left to visit the Scratching River Reserve. When he told her that he was going to see her daughter, Mrs. Johann Loewen, she seemed to be wide awake.

A few hours later, on November 13, 1879 she was "released from this world of pain and ushered into the eternal tabernacle, the morning of redemption. She was buried on November 19 according to her desire" (Note Nine).

Notwithstanding that she died only four years after coming to the new land, Helena Loewen Dueck Reimer was a woman who had a tremendous impact on the history and culture of the E. Reserve.

Helena's Siblings.

Helena was the only one of her siblings who came to North America. At least 2 of her brothers and their families remained in Russia. Bernard L. Dueck in a letter of 1890 provided some information on 2 of Helena's brothers:

"Brother Jacob Loewen's children: a) Jac. Loewen Jr. is married the second time and is living in Muntau; b) Kor Woelks live in Muntau and were very sick at the beginning of summer; c) Katherina has died and left behind 2 children; d) Maria "beim Alten"; e) Ab. Loewen lives with his wife (Mag Wiebe) in ----- where they own half a 'Wirtschaft', yet quite poor; f) Franz Loewens live in Muntau; g) Hein. Loewens live in Furstenau. Their oldest daughter was recently married with a Koop while I was there in May. 3 of Loewens' children are baptized; h) Joh. Loewens are very poor and live in Memrik. One of their oldest daughters is not married and has 2 children, one German the other Russian; i) Helena is married to a Braun, who is a blacksmith and is a drunkard."

"Brother Abraham Loewen's children: a) the old Mrs. Loewen is a widow with six children; b) Jac. Loewen is married for the second time and lives in Furstenau. He owns 2 'Kleinwirthschaften' and a windmill. They have 11 children; c) Diedrich Loewen has died and leaves 9 children; d) Heinrich Loewen died this Spring and has left behind his

Name	Birth	Death
Anna	June 18, 1825	
Jacob	November 3, 1826	November 11, 1826
Helena	June 9, 1828	
Jacob	October 19, 1829	October 26, 1831
Katherina	December 17, 1831	February 14, 1832
Johann	January 3, 1833	
Jacob	October 10, 1835	October 18, 1835
Bernhard	August 16, 1837	
Jacob	June 13, 1839	
Abraham	February 16, 1841	
Peter	October 15, 1842	
Aron	August 1, 1844	August 10, 1844
Katherina	August 8, 1845	August 24, 1845
Klaas	October 18, 1846	November 5, 1846
Aron	May 16, 1848	May 20, 1848
Katherina	January 6, 1850	January 14, 1850

continued on next page

second wife and 6 children; e) Maria was married the second time to a Hiebert of Neukirch. She is, however, separated from him and is presently living with her children in Sagradofka. She has 7 children; f) Katherina, Mrs. Neufeld, is a widow; One of her sons lives in America. She is working in Brasol as a maid. She has 7 children; g) Peter Loewen has a half 'Wirtschaft' in Sagradofka and is a school teacher there. They have 4 surviving children; h) Joh Loewen has lived in the Krim for a year, in the same village as Jak Letkeman. His wife is a Dueck from Schoenau and he has inherited 100 des. of land from his father-in-law."

East Asia, 1885.

Extract from Jakob L. Dueck Letterbook 1885: He refers to "Bernhard Dueck and Wilhelm Giesbrecht in Asia whose wives are daughters of Wilhelm Loewen of Muntau" presumably a brother to Helena. Peter L. Dueck, Gruenfeld, had solicited money to aid these people through the *Rundschau*. An East Reserve Hilfs-Komitee evolved from this

and was formed to collect and manage these funds. The members of the Committee were Peter L. Dueck, Gruenfeld, Kleine Gemeinde; David Loewen, Hochstadt, Holdeman, and Franz Dueck, Bergthaler. The committee collected over \$1,000 for these people who had gone to East Asia with Klaas Epp.

April 1893.

Extract from Abraham L. Dueck Letterbook 1893: A Peter Loewen asking for help and money to emigrate to Canada: "Peter Loewen has nephews in Bergthal (Neufeld families) 6 or 7 miles away."

Abr. L. Dueck writes that "Jakob L. Dueck would be willing to lend passage money or \$231." In the same letter Abraham L. Dueck writes that Peter Loewen's sister is visiting in Gruenfeld, namely, Katherina, daughter of Abraham Loewen.

1887, Pembina.

Extract from Abr. L. Dueck Letter book: "Two of Abr. Loewen's children are teachers in Pembina."

Blumenhof teacher, 1893.

Dec. 23, 1893, *Rundschau* letter from Rosthern, Sask., by Franz Loewen, writes that he has an uncle Peter Loewen who is a teacher in the East Reserve, newly arrived from Russia. Royden Loewen refers to a Peter A. Loewen who was the teacher in Blumenhof from 1893-95: *Blumenort*, page 151.

Endnotes:

1. Courtesy of Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Mb.
2. Heinrich R. Dueck copy of the voting list of the Kleine Gemeinde.
3. Courtesy of Delbert Plett
4. Courtesy of Nettie Fast, Kleefeld, Mb.
5. *History and Events*, Delbert Plett.
6. *History and Events*.
7. Letter book of Ab. L. Dueck, Courtesy of Royden Loewen.
8. Are there any readers that can identify this procedure?
9. Jacob L. Dueck's letter book. Courtesy of Delbert Plett.

Heinrich and Magdalena Sobering

A Biography of Heinrich Sobering (1863-1943) and Magdalena Rieger (1870-1955) and their family, being a compilation of various sources.

Coming from the Old Country, 1900.

"Coming from the Old Country" by Linda Wohlgenuth, editor, *Heinrich and Magdalena (Rieger) Sobering Genealogy 1863-1982* (Rosenort, Manitoba, 1982), 48 pages.

Grandfather Sobering was born February 20, 1863, at Amsterdam, Netherlands. He received his education in Holland and completed a book-keeping course. He belonged to the "*Daubs gesinde*" church [as the Mennonite Church in Holland was known].

When he was nineteen, a man was sending horses from Holland to Hungary. This man wanted honest men to accompany the group who were taking care of the horses. Grandfather Sobering and Mr. Herman Krebs accompanied this group.

In Hungary he was hired out as a book-keeper for a prosperous land owner at the Busta. In later years, he was transferred to Zichydorf, still working at the same profession. Here he met and learned to love Grandmother Magdalena (Rieger) Sobering.

Grandmother (Rieger) Sobering was born June 18, 1870, in Zichydorf, Hungary. She belonged to the Catholic Church which Grandfather Sobering also joined. They were married January 22, 1889, together with three other young couples.

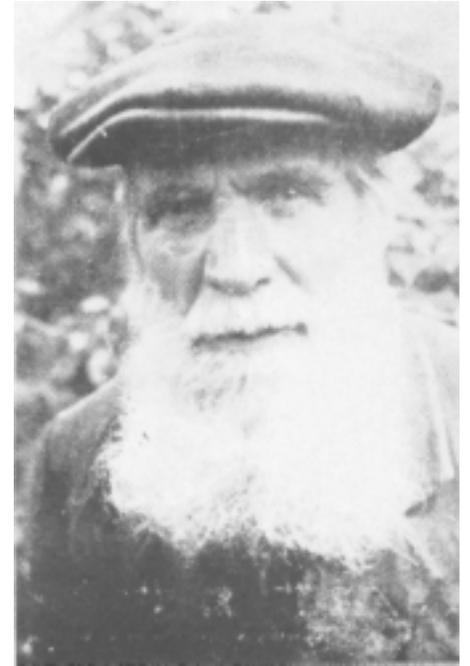
Grandfather Sobering who felt an unrest in his heart was looking for a church that believed in nonresistance. This he could not find in Hungary. He was about to join the Church of the Nazarene when his friend Herman Krebs decided to go to Canada. In Canada Herman Krebs met Mr. Isaac L. Warkentin [the doctor from Blumenhof, north of Steinbach] in the Unemployment Office in Winnipeg. He worked for Mr. Warkentin, finding in him a man believing in nonresistance. He wrote Grandfather Sobering, "I have found what you are



Mrs. Sobering (1870-1955), nee Rieger. Steinbach Post, Feb 16, 1965. Photo courtesy of Ben Sobering.

looking for."

Isaac L. Warkentin and Johann W. Reimer (father of Henry T. Reimer) wrote letters to Grandfather. This seemed light and life to him. Grandparents made arrangements to move to Canada with their six children: Simon, Barbara, Johanna, Heinrich, Andreas (Andrew), and Catherina. To make such a major decision was very hard for them especially for Grandmother, but she was willing to go with Grandfather even if it meant leaving their home and loved ones and moving to Canada.



Heinrich Sobering, "accountant and mill manager in the old Homeland". Steinbach Post, Feb 16, 1965. Photo courtesy of Ben Sobering.

On April 28, 1900, Grandfather and Grandmother Sobering, their six children, Great-grandmother Katharina Rieger (Mrs. Simon Rieger, Grandmother's mother), Grandmother's brother Sebastian and sister Anna Rieger, departed from Hungary, and arrived in Hamburg, Germany, on May 2, 1900. On May 3, this group continued on their way on a ship named Aserion and arrived at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on May 15, 1900. The following day they left Halifax and reached Selkirk,

Manitoba, on May 20, 1900. The next evening, May 21, they were met at the depot by Mr. Johann W. Reimer and Mr. Isaac L. Warkentin and were taken by democrat to the home of Johann W. Reimers' at Blumenhof near Steinbach, Manitoba.

On May 22, Ascension Day, they attended services for the first time in the Steinbach church. They dined at the Rev. Wilhelm Giesbrechts for the noon meal, where "pluma moos" and "shinke fleesh" and fried potatoes were served in traditional fashion. This was a new experience for Grandmother; she was perplexed as to when to eat the "moos". Grandfather came to her rescue and told her to eat it with the meal.

Grandfather attended the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite where he was baptized upon the confession of his faith on September 2, 1900. Grandmother was baptized on January 27, 1901. Grandfather was very faithful in having morning and evening devotions every day.

Ten years later, in 1910, Great-grandmother Katharina Rieger returned to the old country. She was sixty-three years old. She died in Mario-Lana, Hungary, on April 1, 1928, reaching the age of eighty-three years and twenty-six days. Shortly before her death, Anna (Albert Dyck's mother) returned to take care of her until her death.

Born in Canada were Magdalena, Anna, John, Bertha and Eva.

Grandparents, Heinrich and Magdalena Sobering, observed their Golden Wedding Anniversary January 22, 1939. Grandfather Heinrich Sobering died November 25, 1943. Grandmother Magdalena Sobering died April 15, 1955. They are buried side-by-side in the old Steinbach Cemetery.

Those of you who remember Grandparents will also remember them sitting on the porch of their



Henry R. Sobering and Helena Sobering, nee Schalla. Henry Sobering served for many years as police constable for the village of Steinbach. He was the father of Ben J. Sobering Police Chief and Provincial Court Magistrate for many years.

house, always cheerful and hospitable when someone came to see them.

Settling in Steinbach: Klaas J. B. Reimer

"Settling in Steinbach, Manitoba", is taken from the Historical Sketches of Steinbach written by Klaas J. B. Reimer and published in the *Steinbach Post* on February 16, 1965.

In the summer of 1900 the Heinrich Sobering family came from Hungary to Steinbach as immigrants. Also included in their group was the young man Sebastian Rieger, a brother to Mrs. Sobering. The Soberings already had 6 children at the time: Simon, Barbara, Johann, Henry and the baby Katharina. Additional children were later added to these and all of them grew up to be honourable citizens of the country.

Uncle Sobering immediately obtained office work in the Steinbach Flour Mill and for the first 5 years they lived across the street from the mill. In 1905 they bought the entire yard [presumably the 10 acre Feuerstelle] from Cornelius P. Goossens where they made their comfortable home until aunt Sobering, who survived her husband by a good number of years, also died.

When the Steinbach Mill was completely destroyed through a tragic fire in 1921, uncle Sobering came to the H. W. Reimer enterprises as an accountant, where he continued in service for 10 years.

This uncle Sobering, who was born and raised in Holland, was a very friendly and well disposed man and very out-going towards people. He also gladly greeted the youngsters when he met them on the street. I often took note that if I was walking on one side of the street and uncle Sobering was walking on the other, that he would watch to see if I noticed him and if so, he would greet me. Who thinks of something like this in our current busy times; honour to his memory.

The dwelling house which Soberings had built for themselves in 1913 by brother Johann Rieger, is still standing to this day [1965] albeit somewhat hidden behind business premises. A part of the old Goossen house [from whom Soberings had bought the property] is also still standing today and dreams of long ago forgotten days. This house, which the ravages of time have allowed to stand, must have been built around 1880. ... The current R. M. of Hanover offices stand [across the street from the former Sobering property.]

Descendants of Heinrich and Magdalena Sobering

1. **Simon Herman Sobering** was born in Zichyfolva (also known as Zichydorf), Hungary. Simon married **Helena Friesen** from Gretna, Manitoba. He was a teacher and later took up farming. Simon died in Altona Hospital.

2. **Barbara Katharina Sobering** was born in Zichyfolva, Hungary. She married **Johann Friesen** from Nebraska, U.S.A. in Winnipeg with a reception following in Steinbach, Manitoba. Johann operated a cream gathering operation in Steinbach for Crescent Creamery and was known as "Schmaut" or Cream Friesen. Johann died in Steinbach: see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 46-47. Their daughter Helen married John P. Wiebe and both of them were killed in a car accident in Ste. Anne in 1954. In 1952 Barbara Sobering married **Jacob M. Penner** in Steinbach and lived in Ste. Anne district. Jacob M. Penner died in 1971. Barbara Katharina died in the Bethesda Hospital, Steinbach.

3. **Johanna Magdalena Sobering** was born in Zichyfolva, Hungary. Johanna married **Henry T. Reimer**, son of Johann W. Reimer: see George R.

Children of Heinrich Sobering.

Gen	Name	Birth	Marriage	Death
1	Heinrich Sobering	Feb 20,1863	Jan 22,1889	Nov 26,1943
m	Magdalena Rieger	Jun 18,1870		Apr 15,1955
2	Simon Sobering	Oct 31,1889	Sep 20,1914	Dec 19,1959
m	Helen Friesen	Jan 7,1890		Nov 5,1980
2	Barbara Sobering	Jan 31,1891	Nov 10,1910	Sep 2,1979
m	Johann Friesen	Mar 23,1885		May 22,1934
2m	Jakob M. Penner	Sep 23,1885	Aug 3,1952	Oct 24,1971
2	Johanna Sobering	Mar 12,1893	Aug 15,1915	Sep 27,1941
m	Henry T. Reimer	May 17,1892		Feb 6,1964
2	Heinrich Sobering	Nov 25,1894	Nov 9,1918	Sep 28,1975
m	Helena Schalla	Jun 22,1900		May 12,1988
2	Andreas Sobering	Nov 10,1896	Jan 3,1925	Feb 7,1967
m	Judith Doerksen	Apr 7,1904		
2	Catharina Sobering	Oct 29,1899	Apr 15,1917	
m	Jacob D. Toews	May 24,1893		
2	Magdalena Sobering	Apr 20,1901	Jun 19,1921	
m	Peter Wohlgemuth	Feb 11,1891		Jun 12,1969
2	Anna Sobering	Nov 19,1904	Mar 1,1925	Dec 23,1971
m	William M. Wiebe	Jul 5,1899		Sep 15,1975
2	John Sobering	Aug 10,1907	Nov 14,1942	
m	Eileen Dorothy Burns	Nov 9,1917		
2	Bertha Sobering	Jan 10,1910	Mar. 28,1950	
m	John William Busko	Jan 13,1912		
2	Eva Sobering	Apr 10,1912		Feb 15,1954

continued on next page



Children of Heinrich and Magdalena Sobering at Sobering gathering held at Friedensfeld Hall on July 12, 1976. Seated l. to r. are: John Sobering, Mrs. John Sobering nee Eileen Burns, Mrs. William Busko nee Bertha Sobering, William Busko, Mrs. Peter Wohlgenuth nee Helen Sobering, Mrs. Jacob Toews nee Katherine Sobering, Jacob Toews, Mrs. Andrew Sobering nee Judith Doerksen, Mrs. Henry Sobering, nee Helen Schalla, Mrs. Simon (Helen) Sobering. Photo courtesy of Benjamin J. Sobering.

continued from previous page

Wiebe. *Heinrich Fast Reimer and Margaret Warkentin Reimer Family Book* (Steinbach, 1991), pages 38-48, for a listing of descendants. Henry and Johanna made their home and farmed on a quarter section of land in Clearsprings, northeast of Steinbach, Manitoba. Johanna died in the Bethesda Hospital, Steinbach, Manitoba. Henry T. Reimer also died in the Bethesda Hospital. Their descendants include daughter Margaret Reimer Bartel, part owner of "MJ's Restaurant" in Steinbach.

4. **Heinrich R. Sobering** was born in Zichyfolva, Hungary. Heinrich married **Helena Schalia** in Steinbach, Manitoba, where they made their home. Henry served as a policeman in Steinbach for 25 years, 1922 to 1947. He died in the Bethesda Hospital, Steinbach. The Soberings had 9 sons, enough for a good ball team. The policing tradition was carried on by son Ben, who completed a 20 year stint of policing in Steinbach in 1970 as Police Chief when he was appointed as a Provincial Court Lay Magistrate: *Reflections*, pages 166 and 268-273.

5. **Andreas Sobering (Andrew)** was born in Zichyfolva, Hungary. Andrew married **Judith Doerksen** in Chortitz, Manitoba. Andrew was a teacher thus making their home at different places. Andrew died February 7, 1967.

6. **Catherina Sobering** was born in Zichyfolva, Hungary. Katherina married **Jacob D. Toews** from Kansas, U.S.A. in Steinbach, Manitoba. They have made their home in Ste. Anne, California and Oregon.

7. **Magdalena Sobering** was born in Steinbach, Manitoba. Magdalena married **Peter P. Wohlgenuth** from Blumenhof, Manitoba in Greenland, Manitoba. Peter Wohlgenuth taught school the first few years then took up farming in the Landmark area. Peter P. Wohlgenuth died in 1969 in the Ste. Anne Hospital: see *Plett Picture Book*, pages 80-81. Their descendants include Jake Wohlgenuth, founder of Landmark Feeds, and his son Randy of Team Landmark.

8. **Anna Sobering** was born in Steinbach, Mani-

toba. Anna married **William M. Wiebe** from near Steinbach, Manitoba. They lived in the Blumenhof, Manitoba area on a farm raising turkeys. In later years they moved to Linden, Alberta, to be near to their family. Anna died in Alberta. William died September 15, 1975 in Alberta.

9. **John Sobering** was born in Steinbach, Manitoba. He married **Eileen Dorothy Burns** in Winnipeg. John operated a garage in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

10. **Bertha Sobering** was born in Steinbach, Manitoba. Bertha married **John William Busko** in Toronto, Ontario. They worked as waiter and waitress in restaurants and later for a catering company.

11. **Eva Sobering** was in Steinbach, Manitoba. She grew up in Steinbach and lived there till 1940. She was in the hospital in Selkirk until she died on February 15, 1954.

Recollections of Grandparents

Recollections of my grandparents by Benjamin J. Sobering, Box 159, Steinbach, ROA 2A0, retired Magistrate and Steinbach Police Chief.

I remember my Grandparents lived on the corner of Main Street and Elm Avenue in Steinbach. (In fact Grandfather donated the land that is presently known as Elm Avenue.) They were true pioneers, hard working honest folks, truly dedicated to family and home. Morning and evening prayers were always observed in their home; they attended church faithfully.

I spent many hours helping Grandma, she had two large gardens. One was for growing vegetables, the other was for the beautiful flowers that she so enjoyed. Growing in the orchard were a variety of fruit trees. She had such a kind way about her, that even weeding did not seem that bad. I enjoyed helping Grandma maybe because she was so appreciative of my helping hands.

Grandpa after putting in a long day at work (he worked as bookkeeper for years at Steinbach

Flour Mills and later at H.W. Reimers) would come home, first he would feed and water the cow, chickens and of course the pig. How else would you feed the large family? Keeping this livestock was vitally important. While Grandpa was attending to his evening chores, Grandma was busy preparing supper, now we refer to supper as dinner!

Later on Grandpa would read and we spent a lot of time listening to his many stories. Visitors would often drop in to visit and were made to feel most welcome. We as children just sat and listened to their conversations knowing not to interrupt.

The one thing I remember so vividly was when the 9 p.m. o'clock hour approached, Grandpa, like clockwork, would rise, excuse himself, pick up the pail of water he had previously filled, put on his cap, go out, and take this water to the milk cow. He would then return to the house, re-enter the living room where Grandma and guests were still sitting and visiting. Grandpa would then take his Bible, read a few passages and say a prayer. He then proceeded to say "Good Night" to every one, leaving Grandma with the visitors. This was done as a ritual irregardless as to who was there. He loved punctuality and 9 o'clock was his bedtime!

When the Second World War started Grandma was deeply affected. She could not bear for her Grandchildren having to be off to war. She and Grandpa had deep strong convictions!

Grandpa passed away while I was in the military service stationed on Vancouver Island. In later years I served the town as Chief of Police, having succeeded my father.

Grandmother was still living in her home off Main Street just behind the present Loewen Body Shop. Grandma knew I often worked nights so she asked me to please drop in. Whenever I would notice her lights on, I would stop in. Grandma would ask me to make us a cup of tea. She loved to sit and reminisce about the old country, how they came to Canada, where they arrived in this area. I knew then how much she missed grandfather.

They were beautiful people.

Maria Dueck Isaac (1898-1975)

Maria Dueck Isaac (1898-1975): "A Woman Ahead of Her Time", by Wendy Dueck, Box 139, Kleefeld, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Seventy years ago a young Kleefeld woman attended Bible school. We recognize her as the first member of the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) (later the Evangelical Mennonite Conference) to have ventured out in this way. In character, Marie was a confident and quietly determined person. Her Bible school years had a definite influence on her thinking and she in turn influenced a wider circle around her. She was particularly close to her father, a KG minister. Looking back, we have a real sense that they respected, encouraged and influenced each other.

Early Years.

Maria R. Dueck was born into winter's cold on January 17, 1898, the first child of Heinrich R. Dueck and Katharina Reimer Dueck. She lived her earliest years in the pioneer village, established in 1874 by about twenty families, including her grandparents, Jacob and Maria L. Dueck.

By 1907 her parents had moved onto their homestead, just west of the village. Here they built a spacious two-story home. The young couple farmed and had a large family of thirteen children (one died in infancy). Each child who moved to the new property planted a tree. Maria planted a Manitoba maple still alive, but suffering from the effects of last decade's drought. Heinrich R. Dueck, like his father before him, was a minister in the KG, elected on January 23, 1916. He served the Kleefeld congregation until his death on June 20, 1944.

Hands could not be idle on a pioneer farm. Maria worked in the house and in the big garden as a young child. Later she would milk the cows, feed the horses and work in the fields with her father. When her brothers were old enough to take over the field work, gardening became Maria's specialty. She and her sisters Anna, Katherine, Elizabeth and later Helen, managed a large vegetable garden and were noted for their beautiful flower gardens and fruit trees.

Maria attended the private village school until the age of about sixteen, where she was taught in the German language. As the eldest child, she learned to serve at an early age. One story is told that at the age of five she was asked to take a container of noodle soup to a neighbour. Apparently, she tripped and fell, spilling the precious soup. She must have felt badly, for she would remember this incident years later. As an older teenager she enjoyed accompanying her father in the family buggy, on some of his ministerial visits. Her ability



Maria Dueck, 1928 or 1929. Photo taken from Maria's class picture at the Winkler Bible Institute.

to give help was recognized and she sometimes stayed overnight with other families nursing someone who was sick. She took the faith of her parents seriously and was baptized on July 23, 1916, at the age of eighteen.

Early Adulthood.

Years later, Maria told her sisters that suitors had come to the house to visit her, but she was not interested then. With young siblings and frequent visitors she was needed at home. One of her brothers, Peter, developed polio when he was about a year and a half old. Trips to Winnipeg doctors were taken. Later, a special clinic in Chicago was recommended. Father, mother, sister Anna, Peter and baby Nettie travelled by train to the United States about 1920.



Maria R. Dueck, in front of her home in Kleefeld, 1930.

We know that Heinrich R. Dueck, while conservative, was never rigid in his thinking. His son, Peter H. Dueck said later that it was here in Chicago that his minister father gained new Biblical understanding from his contact with the more Fundamentalist Krimmer Mennonites there. On this same trip, he and Katharina travelled to the KG community in Meade, Kansas, where he

preached.

Meanwhile, it was Maria who was left at home to manage the household and care for the youngest children, Helen, Jacob (who died in 1930 from an attack of appendicitis) and Margaret. Her brothers Henry, John and Abe ran the farm.

By Christmas of 1920, the family knew another baby was expected. Katharina gave birth early and very sadly for everyone, both she and the baby died on February 10, 1921. Maria, with her sisters' help, simply took over. By 1923, Katherine married and left home, followed by Elizabeth in 1925.

Heinrich R. Dueck married again, two years later, to Elizabeth Brandt, a middle-aged single woman from Kansas. She came to the home as his companion in the ministry, but it was Maria who ran the house. Sisters Nettie and Margaret remembered it was to Maria that they called in the morning for help to find their stockings or school books. One of Maria's specialties then was the baking of the buns and very fine needlework and sewing.

She was always available to help out at her various neighbours. Even in the winter she and her sisters would hitch the horses to the sleigh and go off to do some much needed sewing or mending. Maria simply gave help as a deaconess might do today. By 1925, the Kleefeld Sewing Circle was more formally organized, with Maria as its first leader.

Bible School.

Maria was beginning to feel God had



Maria R. Dueck with her Sunday School Class, 1931. Front: l-r: Margaret Dueck, Helen Barkman, Nettie Dueck, Annie Koop, Margaret Koop; Middle: Elisabeth Koop, Mary Dueck, Annie Dueck, Annie K. Dueck. Rear: Nettie K. Dueck, teacher Maria R. Dueck, Elma Friesen, Elsie Fast, Gertie Dueck, Susie Barkman.

continued on next page

something more for her. After much thought and prayer, she asked her father for permission to attend Bible school. Heinrich R. Dueck, though known as a quiet leader, was not afraid of new ideas, and he gave his daughter permission, knowing that suspicion would be cast on him by some in the community.

Maria enrolled in Winkler Bible School in the fall of 1927. She attended again the following year, 1928-29, coming home only at Christmas both years. Her fellow students were almost exclusively Mennonite young men and women who had fled Russia in the 1920s. The instruction was given in German. It was a startling decision for a KG woman, but proved to be a very timely one.

Following completion of her program, she ventured out into something that must have also been very difficult to do. She taught vacation Bible school with the Canadian Sunday School mission in its earliest years. She travelled with another woman, going quite some distance from home and taught these lessons to English speaking children. Later she taught V.B.S. at Kornelson School in Steinbach and in Rosengard, southeast of Kleefeld. Maria was always more comfortable speaking in German.

The Sunday school movement had found its way to the more assimilated Mennonite churches. Still many in the KG remained sceptical of change, even when they had lost their German private schools where religious beliefs could be taught. Heinrich R. Dueck knew that the Kansas KG had begun Sunday school in 1924. The Steinbach church was experiencing pressure from the competing Bruderthaler (E.M.B.) Sunday school. During a short period of time when H. R. Dueck was interim bishop, he spoke in favour of classes beginning in Steinbach, which did happen in January, 1926.

By the time Maria returned from Winkler, the Kleefeld church was ready for a Sunday school program. Maria was eager to teach and her father was fully supportive. The first Sunday school classes were conducted in Kleefeld in the spring of 1930, taught in German. Maria instructed the older girls, aged 12-16, Anna Dueck taught the younger girls, and John R. Schellenberg was the boys' teacher. Before long there were other teachers, too. Throughout this time, Maria also remained Sewing Circle leader. The care of her youngest siblings was always uppermost in her mind. Nettie and Margaret remember she took time most evenings to read them a Bible story.

Marriage, 1936.

Among the frequent visitors to the Dueck home had been Rev. and Mrs. Jacob F. Isaac from Meade, Kansas. He was the bishop of the KG in Nebraska and Kansas.



Family portrait 1941. Bishop Jakob F. Isaac and Maria Dueck Isaac, with sons Levi and Alvin, Meade, Kansas.

About 1935, Jacob Isaac was widowed. He knew Maria Dueck, was aware of her giftedness, and proposed marriage. Sisters Margaret and Nettie both said this was not an easy decision for her. It would mean a complete change in her life, a new home so far away, and accepting the responsibility of Jacob Isaac's family of ten children.

Nevertheless, Maria Dueck and Jacob F. Isaac were married on December 6, 1936 by her father in Kleefeld. Two children were also born to her, Levi in September, 1937 and Alvin in August, 1940.

Within a few years of her arrival in Kansas, the Second World War would cast some suspicion upon the Mennonites there. One result was the fairly rapid disappearance of the German language, a change made sooner there than in Manitoba. Maria as wife of the bishop of the Meade Kleine Gemeinde, keenly felt the opposition directed at the church leadership. Letters to the *Christliche Familienfreund* expressed the divergence of thinking in the Meade church. On the one hand the ministers were criticized for not speaking out forcefully against the modern trends in dress. But at

the same time a number of Young People attending the Meade Bible Academy were giving written expression to the blessings of prayer meetings and openly testified of the Lord's leading in their life. This growing divergence of thinking in the church made life difficult for Bishop Jacob F. Isaac.

Now, Maria herself had attended Winkler Bible Institute a number of years prior to her marriage to Jacob F. Isaac. So it is unlikely that her husband opposed the concept of formal Bible training. At the same time there is no evidence that Maria flaunted her knowledge of the Bible or was pushing for change in the church. Actually the church at Meade had been quite forward thinking in its obligation to the world around them. Already by 1926 the church was giving support to missionary H. Bartel in China as well as sending money to the Chicago Mission and the Red Cross.

Jacob and Maria were deeply hurt when in 1943 a petition was circulated among the Meade Kleine Gemeinde members. The petition which was signed by 75 members read, "We the undersigned hereby agree that church services be started in the North Church beginning on the 21st of February, 1943, under the direction of the local E.M.B. church."

A letter exchange between Jacob and Maria in 1944 when Maria spent some time in Kleefeld, Manitoba following the death of her father, Henry R. Dueck, indicates the extent of these feelings. Maria is ready to purchase the family farm in Kleefeld and move away from those who were rejecting her husband's leadership in Meade. In his reply to Maria, Jacob does not dismiss the idea completely, but he does indicate that the farm house in Kleefeld is too big for their small family and that a smaller residence might be more suitable.

He also has some misgivings of his reception among the Manitoba Kleine Gemeinde. Further, he states that he is mindful of the promise that he made to God at the time of his installation by Bishop Peter R. Dueck, that he would remain true to the position that the church had called him to. Jacob and Maria remained in Meade and did retire to a smaller house in the town. Eventually, also, they joined the local E.M.B. church.

The Canadian KG would survive the pressure for change, perhaps because the church here had more time to adjust. The Meade church did not fare as well. But that is another story. ("The Nebraska K.G.", by Henry Fast, in Delbert Plett's *Profile of the K.G., 1874.*)

Maria continued to offer hospitality to the many guests that visited their home. During the Kleine Gemeinde migration to Mexico from Manitoba in the late forties a good number of families were hosted by the Isaacs as they passed through on their way to Mexico. Her son, Levi, remembers

that his mother was hard pressed to find bedding and food for up to 23 guests at a time over a period of a number of days. Neighbors also remember that they were always welcome to join the Isaacs for a cup of coffee or a meal. As long as health permitted they would take a yearly trip to Manitoba to visit brothers and sisters and the many other acquaintances which they had. These visits were always much appreciated, even by the nieces and nephews.

Retirement.

Maria made at least one more trip to Canada after her husband, Jacob, passed away on August 14, 1970, and she was royally hosted by her family in Manitoba. She continued to have an interest both in the immediate family and in the wider world. On her last visit to Manitoba, as a number of her sisters and a nephew were visiting, the topic moved into the area of politics. Evidently, aunt Maria was of Republican persuasion, because when Watergate was mentioned she blurted out, "Die Dauma Democrates". Even in her old age she had strong opinions of the world around her. On her return to Meade she broke her hip and complications set in after surgery. She passed away on March 10, 1975 and is buried in the E.M.B. cemetery in Meade.

Sources:

Interviews: Peter H. Dueck (deceased), Margaret Dueck, Nettie Peters, Henry Fast, Dr. Archie Penner, Dr. Harvey Plett and Rev. Peter K. Bartel.

Jakob & Maria L. Dueck Book First Edition, 1955.

Jakob & Maria L. Dueck Book Second Edition 1986.

Sesquicentennial Jubilee E.M.C. Conference 1812-1962 (Steinbach, 1962).



Silver Wedding of Maria Dueck Isaac and Rev. Jakob Isaac, 1961, celebrated in the Kleefeld Church. All photographs in this article are courtesy of Wendy Dueck, Box 139, Kleefeld, Manitoba, R0A 0V0.

Editor's Note:

The Maria Dueck Isaac story is remarkable for the fact that she chose to attend a Bible School espousing the teachings of America Fundamentalism and German Separatist Pietism which were not seen as scriptural by the Mennonites of Southern Manitoba and, certainly, not by the Kleine Gemeinde. Fundamentalism was extremely categorical during the 1920s and it must have taken immense courage to attend a school where her own culture and faith were not understood and probably ridiculed.

Much to her credit, Maria was strengthened in her faith and not weakened in the least. The fact that she remained true to the faith once received is affirmed by her marriage to Jakob F. Isaac, a Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester.

The second amazing aspect of the Maria Dueck Isaac story, is that she married a conservative Mennonite Bishop who was beset by a strident and unruly faction in his congregation, espousing Fundamentalist beliefs. What a marvellous coincidence! It must have been an incredibly great help to Bishop Isaac to have a marriage partner versed in the doctrines espoused by his enemies.

No doubt, all readers, whether American Fundamentalists or orthodox followers of Biblical teaching, must be impressed with the faith journey of Maria Dueck Isaac. It is evident that Maria was a woman of incredible faith to persevere in the face of spiritual adversity, and with amazing personal strength to avoid being caught up in the faddish religious beliefs of her time-truly "a woman ahead of her time".

125th Anniversary

Announcement:

Readers are reminded that 1999 is the upcoming 125th anniversary of the settlement of the Hanover Steinbach area. If you have any suggestions as how to celebrate this important event, contact any members of the Board of Directors of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

Anna Toews (1868-1933): Midwife

Anna Toews (1868-1933): Pioneer Midwife, by Cathy Barkman, Box 3284, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Introduction.

Although this article was written primarily about the life of Anna Toews (1868-1933), I could not help but make mention of her family, husband and children whose contributions, as well as those of others, helped to shape the woman Anna became. Factual information exists in church records, census and other historical documents, however, there are also interesting stories remembered by children, grandchildren, family and friends who shared vivid memories of Anna in her roles as a wife, mother, grandmother and caregiver.

Childhood.

Anna Toews was born on August 30, 1868. She was the daughter of Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908) and his second wife Anna Bartel (1838-1918): see *Profile*, Chapter 17, for Toews family tree. Cornelius P. and Anna (Bartel) Toews came from Gruenfeld, a village located in the north of the Borosenko Colony in Russia. It was established between 1865 and 1867 by about 120 Kleine Gemeinde (KG) families. These families had come from the Molotschna Colony.

The KG elected Cornelius P. Toews as a minister in 1868. He never preached a sermon: see *History and Events*, pages 43-74. However, he served as a delegate to North America in 1873: see *Storm and Triumph*, pages 293-305, for an account of this journey including some of his correspondence.

In 1874 Cornelius took his family, wife Anna age 35, children, Johann 15, Cornelius 12, Maria 8 and Anna 5 and left for North America. They arrived in Quebec on July 17, 1874 aboard the S.S. Austrian No. 40 which was the very first ship to carry Mennonite immigrants to the East Reserve in Manitoba. (For a detailed account of the Cornelius P. Toews' journey from Russia to Canada see an article written by Cornelius' son Johann, *Pioneers*, page 157.)

Anna Toews (1868-1933) was part of an average size family in those times. Her two older half-brothers, Johann (1858-1931) and Cornelius (1862-1924) were the children of Cornelius P. Toews and his first wife Elizabeth Friesen who passed away in 1864 in Russia. Cornelius P. Toews and Anna Bartel had nine children. Maria, born on Christmas Day in 1865, was Anna's older sister. Anna was next in line, followed by Katharina (1870-1873) and Peter (1874-1935). Cornelius and Anna had five more daughters after arriving in Canada: Katharina (1876-1950), Susanna (1878-1927), Aganetha (1880-1958), Margaretha (1883-1955) and Elizabeth (1887-1955).

Cornelius P. and Anna (Bartel) Toews were one of the founding families of Gruenfeld, known today as Kleefeld, on the East Reserve in Manitoba. Years later the family moved to a farm located 2 miles south of Steinbach where they farmed until 1898. They then moved to

Cornelius P. Toews will have been a constant hub of activity and Anna will have been kept busy with visitors and people needing food and lodging.

Married life.

When she was 18 years old Anna Toews (1868-1933) married the young widower Peter B. Toews (1859-1945), 9 years her senior. He was a tall man, hence known as "Grote" Toews, literally large Toews. Peter was the son of Peter W. Toews (1831-1922) and Aganetha K. Barkman (1828-99): see *Profile*, Chapter 17, for Toews family tree.

Peter B. Toews came to Canada as a 15 year-old boy with his parents and siblings. They sailed on the S.S. Peruvian which arrived in Quebec in July of 1874. The Peter W. Toews family settled in the village of Blumenort, where he was a wealthy farmer. Peter B. Toews registered his homestead on SW33-7-6E on September 13, 1877. His father, Peter W. Toews, had previously registered on NW33-7-6E on September 7, 1874.

On November 24, 1878 Peter B. Toews had married Elizabeth Reimer (1858-1886), daughter of Klaas R. Reimer (1837-1906) and Katharina Willms (1837-1875), Steinbach merchant. Peter and Elizabeth had one daughter, Katharina, born 1883. After eight years of marriage Elizabeth died on Sept. 4, 1886.

On December 25, 1886, Peter married again to Anna Toews, his second cousin. Peter and Anna raised 12 children, as listed in the *Cornelius P. Toews 1836-1908* book: Katharina (Reimer) Toews, b.1883, m. Peter G. Toews (1882-1972); Peter b. 1887, m. Eva F. Hiebert (1891-1963); Cornelius, b.1891, m. Maria Penner (1892-1936); Johann b.1893 m. Annie Reimer (1892-1958); Jakob b.1895, m. Helen Hiebert (born 1893); Anna b. 1896, m. Henry F. Penner (born 1894); Mary b. 1900, m. Henry P. Giesbrecht (born 1896); William, b. 1902, m. Wilhelmina Reimer (1903-91); Susie (b. 1904), m. George P. Giesbrecht (b.1900); Dietrich (b.1907), m. Margaret Friesen (b.1907); Margaret (1908-25); Eva, b.1913, m. Harold Snyder (b.1911).

Memories.

Peter and Anna Toews lived in Blumenort until 1890 where Peter operated his father's saw-mill. They then moved to Greenland where Peter was a farmer. He also owned part of a steam-engine threshing outfit.



"Four generations of the Toews Family." On the back of the photograph, Peter B. Toews himself has written the following memorial: "This picture was taken on July 11, 1941, at Eatons and Company in Winnipeg. I myself, Peter B. Toews, am sitting in the middle, 83 years old; to my left is my daughter Tien, Mrs. Peter G. Toews, 59 years old; her daughter Anna, Mrs. J. G. Friesen, is standing to my right, and standing by me is my great-grandson, age 15. Mrs. Joh. G. Friesen is 37 years old." Katharina, Mrs. Peter G. Toews, was the granddaughter of Steinbach merchant Klaas R. Reimer; being the only child of his oldest daughter Katharina W. Reimer (1858-86). Photo courtesy of Peter T. Friesen, Winkler, Manitoba, 1981.

Greenland, Manitoba to retire: see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, No.9, Part Two, page 48.

One can only imagine the unique and exciting experience Anna Toews (1868-1933) will have had as a child. Indeed, the journey from Russia to America, over land and sea, will have been an interesting tale to relate to her children in later years. I would guess that the house of

Peter was a quiet man. He is remembered by one grandchild as having an innocent and naive nature. He didn't like to spend time alone. Leona Rempel, a granddaughter, tells the story which was passed on from Russia about how Peter went into the barn and found that the hired hand had hung himself. Since then he preferred to have people around him and after Anna died he always had someone living with him.



Anna Toews (1868-1933) with her daughter Margaret (1908-25) standing behind a cold frame which was used to start plants. Taken around 1912/13 which would have been shortly after they returned from Needles, B.C.

Peter liked to tell stories. Martin Barkman related one regarding an 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.

The break-up of the KG in 1882 brought a change for Peter and Anna Toews. They then made a decision to join the newly formed Holdeman church. Some say Peter spoke in tongues. He wanted to talk about his experiences so people came from far and wide to hear him. Peter was never a minister or deacon.

Needles, B.C., 1911.

In the 1910s there was an agent who sold land to some of the Mennonites hoping to establish a Mennonite settlement in British Columbia. As a result Peter Toews (1859-1945) bought some land in Needles, B.C. The family moved west in 1911.

The land turned out to be worthless and Peter and Anna faced financial disaster: see Ted de Veer, "Whatshan Valley, Needles, B.C.," in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 30-31, for a photo of the Peter B. Toews family on the Spray bridge, 1911.

Son William passed down some memories of the B.C. trip...when they were down to their last piece of bread and had only enough money left for train tickets they decided to go back to Manitoba. With heavy hearts and tattered clothes they waited long hours for a train that was apparently late. An older English couple, noticing the destitute family, invited them into their home for the night. They fed them and got them off to the train the next day. Their generosity was highly regarded for a long time afterwards.

Ste. Anne, 1912.

After they returned to Manitoba Peter bought a farm in the R.M. of Ste. Anne, River Lot 29. Several of Peter and Anna's married children lived just west of the Toews' farmyard. George P. and Susie (Toews) Giesbrecht lived right beside them, then Cornelius T. and Marie (Penner) Toews and next to them Henry P. and Marie (Toews) Giesbrecht. Peter B. Toews farmed grain, cattle, horses, pigs and chickens with his boys. They never had a tractor. Peter also had a small share in the cheese factory and delivered milk to supplement the family income. Peter and Anna were very poor as they raised their family through the depression years.

Eva (Toews) Snyder, a daughter, says that she was born in Ste. Anne in the family home which was a large house with fancy gable ends. It was plain but comfortable with 2 stories, a basement, and no indoor bathroom or electricity. There were 3 bedrooms upstairs and 2 downstairs, a parlour, a big kitchen/dining room combination



This photo shows some of the Peter B. Toews family in Needles, B.C. Photo taken around 1911. Although no one knows for sure, this may have been taken by a schoolhouse surmised because of the flag pole on the left. Courtesy of Leona (Toews) Rempel.

and a pantry.

Minna (Reimer) Toews (1903-91), daughter-in-law to Peter and Anna Toews, told me that they lived with her in-laws, the Peter Toews' for a few years. Aunt Minna remembers going to church Sunday mornings, coming home to mother's (Anna) prepared dinner, returning to church for Sunday school until 4:00 pm and then attending the evening service after faspas.

Recollections.

Peter and Anna were viewed as a popular

couple. Anna was a large, tall woman, but Peter was even taller. A niece, Mrs. George (Katharina Wiebe) Penner, in reminiscing about Peter and Anna Toews remembered that Peter was very deaf for as long as she knew him. She thought perhaps this was the reason that Peter and Anna always spoke loudly to each other. Peter was a happy, easy-going person and didn't get excited very easily.

Peter Toews always sat in the passenger seat of the car and was so tall that his head touched the roof of the car. Anna did the driving when they travelled in their Model T car which didn't have any windows. Many wondered at that rare phenomenon - a woman who did all the driving? Some say Peter didn't have the courage and was too nervous to drive. Peter wasn't interested in driving the car but he always kept up the repairs and changed the tires when needed. He regularly crank-started the car for Anna. In fact, whenever Anna, who was a midwife, took the car to deliver a baby he went with her to crank-start the car so she could come home once the newborn arrived. Fortunately, as a rule, people came to get Anna when they needed medical attention.

Eva (Toews) Snyder remembers the family car in which they frequently went to Winnipeg. If they didn't take the car they rode the train to Winnipeg to do their shopping. They bought their groceries in Ste. Anne. Some of their food supply was supplemented by the large family garden. Eva remembers picking many potatoes. The homestead had a smokehouse behind the house. The family would butcher pigs and hang them in the smokehouse providing smoked pork for the winter. The Toews' home was a busy place. They sewed their own clothes, dresses and pants, with a sewing machine. Anna spent some of her "spare" time knitting.

Peter would go to Winnipeg with his horses and sleigh and bring things back to sell out of his house in Ste. Anne. Annie Penner recollects going to get some one cent popcorn bags and other candies from the little store grandpa operated on the side.

Peter and Anna were the first family outside of Steinbach to have a telephone line. This could have had something to do with the fact that their son Peter ran the telephone exchange in Steinbach. Their phone line, installed in 1911, led from the house to the cheese factory.

Retirement.

As Peter and Anna reached retirement age their daughter Eva bought the supplies needed for a house which was built across from the family farm by volunteers. Once Peter and Anna moved into the new house their son Peter and his wife Eva took over the Toews' farm. Family gatherings still carried on. Leona Rempel remembers going to visit her grandparents. William Toews, Leona's uncle, owed his sister-in-law, Mrs. Jakob Toews, some money. To repay the debt Bill (William) would swing around Steinbach, pick up Mrs. Toews and Leona and take them to visit Peter and Anna Toews.

Regular family get togethers and picnics were greatly enjoyed by the grandchildren. They would

continued on next page



This is the farm that the Peter B. Toews family bought after returning from Needles, BC. After they retired it was bought by their son Peter T. Toews. Picture taken in 1938. Courtesy of Leona (Toews) Rempel.

all squat on the ground and Grandma would start a table song in German. Peter Toews was a very affectionate and generous grandpa. He would pay out 10 cents for a kiss from the grandchildren. Selma Barkman tells of how they used to carry little pails of water into the farmhouse because grandpa and grandma didn't have running water. Grandpa sold mixed hard candy and he would give the grandchildren one for little chores they did for them. Laura Barkman recalls that grandpa enjoyed when the grandchildren would line up on the stairs in the new house and sing "My Grandfather's Clock" for him.

Eventually Peter moved to Steinbach and the first house Eva had built for Peter and Anna became a schoolhouse. In 1936, three years after Anna died, Eva had another house built in Steinbach for her father. Peter, preferring not to live alone, lived first with the Charles Rumpel family (close friends of Peter) and then Dave Barkmans. In 1943 Waldon and Alma Barkman moved in with Peter who lived with them until his death. Today this home still stands at the corner of Hanover and Elm Avenue and is owned by Waldon and Elma Barkman.

Peter Toews died on August 11, 1945. Leona Rempel recalls seeing his coffin in the front yard of the house on Hanover. His funeral was held at the Steinbach Holdeman Church and he is buried at the Steinbach Memorial Cemetery.

Anna-Mother.

As one of the grandchildren put it "Anna Toews was an amazing woman" who possessed a keen memory. People use descriptive words such as friendly, cheerful, generous, hard working, busy, and humorous as they reminisced about her. She was a plump woman and almost as tall as her husband. Anna usually wore a black apron over her plain black serviceable dresses. She wore her hair pulled back as was the custom. "Groute Toewsche", as Anna was known, enjoyed a good meal. After the car drive from Ste. Anne to Steinbach to visit her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Jakob Toews, she would often head for the pantry first and ask if there was anything good to eat. She also loved a good bowl of chicken noodle soup and didn't mind going 40 miles to get it.

Anna made wonderful chicken noodle soup from their own chickens which was served with

her delicious homemade buns. Guests, family and extended family often sat around the Peter Toews' table for a meal and as a result all the women at the Toews' home had to do their share of the cooking. Anna liked to bake peppernuts and hand them out to the grandchildren.

Anna-Caregiver.

Anna Toews was a woman ahead of her time. She had a full time occupation outside of the home. Between the age of 19 and 45, covering a span of twenty-six years, Anna bore 11 children. At the same time she was a *Hehbanne* or midwife which meant she was very busy delivering the babies of families in her own community as well as other districts such as Blumenort, Ste. Anne and Richer. As a midwife she delivered babies for KG, Holdeman, Metis and presum-

ably people of other beliefs and backgrounds.

Historian Royden Loewen reported that her personal records show she delivered almost 1,000 babies: Loewen, *Blumenort*, page 219. Family members acknowledge that among these were many of her own grandchildren. Whether people were wealthy farm or village residents or poor bush-dwellers without money, Anna felt that God had called her to help anyone in need. [In 1892, Anna volunteered, along with two other women--Aganetha, Mrs. Johann R. Reimer, Steinbach, and Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob B. Toews, Hochstadt--to take a church-sponsored, six week course in midwifery from Dr. Justina Neufeld, Mountain Lake, Minnesota who was well-known in the East Reserve (Note One).]

Anna was known as a competent midwife. Anna's reputation as a respected person in the medical field was so widespread that she was often called to certify the deaths of people.

To my knowledge, no one knows how or why Anna became a midwife. The article "Free Home Deliveries" written by Alma Barkman, *Memorable Memories*, page 297, takes a look at the pioneer years before doctors and hospitals. A man, whose wife was in labour, would run to the first suitable neighbour woman for help. Once a woman had delivered her first baby she became a candidate for a midwife. The more babies she delivered, the greater her knowledge and notoriety became. These women were rarely paid for their services. They were called by God to do this work and felt it was a privilege to bring a precious life into the world.

Anna was also available for other afflictions that women experience. On one occasion a woman had been treated for a severe haemorrhage



Peter B. and Anna Toews family - taken in the back yard of the "Central Office" (telephone office) in Steinbach in 1926. 1st row left to right: Luella (Toews) Smith, Willy Giesbrecht, Selma (Toews) Barkman, Margaret (Toews) Benoit. 2nd row: Edgar Toews, Annie (Toews) Penner, Peter B. Toews, Anna (Toews) Toews. 3rd row: John Toews, Cornelius T. Toews with son Eddie on lap, John T. Toews, Alvin Toews, Alfred Toews. 4th row: George P. Giesbrecht, Mrs. Cornelius T. (Marie Penner) Toews, Mrs. Johan (Annie Reimer) Toews, Mrs. George P. (Susie Toews) Giesbrecht, Mrs. Peter (Eve Hiebert) Toews. Photo from the album of Bert and Susie (Toews) Doerksen.

by several doctors who used ice packs to stop the bleeding. They had pretty much given up when someone summoned Anna Toews who in wondrous ways helped the woman make a full recovery.

Since doctors were very scarce, Anna will have been sought out for her advice on curing numerous ailments. Selma Barkman notes that her grandma grew "moya blada" in the garden which was used to rub on sores and boils. She also grew chamomile in the garden using the blossoms to make a tea for sick people. "Remedies", written by Tina H. Peters, *Mennonite Memories*, pages 285-291, says that a cup of chamomile tea in a babies bath water was thought to prevent "Schwam" which was a prickly heat rash on newborn babies. The same tea was supposed to be beneficial for the baby's mother after her confinement.

Anna will have had to look after the medical problems of her own family as well as others. "Remedies" also gives us some insight as to the common illnesses and diseases that pioneer women had to deal with in the late 1800s and early 1900s: rickets or "head growing" treated by rubbing the head with apodoldac or alcohol; the common cold treated by hot foot-baths, homemade chest rubs and poultices; bronchial colds treated by applying goose grease, chicken fat or even plain lard mixed with a few drops of turpentine to the chest; tonsillitis or sore throat treated with cloths wrung out in hot water and applied to the neck and throat or medicine of a few drops of Wonderoil into a teaspoon of sugar; earaches treated with the heart of a roasted onion placed against the inner ear; and the "seven years itch" treated by a sulphur bath and a daily change of clean clothes and bedding. Alum or salt in water was used as an antiseptic to treat canker sores of the mouth or haemorrhages after a tooth had been extracted. Anna will have probably used all of these remedies at one time or another.

How did Anna manage to juggle her medical career and home life? Peter supported Anna in her decision to be a midwife. He was very proud of her. Leona Rempel says that Anna was very dedicated to her medical profession. She would sit beside the bed of a woman about to deliver a baby for as long as 2 days if need be. No wonder many of the mothers-to-be wanted Anna to deliver their babies. Fortunately for Anna, she had a very capable step-daughter, Katherina, who worked very hard at home and convinced the younger children to help as well. She kept their enthusiasm going by telling them stories and reading to them while mother was busy out of the home. It is no wonder that Anna was a little reluctant to allow Katharina to get married as she was such an asset to the household during Anna's busiest years outside of the home.

One can only imagine the strain that an occupation such as Anna's may have put on the family and home. Her husband, Peter, and the older children will have had added responsibilities in raising the younger children and keeping up with the household chores which in other homes were done by wives and mothers. Yet, we can well appreciate what Anna's vast knowledge, experience and dedication meant to the communities



Peter B. Toews laid out in the front yard of the house on Hanover and Elm Ave. Photo taken in August of 1945. Left to right: Mrs. Jakob Toews (Helen Hiebert), Mrs. Waldon Barkman (Elma Toews), Mrs. Bill Toews (Minna Reimer), Mrs. Henry F. Penner (Anna Toews), Mrs. Peter T. Toews (Eve Hiebert), next unknown, little girl standing unknown, Mrs. George Giesbrecht (Susie Toews), Mrs. Peter G. Toews (Katharina Toews), Henry F. Penner, George P. Giesbrecht, Cornelius T. Toews, Henry P. Giesbrecht, Peter G. Toews, Mrs. Henry P. Giesbrecht (Mary Toews), William (Bill) Toews, Waldon Barkman. Courtesy of Leona (Toews) Rempel.

surrounding her.

Death, 1933.

The January 17, 1933 issue of the *Messenger of Truth* reports under News Items that: "Sister Peter B. Toews, St. Anne, Manitoba, is ailing and suffering much with the fatal malady, cancer. The sister prefers to be with her Saviour, and is prepared to meet her God. We have much sympathy for the sufferers of the dreadful disease, cancer."

Grandchildren confirm this bit of news adding that Anna Toews suffered from stomach cancer. Leona Rempel remembers going as a young girl with her mother to visit her grandmother as she lay sick in bed. A woman dying of stomach cancer was a traumatic sight for a young girl. Anna's daughter, Eva, and her granddaughter, Elma Barkman, sat with Anna towards the end of her illness. Eva, who was training to be a nurse in Portage, was called home to be with her mother. Elma was considering going into nursing at the time and Eva thought this would be a good time to see what nursing was really about.

The February 14, 1933 issue of the *Messenger of Truth* printed the obituary for Anna Toews which was written by P.A. Penner. Waldon and Alma Barkman of Steinbach provided me with a copy of this issue. Parts of it read: "About 2 years ago she began to ail somewhat that she at intervals became confined to her bed, but as soon as she sufficiently recovered she ventured to calls for obstetrician which she had rendered faithfully her past 40 years, people gaining such confidence, that she could not refuse when possible, until December last when she became so ailing that she felt her end was only a question of short duration, when she expressed her preference to meet her Saviour at rest from all sorrow and suffering and be with God's children, since she confessed and believed to be in peace with God and man through the redeeming blood of Christ, not of good works but the free gift of God."

"Christmas it appeared as though she might recover, when she said, she would also gladly be

with her dear family if so it would be God's will, even though with much suffering. But it was God's will to relieve her from her much suffering, wherein she remained patient to her last. She was wholly offered unto His will, until He called her January 26, 1933, awaiting until the glorious resurrection morn, when she will respond to the trumpet's call.

"Funeral services took place Jan. 28 in the Greenland Church, Brother P.A. Penner opened services by calling minds to prayer and led in prayer, then brother Wiebe spoke from text Heb. 4:9-11, in German, then brother J.M. Penner spoke in English, then brother J.J. Penner made closing remarks. The remains were laid at rest in the adjoining cemetery."

It was noted by grandchildren that because Anna's funeral was in the winter there were no automobiles at the funeral. The coffin was transported from the house to the Greenland Holdeman Church by horses which pulled the large sleigh."

Conclusion.

Anna Toews was truly an extraordinary woman. Although she lived a different lifestyle than most women of her time she did not view herself as "different" or advanced. Anna is remembered as an efficient woman who was dedicated in her role as a medical caregiver in southern Manitoba. Along with her medical commitment to the community, she managed, with the help of her husband, children, family and friends to raise and care for her family.

Although Anna was not without flaws, she was devoted to fulfilling the will of God for her life. This meant being a loving caregiver to strangers as well as friends and family. She was respected and loved by neighbours, family and community.

Endnotes:

Note One: K.J.B. Reimer, "Neunzig Jahren," *Steinbach Post*, 1964-65.

Susanna Loewen Dueck Reimer (1852-1918)

Susanna Loewen Dueck Reimer (1852-1918), by Harvey Kroeker, a great-grandson.

Background.

Susanna was born to Peter and Susanna (Enns) Loewen in the Molotschna, South Russia, now known as the Ukraine, on October 7, 1852. She had an older brother Isaac and a younger sister Margaretha. When Susanna was about five years old, her mother passed away at the age of 28 years. As a result Johann and Anna Warkentin became Susanna's foster parents. Little is known of her formative years.

Marriage, 1871.

When she was 18 she received a proposal of marriage from a widower from Friedensfeld with two small boys, Johann aged 6 and Peter aged 9 months. His wife Justina had died October 10, 1870. She accepted and as a result Peter L. Dueck and Susanna Loewen were married on January 1, 1871.

We might well ask, "Why would a young, attractive, intelligent and optimistic young girl marry a widower, ten years her senior, with two small children? Wouldn't there be plenty of prospects for her in the future that would be a much better match?" Very likely one of her considerations would have been the motherless boys. She knew from personal experience what it meant to lose a mother and then be separated from her father to live with strangers. She was not easily fazed by seemingly adverse circumstances and by the fact that Peter had been unfortunate in losing nine or ten horses in only one of two years on his farm.

About a year after the wedding the family moved to Blumenhof in the Borosenko settlement, which was closer to Susanna's home. Here Peter again took up the position of school teacher. He also rented some farm land.

Emigration, 1871.

Three years after the wedding and a year after the birth of son Heinrich in 1873, the family decided to join the emigration from Russia of the Kleine Gemeinde. They were part of the very first group to enter Canada and sail down the Red River from Moorhead on the steamer "International". After buying necessary supplies in Winnipeg they embarked again and landed where the Rat River flows into the Red.

Pioneer life.

After a few weeks in the Immigration Sheds a few miles inland, where their son Heinrich died on August 13, Peter and Susanna helped to found the village of Gruenfeld. Later the site was moved slightly and the name became Kleefeld. During this time and for nearly a year before this time, Susanna had been somewhat sickly. An infant son Isaac died in November of the same year. Their next child, Susanna, was more sturdy; born in April, 1876, she not only survived to adulthood but lived to be 103 years old be-

fore she passed away in 1979. They had five daughters altogether that survived to adulthood, married and had offspring before they died. Another child, a son named Bernhard, died at less than four months old.

For the first winter they built a "Sarais", with wooden poles in an "A" frame, covered with piles of straw or hay. Peter L. Duecks shared it with Abram L. Duecks. Some cows and a team of oxen lived at one end, while the people lived in the other.

Peter L. Dueck was a man of many talents. He was hired as a teacher, he farmed, became a day labourer, freighted building wood from Winnipeg with oxen, and finally his main occupation became the book-selling business. He supplied some 60 villages, on two Reserves, mostly with German books. He also served the church as song leader.

Widowhood, 1887.

On January 1, 1887 on the 16th anniversary of Peter and Susanna's wedding, returning on foot from a visit to the neighbour's, he became quite ill. When he arrived at home, he had to go to bed. His condition worsened, so that eventually a doctor was called who gave the family hope for his recovery. However, this was not to be. After an illness of two weeks, Susanna's husband died on January 15, 1887 at the age of 44.

Susanna's two step-sons John, 21 and Peter 16 had to take charge of the farm and the book store for the time being. Susanna's five daughters ranged in age from one to ten years old.

Remarriage, 1889.

During Susanna's two years and nearly ten months of widowhood, she received a proposal of marriage from a widower about fifteen years older than she. Susanna decided she wanted a younger man so she declined the offer. She told her family of girls, "I believe that younger men are available. I'll wait."

Her courage and optimism were well rewarded. A little while later, a young son of deacon Abram R. Reimer of Blumenort, said to his father, "I am not waiting till I'm 21. I aim to get married now. Susanna Dueck needs a husband to help her raise her five girls and I want to be that man."

When Peter's father realized his determination, he got things in motion according to custom, and eventually Peter, 19 and Susanna, 37, had their dreams realized. The wedding took place on November 10, 1889.

Susanna's daughters were delighted to have such a precocious, resolute, and good-looking young man for their father.

Blumenort.

The family moved to Blumenort and each one of the five girls got to be married and to have a family. Anna, the second youngest, mar-

ried Cornelius W. Brandt when she was nearly 21 and had a son Peter. She passed away exactly a year and a day after the wedding. Consequently little Peter D. Brandt was raised by Peter and Susanna Reimer, his grandparents.

The other four girls from Susanna's first marriage all grew up, married and raised large families to maturity.

Peter and Susanna Reimer had a little girl Maria who passed away in infancy. After that a boy and girl were born to them that survived to adulthood, marriage, and a considerable family.

Susanna died on April 16, 1918. She had been a faithful member of the Kleine Gemeinde since her baptism on the confession of her faith in Jesus Christ on December 6, 1870.

Conclusion.

Susanna was an attractive and intelligent woman with courage, optimism, vivacity, a sense of humour, and a positive outlook on life. Her optimism stemmed not only from her own temperament but also was a result of her faith. I am convinced that the tribute one might give to her for the life she lived, she in turn would say belonged to her Lord and Saviour.

Descendants.

Descendants (one example from each of her seven married children).

From the first marriage to Peter L. Dueck: 1. Susanna (1876-1979), Mrs. Abram R. Penner, mother of former Steinbach mayor, A. D. Penner; 2. Helena (1878-1950), Mrs. Heinrich R. Reimer, mother of former principal of Steinbach Bible Academy, the late Rev. Ben D. Reimer; 3. Elizabeth (1879-1963), Mrs. Peter B. Kroeker, great-grandmother of the present Associate Professor of Religious Studies at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, P. Travis Kroeker; 4. Anna (1883-1905), Mrs. Corn. W. Brandt, great-grandmother of former Olympian (1996) volleyball player, Michelle Sawatzky, a great-granddaughter; 5. Margaretha (1885-1968), Mrs. Aron D. Reimer, mother of the late Abe D. Reimer, the founder of Reimer Farm Supplies;

From the second marriage to Peter R. Reimer: 6. Abram L. Reimer, father of Walter F. Reimer, former owner of Reimer Overhead Doors; 7. Maria L. Reimer, Mrs. Franz T. Kroeker, mother of the late Elizabeth (nee Kroeker) Loewen, former missionary to Brazil under New Tribes Mission.

Sources:

Prairie Pioneer: Johann W. Dueck (Published by the John W. Dueck Book Committee, 1996).

Aron R. Reimer 1885-1953, Margaretha L. Dueck 1885-1968, by J.A. Reimer and Emil Reimer, 1992.

Katherina Penner Friesen 1871-1952

Katherina Penner Friesen 1871-1952, Mrs. Klaas I. Friesen: A Brief Biography; by Mary Ann Loewen, Box 21441, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2T3.

Katherina P. Penner was born in South Russia on January 14, 1871, to Peter Harms Penner and Helen Penner: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 26-29, for information regarding her family roots.

Katharina was a middle child in a family of 12. In 1874, at the age of three, she migrated with her family to Kansas. But five years later, when she was eight, the Penners moved to Manitoba, where they settled in the village of Blumenort and established a successful farm. Evidently the Penners joined the Holdeman church in 1882, although it seems that Katherina did not.

When she was 18, on September 1, Katharina married her neighbour, Klaas I. Friesen, son of Blumenort village mayor Abram M. Friesen: see *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, pages 48-49 for information regarding his family.

They probably lived on the Friesen parents' farmstead until 1893 when parents and married children left the village and moved onto a separate quarter section in the Greenland area. Here, close to Klaas' parents' place, they ran a small farm. Despite the fact that Abram M. Friesen's diary notes that Klaas and Katherina had their own farm, house and oxen, the 1898 municipal tax roll records show that Klaas I. Friesen, age 30 and father of five children, owned no land, and no livestock other than one cow. This fact would coincide with the stories the grandchildren remember about their great-grandfather. They recall that his sense of business was not very good, and that they just barely managed to "eke out a living" [Katie Reimer].

After ten years on the farm in Greenland, they moved to Steinbach, where they lived in the southern section of town, later described as "behind the Vogt store" [Erna Thiessen]: see

Preservings, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part One, page 61, for photos of these premises.

Together, Klaas and Katherina had nine children, six of whom were girls. These Friesen girls, according to my father and Katherina's grandson, Wilbert Loewen, were known to "turn heads" with their red hair and attractive physical features. Klaas had a livery stable and Katherina ran a "guest house". Klaas also hauled gravel for the town, and goods for people, with his team of horses, from Steinbach to the train station at Giroux.

As the need for horse-drawn freight service decreased with the coming of motorized vehicles, the family moved to the Prairie Rose settlement to once again try their hand at farming. They lived here from 1920 to 1927, when Klaas died, likely from either asthma or heart disease. At this time Katherina moved to Steinbach with her only unmarried child, 17 year-old Alfred.

In spite of obvious hardships in life, Katherina seems to have maintained a reputation as a "jolly, happy person" with a "one-sided" smile [Elvira Penner]. According to my father, she was known as "die dicke Grossmom" in order to differentiate her from the paternal grandmother, Mrs. C.B. Loewen, known as "die denne Grossmom". Katherina is remembered as someone with an obvious interest in both conversation and food. Elvira Penner, a grandchild, remembers well how her grandmother always liked to sit in the middle of the table during a meal, so as not to miss out on either the conversation taking place around her, or the food being consumed. Other grandchildren associate specific foods with their grandmother; Wilbert Loewen, remembers specifically her popcorn balls, and Elvira Penner remembers her

gingersnaps.

Unlike her husband, Katherina was aware of the business side of life. From oral accounts by various grandchildren, it seems that this side of Katherina came out when she helped her youngest child, Alfred, run a raspberry farm after moving back to Steinbach in 1927. Katherina was the one who knew exactly how many baskets of berries had been picked and how much each basket was worth. (Incidentally, it seems that Alfred had a special place in his mother's heart; this sentiment was apparently "common knowledge" amongst the grandchildren.)

According to some accounts Katherina was not a humble woman. An awareness of appearance was apparently not lost on her. Elvira Penner says that her grandmother was very proud when she, Elvira, was born, because she was the first grandchild with brown eyes. Wilbert Loewen recalls how activity would centre around grandmother, and Helen Eidse recounts her grandmother's love of the game Chinese Checkers, and that when playing with the grandchildren, she would somehow always manage to win!

There are several humorous stories about Mrs. Friesen that have surfaced through the interview process. One of them comes from Helen Eidse. It goes as follows: Mr. Friesen says to Mrs. Friesen, "The Penners can simply not get along in life without incessant talking!" To which Mrs. Friesen replies, "Yes, but what can the Friesens not get along in life without? The Penners!"

Another story comes from Norma Martens. She tells us about the time when Katherina's "English" daughter-in-law, Frances, came over to borrow sugar. Frances, trying her hand at Low German, asked for "zucker", and Katherina,



The Klaas I. and Katherina Penner Friesen family in 1927 shortly before the death of Klaas I. Friesen. Left to right: sons Alfred, Paul, Frank, the parents, Klaas I. Friesen and Katharina Penner Friesen, and daughters Katharina, Mrs. Cornelius K. Friesen; Helena, Mrs. C. T. Loewen; Margaretha, Mrs. Jakob T. Loewen; Anna, Mrs. John R. Barkman; Maria, Mrs. Peter D. Reimer; and Pauline, Mrs. Henry D. Reimer.

likely wanting to impress her daughter-in-law with her knowledge of the English language, answered her using the English form of the word, "sugar".

A third story is told by Katherina's daughter, Margaret, Mrs. Jakob T. Loewen. Apparently, in Katherina's early years of marriage, there was a day which found her home alone with pre-school children, feeling extremely lonely and unwell; her husband was away at a lumber camp east of Giroux. When suddenly she saw her parents-in-law's old dog on the yard, she had an idea; she wrote a note and tied it around the dog's neck and sent the animal home. She was rewarded when Abraham M. Friesen, her father-in-law, saw the note on the dog, retrieved and read it, and at once hitched horses to the sleigh and came over with two of his daughters, bringing treats for the small children.

Katherina was a member of the Kleine

Gemeinde church. Some of her children, however, became members of the E.M.B. church. One of these was her son, Paul. When his daughter, Elvira, married Archie Penner, who was not only a Kleine Gemeinde, but a Kleine Gemeinde preacher, there was great rejoicing!

Most of the informants agreed that grandmother had diabetes. It is a known fact that Katherina had to have a leg amputated at the knee, a result, according to Erna Thiessen, of "poor circulation". This amputation was hard not only on Katherina, but also on the grandchildren; they found it hard to see their grandmother this way.

Katherina, Mrs. Klaas I. Friesen, died on Oct. 14, 1952, at the age of 81 years.

As a footnote, I would like to thank my father, Wilbert Loewen, for interviewing the following people: Elvira Penner, Norma Martens, Katie Reimer, Erna Thiessen, Ben L. Giesbrecht,

and Helen Eidse. These are all grandchildren to Katherina. It is partly from taped telephone conversations with these people, and from talks with my father, that I got my material.

I would also like to make a personal observation. In listening to this information about my great-great grandmother, I was struck by the similarity between this woman and my own grandmother, Margaret Friesen, Mrs. Jakob T. Loewen, right down to the winning of Chinese Checker games! Perhaps my own son's propensity for the game of Chess has its origins in the 1860s!

Sources:

Loewen, Melvin J. *The Descendants of Klaas I. Friesen and Katherina Penner*. 1997.

Friesen, C.W. and Peter J. Penner. *The Peter Penner Genealogy*, 1973.

Friesen, Abram P., et. al. *The Von Riesen-Friesen Genealogy*. 1966.

Margaretha Frantz Enns (1892-1959)

Margaretha Frantz Enns (1892-1959); by Margaret Thiessen Rempel, Box 52, R.R.#1, Ste. Anne, Manitoba, R0A 1R0.

"Bless this heart that holds within it far more than it can carry of grief and the disabling pain of multitudes, yet knows that You would ask of it no more than it can bear and so it bows in gratitude, making the most of amazing grace." (Note One)

Introduction.

Gathering stories of the life of Margaretha (Frantz) Enns is indeed testimony to an incredible abundance of amazing grace. She was truly a gracious woman. To say that Margaretha's earthly journey was difficult is of course, an understatement, but much more than that, her response to the journey she encountered in her life is a very powerful witness to her faith in God; a daily, sustaining and nurturing faith.

Family Background.

Born on August 10, 1892, Margaretha was the sixth child of Heinrich and Barbara (Rempel) Frantz. Their home and Margaretha's place of birth was the village of Sarona in the Crimea of southern Russia, not far from the Kapasy River. Her mother's family had moved to the Crimea in the early 1870s, from the village of Rudnerwiede, in the Ukraine.

"Heinrich Frantz had a store in Sarona at the edge of the village toward the mountains. He lived happily and contentedly. On the side he was a carpenter and constructed all kinds of household items. In 1892 he travelled to Charkov to make purchases as he often did. On the return trip he got chilled and came

home sick. He contracted pneumonia and died on October 7, 1892, and was buried in the cemetery in Sarona"(Note Two).

Margaretha was barely two months old when her father died, leaving her mother with six children, the eldest being only eleven years of age. Barbara (Rempel) Frantz remarried the following year, to Abraham Giesbrecht (born January 7, 1868, Buragan, Crimea) (Note Three). Abraham was a widower with one young son. He and his new wife moved their family to Shirin, where Barbara had a dry goods store. Five more children were born to Abraham and Barbara. By 1900 they had purchased more land, and built up their business interests. A thriving mill (five storeys in height by 1914) was a significant part of their financial success.

As a young girl growing up in Shirin, Margaretha enjoyed swimming at nearby picnic sites along the river. In later years she would often tell her own daughters of her

family's adventurous sailing excursions on the Black Sea. Her love of and fascination with the sea is preserved on a canvas she painted in 1919, appropriately and poignantly titled: "Bewearte See" (The Restless Sea).

The rich music tradition, a very significant part of Mennonite faith and worship, was also Margaretha's personal favourite expression of that which was meaningful to her soul. She was baptized on May 27, 1910 by Elder Heinrich Dirks (a missionary to India) and accepted into the membership of the Crimea Mennonite Church.

She appreciated the opportunity to learn to play the "fuss harmonium" (pump organ). She had a strong soprano voice and loved to sing. She was known in the community as the "sing voglein" (the song bird). A local school teacher organized a children's choir, one of the first in those Mennonite circles. (The first years of the choir's existence, they had to sing in unison only, as singing in harmony was



Home of Margaretha Frantz 1893, Shirin, Crimea. This was the *Wirtschaft* or village farm of Abraham Giesbrecht, step-father of Margaretha Frantz Enns.

considered to be too proud and worldly.)

Margaretha's artistic talents were also channelled into the area of fashion design. She studied "pattern making" and was a creative and accomplished seamstress.

Marriage, 1914.

During these years, Margaretha's oldest brother, Johannes, was working as a foreman on the estate of a Martens' family near Tastshenak. When the elderly mother of his employer suffered paralysis and needed a nurse maid, Johannes suggested they send for his sister. Margaretha accepted the request,



1910. Margaretha Frantz, later Mrs. David Enns, at 18 years of age.

and during this time met David Enns, whose family owned the neighbouring estate. They continued to correspond after she returned to Shirin.

Margaretha married David D. Enns (born June 21, 1886; died April 27, 1973) on August 14, 1914. Rev. Heinrich Friesen served as the officiating minister. The couple moved out of the Crimea to the estate of her husband's family near Tastshenak, Ukraine.

Anarchy, 1919.

By 1919, the violence and political chaos of the Russian Revolution forced David Enns' parents, his brother Johann and his family, and David and Margaretha and their two young daughters (Katherine, born January 8, 1916

and Barbara, born October 31, 1918) to flee to Halbstadt. They all took refuge in a house owned by the father-in-law of David's brother Gerhard. Margaretha and David credited their Russian employees for helping to save their lives, warning them in advance of the Machnov bandits' arrival, and giving them advice on which roads were safe for travel.

Three more daughters were born to them in Halbstadt: Margarete, born December 21, 1919, Elfriede, born and died July 4, 1921, and Maria, born August 7, 1922. Several months after Maria was born Margaretha and David moved into one and a half rooms in the home of a widow, Mrs. Peter Unruh, in nearby Muntau. Mrs. Unruh's three youngest children were also still living with her.

Life was very difficult during the years in Halbstadt and Muntau. Fear was everyone's constant companion. Fear of hunger and its accompanying illnesses was well-founded in the large number of deaths in the Mennonite communities in the Ukraine. Fear of having a family member "rejected" for emigration to Canada, due to health reasons, was ever present. But without a doubt, the greatest fear of all was the dreaded "knock on the door in the middle of the night". Many women witnessed the execution or disappearance of their fathers, husbands, and sons. Many women experienced the terror of rape, especially gang rape by the Machnov anarchists.

As the famine intensified, Margaretha's daughters recall their monotonous menu: a daily soup made from an onion, a handful of rice, and water. The children already hated the thought of going with their mother to pick up their ration of rice from the 'relief centre' and on occasion they even complained to their mother. Her response was simple: children who did not eat rice were not allowed into



Margaretha Frantz, being courted by David D. Enns, at her family home, Shirin, Crimea.

Canada. It was effective psychology at work. Everyone was already anxiously anticipating the opportunity to find refuge from all the terror by emigrating to Canada. It had become the ideal, the dream, the goal, the best solution to their troubled lives.

Throughout the hardships and uncertainties of these years, the daughters all agree that they never felt any anger or heard any vengeful words from their mother. Margaretha was not a woman to dwell in the past or pine for what was lost. She was after all, a young woman, just thirty years of age. She had moved away from her home and family, borne five children (burying one of them at birth), experienced the loss of their land and virtually all their material possessions, fled from their home to live in crowded quarters for five years with four young children, struggled with hunger and 'blue stone' treatments due to trachoma (an infection of the eyes), as well as coping with all the fears and uncertainties of those violent times. For Margaretha, strength and courage and daily peace came from her faith. That evil was rampant around them was never equated with abandonment by God. Her Creator and Saviour knew of her plight, and was the source from which she could look and work toward the future.

Christmas Eve 1922.

Her daughters, Katherine and Barbara, tell of being woken from their sleep one evening in winter. They were dressed and the family quietly slipped across the street to a house with darkened windows. It was the first time in their lives that the girls saw a Christmas tree, candies brightly burning. (It was Christmas Eve, 1922.) Several families gathered to read the biblical account of the birth of Christ, and to sing, albeit quietly, the beloved "Welchen Jubel, welche Freude". Each child received a cookie and a small handmade gift. Their mothers had managed this very special and wonderful surprise!

The daughters have several other memories of these years. They remember the emphasis placed on being quiet much of the time, and especially so in the evenings. Toys were as scarce as food, but they speak of the fact that there was 'a lot of love' around. Margaretha may not have been able to give her daughters any of the perks and privileges her grandchildren and great-grandchildren would someday take for granted, but her heart was full of much more important treasures to be shared. There was no limit to her love, and it made her children feel reassured and secure, surrounded though they might be, by atrocities of unspeakable dimension. Long before they were able to articulate it, Margaretha's daughters knew of the source of their mother's incredible strength for those days when discouragement and hopelessness and danger threatened.

There were no trained counsellors or medications available to deal with the grief and pain. Church leaders and teachers, some of whom may have been in a position to offer

continued from previous page

formal counsel, were often among the first to be removed [sent to labour camp or murdered] from the villages. People had to rely on each other and their internal resources to see them through. That their capacity to love and care for one another in a measure much greater than the enormity of their suffering remains an impressive testimony to all who explore the stories of their lives.

Crimea, 1924.

Margaretha's determination and strength were evidenced in the spring of 1924. It appeared as though the family's papers were in order and they would be able to leave the country soon. Margaretha wanted to travel to the Crimea to say good-bye to her parents and siblings. Since it was much too dangerous for her husband to travel, she packed up her four young daughters, managed train fare, and travelled alone to Neu Shirin.

The girls recall the sheer enjoyment of that visit. Life there was still peaceful; the farms, businesses and villages still beautiful and flourishing. What a delight to play, with laughing abandon, in the flower gardens and orchards with their cousins! The grandparents wanted Margaretha to leave Barbara with them. They still felt that the bad times would soon be over and they would be re-united. Margaretha would not hear of it. Her girls would stay with her. She would take care of them. Whatever came, they would deal with it, but they would stay together as a family. The daughters remember Margaretha's tears

when the time came to say farewell. They sensed that they would never see these relations again; that there was something quite final about this parting.



Passport picture, Mrs. Margaretha Frantz Enns and her husband David D. Enns, with daughters Katherine 8, Barbara 6, Mary 2 and Margarete 5.

Emigration, 1924.

Back in Muntau, the first group of families had already left and a second group had received permission to travel by train to Latvia, and the port city of Riga. Some of the men had scrubbed the cattle cars clean and built bunks and hung blankets to form small compartments. The children were very excited about the anticipated trip, but Margaretha had to come to terms with the emotional pain of leaving her entire family behind. On the other hand, all of her husband's siblings and their families, as well as his parents, (who had all left with the first group out of the Ukraine) were emigrating to Canada.

Once en route, (leaving July 20, 1924) their journey was of course, interrupted frequently by soldiers' inspections. Everyone lived in fear of being put off the train. As with other trainloads of Mennonite people fleeing from the oppression, the cars carrying Margaretha and her family and friends, burst into song at the moment when the train passed through the "Red Gate" into Latvia and freedom.

The family spent several days in Southampton, England, waiting for medical clearance and other paper work to be completed. On July 29, 1924 they set sail across the Atlantic Ocean on the "Empress of France". For Margaretha the entire voyage was summed up in one word: "seasickness". David and daughter Katherine, however, were spared that discomfort. Katherine enjoyed playing with her cousins, and going to the

ship's kitchen, where the cook would give them oranges (the first Katherine had ever eaten). The ship arrived in Quebec City on August 8, 1924. (It would be another seventeen years before the "Reise Schuld" (travel debt) would be paid in full.)

Arrival in Canada.

Upon clearing Canadian customs, Margaretha and David and their daughters boarded a train once more. This time their destination was southern Ontario. Together with the family of David's older brother Johann Enns (born April 24, 1877, married to Eva Neufeld, children: Johnny and Anna), they went to live with the Wesley Witmer family on a farm near Kitchener. The Witmer's had seven children. Their household of nine swelled to nineteen overnight.

Everyone involved seems to have remembered these months as a wonderful time. The fear of death was removed. The travelling temporarily over. The children played for long hours in the orchard and thrilled to eating the freshly picked apples. (The Witmer children apparently cried a lot when it was time to say good-bye to their new immigrant friends. In later years, the Enns' sisters asked them if they had not resented all these people crowding into their home. The Witmers' response was that they'd had a great time!)

Dominion City, 1925.

Within a few months, several farms, available for rent from a Mr. Anderson, had been located near Dominion City, Manitoba. (Wesley Witmer and his wife begged the Enns clan to stay with them till spring, convinced it was not wise to move out onto the Canadian prairies in winter.) However, in February of 1925 a group of about eight Russian Mennonite families moved to the Dominion City area. Margaretha Enns and her family were part of that group.

The farmsite (five miles northeast of Dominion City) to which they were directed had a reasonably large house and several out-buildings. Margaretha's brother and sister-in-law, Johann and Eva Enns and their two children moved into the upstairs. David's sister Anna, and her husband Gerhard Enns, with children Alice and George, occupied one of the main floor bedrooms, while Margaretha's parents-in-law, David (April 12, 1847-Feb. 11, 1926) and Katherine (Schroeder) Enns (? - Feb. 1, 1927) joined with these three of their children's families, taking up residence in the other main floor bedroom. All families shared the kitchen and dining space.

However, that left Margaretha and David



Margaretha Frantz and David D. Enns, engagement picture 1912.

and their four little girls still needing a roof over their heads. A small chicken barn was located in relative proximity to the house, so it was quickly cleaned and white-washed and divided into two small rooms. (A small lean-to kitchen area was added later.) Margaretha's resourcefulness and attention to detail soon were in evidence. Flour sacks were acquired, washed and bleached. Margaretha's talent with a needle and thread soon had lovely cut-work designs on these re-cycled sacks.

They hung to frame freshly scrubbed windows with red, potted geraniums on the sills. The daughters were sent to gather stones of uniform size and shape, which were then white-washed and neatly laid to border a path to the house. Perhaps it was a manifestation of the artist within her, but to Margaretha, bringing beauty and order to one's (visible) life reflected a process of bringing order and beauty to one's (invisible) soul. A pencil sketch (of a deer standing at the edge of the woods near Dominion City) done on the back of a calendar, gives another glimpse of Margaretha's artistic talent. Obviously she took a few moments now and then for an activity that many others of her time considered unimportant, or even frivolous.

Perhaps it should be noted that the 'chicken barn turned family dwelling' was the first time in the eleven years of their marriage that David and Margaretha were living in a 'house' of their own, i.e. not shared with members of other families. The older girls were absolutely thrilled with their new home. Of course, for the first while at least, they continued to prepare and eat their meals with the other families in the big house, as well as gardening and working together daily. One obvious question which comes to mind: how did the women of this era cope with the strains and stresses of poverty and being crowded into rather tight living arrangements for so many years?

Reflections.

Margaretha's daughters look back on their mother and her peers with much admiration. These women were incredibly tolerant, sharing each other's burdens and pain, but also their daily joys. Being able to share their feelings with others who had experienced many of the same sorrows was indeed therapeutic. The gift of freedom from the violence and persecution of the last years in the Ukraine gave much momentum to the ability to cope.

And cope they did. Although a few women (and some men as well) apparently, did find it difficult to adjust from the wealth they had once known, wanting for nothing, to the serious poverty that was now theirs for the foreseeable future. However, like the majority of the women, Margaretha rose to the challenge of making do. Hardship was unable to rob her of her love of singing. Sometimes her husband accompanied her on his mouth organ or simply whistled along. More often her strong soprano voice was ably complemented by the equally lovely alto voice of her sister-in-law,



Family portrait 1947. Front row, left to right: Eleanore Rempel, Katherine Rempel holding Irma, Eric Rempel, Margaretha Enns, David D. Enns, Elfrieda Quiring, Vivian Quiring, Mary Banman holding Marilyn. Back row: Gerhard Rempel, Barbara Banman, Jakob Banman holding Robert, Henry Quiring, Margarete Quiring, John Banman.

Eva. The two women sang many, many hours while they worked at the daily tasks of feeding and clothing and caring for their families. These two women never argued or even disagreed. Everyone, or so it seemed, was trying to do their best to adjust to the times and circumstances. The extended family ties were strong and supportive.

To this day, sisters Katherine, Barbara, Margaret, and Mary are often asked why it is that they are so close. Despite quite different personalities, gifts and abilities, and on some topics, quite different opinions, they get along very well and evidence a deep and caring love for each other, spending time together frequently. They feel they were deeply influenced by the role their mother modelled to them: to cherish and enjoy, to show tolerance and acceptance, to recognize that love for others is much more important than any differences of opinion which may occur from time to time.

It seems there was no need for harsh discipline. Margaretha preferred the "talk to them" method. On occasion, the daughters recall having an opportunity to think about their actions or misdeeds while standing in a corner. Certainly most of the time they enjoyed being with their mother. Her happy disposition, her stories and songs turned chores like shelling peas, cutting up beans, piling wood, and churning butter into fun activities that the daughters and their cousins enjoyed doing. The children competed to be assigned to various chores, as opposed to wishing those chores could be avoided! Strong evidence to some enviable parenting skills.

The Immigrant Experience.

Nonetheless there were an abundance of

difficulties and challenges to life in Dominion City. The land was so different, the winters were so cold, the physical labour was difficult, and the resources and material rewards were few. On his family's estate, David had been a very capable and efficient manager. He was not used to long hours walking behind a plow or disc, and without adequate footwear (in fact, without any footwear on some occasions) his feet became painfully swollen and cracked. When he came in from the field in the evening, Margaretha would wash her husband's feet in buttermilk in an attempt to moisturize and heal them. She then bound them carefully for the night. It was all a part of being there for each other.

In the last couple of decades our much more sedentary society is encouraged to take up a serious regimen of physical exercise as a way to cope with stress. For Margaretha, David, and the others, physical work was, perhaps unknowingly, a form of stress management. There were few idle moments available for self-pity, and their tired bodies meant that they slept soundly at night.

From time to time, aid would arrive from their American Mennonite brothers and sisters, in the form of bundles of used clothing. Margaretha and the other immigrant women would then gather to sort and distribute the articles. This was accomplished in a spirit of unity and caring. They were most appreciative of the assistance and not about to be greedy or selfish about the contents. They needed each other, not only for physical survival, but also for spiritual encouragement: the latter was most important. When they gathered in one of the homes for Sunday worship, they wanted to do so with a clear conscience before God and each other.

continued on next page

Another hurdle to face in Dominion City was the alienation and lack of acceptance they felt as immigrants. Language, of course, was one of the obstacles in the way of understanding others in the community as well as being better understood. Margaretha was both tolerant and creative in these situations. Her daughter Barbara was left-handed, and her first and second grade teacher had not been bothered by this 'oddity'. However, grade three meant Miss Bruce, and many raps across the knuckles for writing with the 'wrong' hand. At home, Barbara would seek her mother's sympathy. No doubt, Margaretha felt somewhat helpless to effect change in this situation, but throughout the year, she gently encouraged her daughter to concentrate on learning all she could, rather than on the adversity she was experiencing because of her left-handedness.

With regard to acceptance in the community, circumstances took a turn for the better. Margaretha may have felt helpless in some situations, but she certainly never missed an opportunity when it presented itself. One day, Katherine's school teacher reminded the students that the community summer fair was coming up soon. The students were encouraged to enter their samples of darning, hem-stitching, embroidery, and so on. Katherine was quite excited when she passed this information on to her mother after school.

Margaretha responded with enthusiastic support. Daughter Barbara was too young for the sewing competitions, but her mother suggested she gather some flowers, and coached her in arranging a basket to enter. Many of the Mennonite girls, including Katherine and Barbara, walked away from that fair with first-place ribbons. More important they walked away with new respect and acceptance in their community. It was a turning point; the beginning of the feeling that now they belonged in Canada.

Grunthal, 1927.

By 1927, a number of Mennonite families from the Grunthal area were preparing for a move to Paraguay. They had farms and livestock and equipment available for purchase. David and his brother Johann were able to lease one of these farms (located almost two miles west of the junction of PR 216 and PR 303), from the National Trust Company. The proceeds of one half of all produce (milk, eggs, calves, crops, etc.) went towards the lease payments. Fifty percent of gross income seems like an economically harsh payment schedule, especially as the small farm had to support four adults and six growing children. The country, in fact much of the world, was in the midst of the Great Depression during these years. However, the Enns families always had a garden and the women were even able to can extra produce for the MCI at Gretna and the hospital in Steinbach.

The move to Grunthal afforded participation in a more traditional congregational church setting. The Enns' families became members at Elim Mennonite Church in

Grunthal. The children enjoyed the opportunity to go to Sunday School and later to participate in choir and youth activities. Margaretha enjoyed serving as part of the women's group. She was also frequently called upon by families in the community, to prepare the bodies of loved ones for burial upon their death.

In 1936 Johann and Eva Enns decided to move to southern Ontario's Niagara Peninsula. The two families then left the farm, and David and Margaretha built a small home one and a half miles north of Grunthal, (on PR 216). They continued to farm on a small scale. Katherine had been working as a domestic in Winnipeg since 1932, followed by sister Barbara two years later, and sister Margarete in 1936. The girls' earnings were used to pay for their parents' house, and also toward pay-



Margaretha Frantz Enns and daughters 1958. Rear: Barbara and Katherine; front: Margarete and Mary.

ment of the 'Reise Schuld' (travel debt). That moment finally arrived on July 30, 1941, when the document was stamped: "payment received in full"!

Margaretha would have dearly loved for her daughters to be able to continue their education, but it seemed that economic considerations were stacked against that desire. When relatives living in Winnipeg offered to provide Barbara with room and board so she could attend high school, Margaretha, despite her limited ability in the English language, and particularly in writing the language, did write a letter to the board of the Pinkham School in Winnipeg, requesting permission for her daughter to attend classes there. The response indicated a student fee would need to be paid upfront. Sadly, there was simply no money to pay the fee. However, not succeeding had never prevented Margaretha from trying.

During those years in Grunthal news

reached Margaretha that the conflicts in the 'old country' had reached the Crimea, and her siblings were starving. She put her talent for sewing into an even higher gear, giving lessons on how to make patterns as well as sewing numerous bridal gowns. Her daughters often helped her take apart old garments, re-using the pieces to create 'new' articles of clothing. The money earned was used to send food parcels to her family.

(The Frantz family were eventually exiled to the north. Margaretha's mother, Barbara (Rempel Frantz) Giesbrecht died of a stroke in Alma Ata on February 22, 1938. Her stepfather, Abraham Giesbrecht also died in Alma Ata on March 3, 1938 after a very difficult sickness, being both blind and deaf by that time.) (Note Four)

Retirement, 1942.

In 1942, Margaretha's own health took a turn for the worse. The very severe pain of acute glaucoma necessitated surgery to remove one of her eyes. Unfortunately sight in the remaining eye also succumbed to the disease. Although she had been accepting and patient with the loss of one eye, losing the other caused her some tears and moments of anguish. She begged the Lord to take a hand or a leg, but please, not her remaining sight. She loved to read, sketch, paint, and sew. How would she be able to write letters to her daughters or her siblings?

In 1953 Margaretha and David moved to Steinbach (128 Barkman Ave.) and by the following year she was virtually blind.

In February of 1959 she suffered several strokes and a heart attack. "Angels carried her up to the Lord" on April 25th. (Note Five)

Margaretha Frantz Enns was a very strong person. The text for the sermon at her funeral was taken from Psalm 73:23-26. Those who knew and loved her still hear the echo of those words in verse 26: "but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (NIV)

Endnotes:

- Note One: Winter, Miriam Therese. *A Psalm of Discipleship, WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter*. New York: Crossroad.
- Note Two: Excerpt from: *A Genealogical Account of Some Russian Mennonite Families: Frantz, Rempel and Matties* by Margaretha (Frantz) Enns; transcribed, translated, & edited by David J. Rempel Smucker, March 11, 1986. p. 21.
- Note Three: *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- Note Four: *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- Note Five: *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Sources:

Other sources used include: Genealogy of Isaak Schroeder, compiled for Abram J. Braun by Katie Peters, Winnipeg. 1973; and the private collection of family documents of Barbara (Enns) Banman, Steinbach.

Special thanks to Barbara (Enns) Banman and Katherine (Enns) Rempel for their patience, and assistance in sorting out details.

Anna Siemens Neufeld (1893-1960)

Anna Siemens Neufeld (1893-1960), by daughter Helen Neufeld Rosenby, 505-71 Roslyn Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 0G2.

Introduction.

Anna (Siemens) Neufeld arrived in Steinbach on March 4th, 1928 - I remember the date because it was my third birthday and I was not at all pleased with our journey from Winnipeg in Mr. Abr. Hiebert's car. (The Mr. Hiebert who owned the second-hand store, the only one in town at that time.) I was squeezed into the back seat with my sister and my two older brothers, (had to stand a lot too), while Mother, holding the baby, sat up front. It did not occur to me at the time that Mother and the rest of them were probably a good deal unhappier than I.

Family Background.

Anna, the second daughter of Julius and Katharine Siemens was born in Schoenwiese, in South Russia Dec. 10th, 1893. She had two younger sisters and two brothers. Her father was "Schult" in Schoenwiese, quite an important position I understand and as his office was in his home, many people came to the house and the family was well known in the town.

Unfortunately I never knew my grandparents as my grandmother died in Russia shortly before my parents immigrated to Canada and my Grandfather who was unable to leave Russia as he stayed behind to care for his epileptic son who died some years later. I understand my grandfather was a very congenial and generous person and my grandmother a very intelligent and well-read woman. In her later years she was able to indulge herself in her quest for knowledge--she was known to lock herself in a room to avoid being disturbed by the children, and read.

By the time Anna and her older sister, Katharine, were young adults, their parents were "comfortable" and the girls received a good education which, of course, included cooking, sewing and keeping house and all that it implies.

When Anna was 16, Katherine's suitor, Julius Martens, brought a friend, Abraham Neufeld to the Siemens home and introduced him to Anna----it was love at first sight. After a courtship of three years, they were married in Schoenwiese, April 27, 1913. We were always told that the celebrations lasted three days. Anna's sister Katherine had married her beau, Julius Martens, a year previously.

War, Revolution, 1917.

As we all know, these happy and prosperous days were soon to end for the Siemens, the Neufelds and most, if not all, Mennonites and so many, many others.

My father Abr. Neufeld, was in the "Sanitaets Dienst, Medical Corps" during the

war and was stationed in Moscow a long way from his young wife. He was away when her first baby was born (stillborn). He was still in the service and not home when her second baby (Anni) was born. Anna in the meantime had gone to live in her parent's home where little Anni was the centre of attraction in a housefull of adults. The child was



Wedding photo of Anna Siemens and Abram Neufeld, April 27, 1913, Zaporizhye, Russia, now Ukraine. Photo courtesy of daughter-in-law Frieda Neufeld, Steinbach, Manitoba.

two years old before her father returned home and the little family was able to move into a house of their own. (I believe the house belonged to my grandfather Siemens.) Naturally a period of adjustment followed.

My father was employed as accountant in the firm of Lepp & Wallman and there-

fore had certain privileges, such as an electric light bulb in the home, etc. (The marauders, when threatening to take this light bulb would respectfully leave it when they were told that it was essential for my father since he required it when doing work at home for the Firm)

We have all heard the stories of the chaos, the marauders, the revolution and the turmoil, etc. and as so many others, the Neufeld family was anxious to escape (The family had increased with the birth of two sons, Herman and Victor).

Emigration 1923.

In 1923 they were very grateful to leave the Russia they had loved but seen torn asunder. As with most other immigrants, the first years in Canada were very difficult and I'm sure my mother was not really overjoyed when in 1924 she became pregnant and I was born in March, 1925. At that time we were living on the Sheldon Farm near Hanley, Saskatchewan. Since my father was an accountant by profession and spoke English when he arrived in Canada, he was assigned to do the purchasing for the commune.

He had had dreams of actually farming when he came to Canada--it was not to be. On May 27, 1927 he became very ill. The doctor was unable to diagnose his illness and decided to take him to the hospital. My father died in the doctor's car en route to the hospital--presumably of a perforated appendix.

My father had had the foresight to buy a life insurance policy shortly after arriving in



Passport picture of the Abram Neufeld family 1923. Abram Neufeld and wife Anna Siemens, with children l. to r.: Herman, Anna and Victor. Just prior to immigration. Photo courtesy of daughter-in-law Frieda Neufeld, Steinbach, Manitoba.

continued from previous page

Canada. That probably was responsible for my mother being able to take her family to Winnipeg, and later make a payment on a house and keep the family together.

Two of Anna Neufeld's three sisters had also been able to leave Russia and come to Canada. Her older sister, Katharine Martens, had been widowed in Russia; she and her three daughters lived in Winnipeg.

The youngest of Mother's siblings, Mary, had married Isaac Klassen in Russia and they were also in Winnipeg. And so Isaac Klassen, a dreamer, an artist, a philosopher (and later minister at First Mennonite Church) had the responsibility of advising and comforting and aiding two distressed widows and a young wife.

Steinbach, 1928.

After Mother's baby, (Ernest) was born in Winnipeg, she was advised to go to Steinbach. It was a Mennonite community where German was spoken and she would not have the added problem of the language barrier. It was also a rural community where fresh produce (and fresh air) would be available for the children, especially the rather delicate new baby.

With the money remaining from the meagre insurance money, Mother was able to make a payment on a house on Main Street, across from the Kleine Gemeinde Church at the south end: see "Steinbach Main Street: Part Three," in Part One of this newsletter for information regarding these premises.

The house was one of the original pioneer homes with attached summer kitchen, wood shed, barn and machine shed. It was on a large parcel of land with tall poplar trees along the front, an orchard with crabapple, plum and cherry trees. The garden was bordered by currant and raspberry and gooseberry bushes. In the front yard was an old wooden swing with two benches, there were lilac bushes and a large sandbox. An ideal spot to live and raise a family.

Furthermore, the house had been subdivided so that several families could occupy the premises and the income would enable Mother to make the payments on the house, pay the taxes, etc. (She of course also had the "Reiseschuld" hanging over her head.) Mother was an expert seamstress so she would make her living by sewing for the ladies in town. She was so happy to have a roof over her head, her children were healthy and she was safe in Canada.

The Krueger family was living in part of the house when we first arrived. They were also an immigrant family from Russia, the mother, three grown daughters and a son. I believe they were at that time building a house across the street and only lived in our house until they were able to occupy their new home. Mother in the meantime had become very friendly with this family and they remained the best of friends always.

Mrs. Krueger died not long after our arrival in Steinbach. John, the son built a machine shop near the new home on Main

For a short period of time Mother attended night school to learn English. She also took every opportunity to take part in our lessons to improve her English and she read anything that was available, which was not too much at that time. When the Krueger ladies went to Winnipeg to shop, they would frequently take Mother with them to act as interpreter (John Krueger by this time had a car of his own).

Moving.

This was the time of the depression and though the tenants who rented the little apartments in our house were good people, they too were poor and often unable to pay their rent. The yard and the garden were lovely but the children were too young to be of much help to look after them and Mother could not possibly sew to make a living and look after the yard and the family as well. She had also acquired a cow and a few chickens. Unfortunately the poor cow, one beast in the cold, big barn, succumbed to the cold one winter and that important food source was gone.

After Mother had struggled with these problems for some three or four years, the real estate agent (?), a Mr. Kroecker saw that it was impossible for Mother to make the mortgage payments and pay the taxes and he made her an offer so that at least she would not lose the house. He had for sale a smaller house, on a smaller yard in the north end of town and perhaps she would be able to handle that. It must have been with a heavy heart that she made this trade. The house was certainly smaller as was the yard and it was only the knowledge that she would be able eventually to take title to the property and manage the upkeep that she consented and was indeed grateful in spite of the difference in the two homes. (My brother describes the house so well in his book, *EARNESTLY*.)

The house had been moved twice and had no insulation. It must also have been pretty shaken up in the move. The soil which had been dug up to make the basement, had been dumped on the garden and certainly did nothing to make it very productive. There was not a shrub or a tree on the yard or a speck of paint on the house or on the small barn at the back of the property. The basement was full of water which Mother and the two older boys carried out with buckets. They worked so hard to make the house liveable. They also had to remove layers of old wall paper and



Anna Siemens Neufeld, in retirement. Photo courtesy of daughter-in-law Frieda Neufeld, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Street, the two sisters were seamstresses and the eldest sister kept house for the family. Their buildings were on a large piece of land and except for a large garden served as a pasture for their cow. They had also made a tennis court on this land and Mother in the little leisure time she had loved to go and have a game of tennis.

In the spring when the snow melted, a large portion of this land would be covered with water which would freeze at night. Mother would get up a 5 a.m. to go skating before her children awoke and the ice melted. I don't know how often she was able to enjoy these activities but I've always admired her for taking advantage of the opportunities to indulge in a bit of outdoor recreation.

cover the walls with "Calcimine", probably the cheapest coating available.

My sister by this time had gone to Winnipeg to work as a domestic and I had to stay home to look after my little brother.

The Campbell family were good friends of ours. There were three children in the family whose ages corresponded to that of three children in our family and we had become friends at kindergarten (in my case) and at school. Mr. Campbell was an attorney and, as was the custom in those days, was occasionally "paid in kind" for his services. Having heard that we had suffered the loss of our cow, "Nancy" (a sweet and gentle, generously productive Holstein, with no horns), he made Mother a proposition (knowing that



Daughter Helen and son Ernie Neufeld on the steps of their second Steinbach home on Main Street, north.

our mother was not one to accept favours or hand-outs). He said he had taken a cow as payment and he would give us the cow, if we would share the milk with his family. This, of course, was a godsend for us, as we could not possibly afford to buy a cow.

This cow was soon named "Bossie" because we very soon discovered that she did not like children and she had horns and would not stand for any patting. We always disliked her and gave her a wide berth but she did her job--supplied two families with milk and as a bonus sometimes produced a calf in the spring.

Character.

Mother never professed to be very fond of children but somehow the children in the neighbourhood were her friends and would come to visit "Taunte Niefeldsche" just to chat. She did not give them cookies or any other treats but just carried on with her sewing or whatever she was doing while they

told her what they wanted to tell her. (Sometimes maybe personal family matters that their parents would not have been too pleased to have repeated.) I think kids liked her because she treated them like "people".

She did however like "older" young people and as we were growing up our friends were always welcome in our home. They would come for "Fesper" on Sundays and listen while she related her experiences in Russia during the Revolution and after. She loved to tell them and they loved to hear them but we often tired of hearing them repeated. I felt a little resentful at times that she captured their attention and I was left out.

When we came to Steinbach there was not a branch of the Mennonite church to which the family belonged and we attended the Mennonite Brethren Church as Mother believed it was important to be brought up with a religious teaching. She attended the services and we attended Sunday School there until a number of families belonging to the Schoenwieser Church began having services some years later. She was a good Christian and a believer but she also firmly believed that "the Lord helps those who help themselves."

I believe that one thing that kept her going was that she "kept the Sabbath". When the children were young, her week days began at 5 a.m. and she often worked at her sewing or knitting late at night. But Sunday was her day of rest. She would get us up and out to Sunday School with the parting question, "Do you have a clean handkerchief?" She would attend church services, we'd have lunch and she would try to catch a little nap. It was not always easy with us running in and out, slamming screen doors or coming in to tattle about something. She did not have the luxury her mother had to lock herself into another room. Then she would pick up her fancy work which she enjoyed so much until it was time to make Fesper. She never did any sewing for which she would be paid on Sunday.

Family.

When war was declared in 1939 we could not understand why Mother was so upset. After all, the war was so far away, it could not affect us; her three sons were safe.

It was not too long before Mother too faced the empty nest syndrome nor did she have a husband with whom to share it. Anne, the eldest had long since gone to Winnipeg to work and by this time was hoping to get married, but, was still helping to support the family. Herman worked at Vogt Bros. store and contributed to the home until he married Frieda Vogt. Vic had worked at P. Loewen's Garage for a number of years before heading east to Fort William to seek his fortune but joined the R.C.A.F. before too long. Helen (yours truly), had to leave school after Grade X and also go to Winnipeg and do domestic work. Ernie, the youngest, after working at Derksen Printers for a few

years, also headed east to Toronto, leaving Mother alone with only Tibby, the faithful old dog for company.

Mother wrote to tell me there was a position open for a clerk at P. Vogt's Economy Store, at seven dollars a week. I was delighted. I had been very homesick during my year in Winnipeg. Now I would be able to live at home so Mother would not be alone and I'd be making more money. (I had been earning 15 dollars a month.) And perhaps eventually further my education.

After a year at Economy I was offered a job as clerk at McBurney's Drug Store (the only drug store in town at that time). I worked there for three years during which time I was able to complete my Grade XII by attending classes for an hour or so a day. I then went back to the city to work and Mother sold the house in Steinbach and we made our home together for the rest of her life.

In spite of all the hardships she had endured for so many years, she accepted the task of caring for my son, Ernie, to enable me to work and complete my education and get my degree in Pharmacy. We had bought a house in Winnipeg and I had hoped to make life a little easier for her. She still did some sewing for a few of her customers from Steinbach as well as keeping house for us. She still had that pride and liked the feeling of independence that earning a little money on her own gave her. She cared for my son as though he were her own, with plenty of discipline but also so very much love.

His welfare and future were her main concern when at age 66, she was stricken with leukaemia and died November 1, 1960.

Conclusion.

I especially owe her so much more than I can ever say. She was a great lady.

Anna Neufeld was a courageous, totally honest woman but not at all aggressive. She perhaps at times rejected well-intentioned offers of help because of her pride and fierce independence.

Descendants.

The descendants of Anna Siemens Neufeld include her grandson, Steinbach lawyer, John E. Neufeld, Q.C., past-President of the Law Society of Manitoba.

Announcement

The December 1997 issue No. 11 of Preservings will feature the Chortitzer Gemeinde in honour of the 100th anniversary of the worship house at Chortitz, Manitoba, (also known as Randolph), the oldest Mennonite Church in Western Canada still in use today: see article page 34, part one.

The roots of the Chortitzer Gemeinde of the East Reserve go back to the founding of the Chortitzer Colony in Imperial Russia in 1789, over 200 years as a vibrant and vital part of the Church of God.

Katharina Enns Kasdorf

Katharina Enns Kasdorf (1901-97); by granddaughter Ruth Kasdorf Sawatzky, Box 3712, Steinbach, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

Katharina Kasdorf (nee Enns) was one of seven children born to Cornelius and Helena Enns (nee Penner) on February 20, 1901 in Burwalde, Chortitza Colony, South Russia, now called Ukraine (Note One).

Katharina grew up on a farm and worked very hard right from the beginning. Life was difficult, food scarce and Katherina spent her time working when not in school. She helped out on the farm, feeding the threshing machine, feeding animals and the like. Church played a very important role in her life and the Sabbath was always kept. Sundays meant a break from the work and participation in the Sunday morning service.

Anarchy, 1917.

[During the years after the Russian Revolution in 1917 anarchy prevailed in Southern Russia, later Ukraine, as bands of anarchists swept through the country side destroying everything in their path. Many were murdered and women were raped.]

On May 20, 1920, Katharina was baptized on her confession of faith in Jesus Christ as her personal Lord and Saviour by Bishop Isaac Dyck in the Burwalde Mennonite Church. She loved music and could be heard singing often, especially in times of trouble when fear prevailed. Music seemed to soothe the soul and inner peace could be restored. There were many times in her life where fear prevailed..

There was no law enforcement in villages at the time and she remembered as a young adult having to run and hide in the bush around their farm from the bandits that raided the area. She probably would never have married except for the insistence of her father, who felt she would not be safe as a young woman on her own in those living circumstances.

After the Communists had taken control of Russia they confiscated all the farms, including Katherina's home. Many people were loaded up in wagons and sent to Siberia. She escaped Siberia because she was married and

she and her husband Johann Kasdorf moved to Rosengard, a neighbouring village in the Chortitza Colony or so-called "Old Colony".

Marriage, 1930.

The wedding ceremony took place May 10,

work for the government without pay. They subsisted on produce from the garden. She made extra money sewing clothing for others. Their first child was born September 1, 1931 and named Hans (John).

Life continued on for a stretch and Jacob was born in 1933. He did not have very long before he got sick and died of dehydration as an infant. Tina was born March 29, 1936. Another son born August 22, 1938 was named Jacob.

Life seems tremendously unfair at times and this infant got sick as well and died in April, 1939. God blessed Katherina and Johann with a fifth child April 27, 1941 and he was named Gerhard. Through out these years food was scarce and the oldest child kept watch of the younger ones while the parents worked.

WWII, 1941.

After the start of WWII, Katherina was forcefully taken from her home and along with her children and many others loaded onto wagons and taken to Andreafska Region. They were unsure where Johann was as he was on a cattle drive. These refugees were then taken to Liesevetafska railroad station to be loaded onto box cars going to Siberia. Before they could be transported, however, German war planes bombed the railroad and travel was impossible.

Katherina along with some of the other women requested transport back to Rosengard from the German Authorities. The Germans asked the Russians to return the women and children back to their homes. The Russians refused and the German authorities confiscated horses and wagons to transport the

women and children back home.

Back in Rosengard, Katherina and her three children were reunited with husband and father, when Johann returned from the cattle drive.

In 1943 the family again packed up some of their belongings and left by boxcars to Ger-



Wedding Picture, May 10, 1930. Couple on left are Johann and Katharina Enns Kasdorf. Couple on the right are Abraham Hildebrand and Lena Enns Hildebrandt (later Mrs Arndt Lehn). They are the parents of Mrs. Cornie Nikkel, nee Helga Hildebrand, of Steinbach, Manitoba, whose son Rudy Nikkel is a well-known teacher and musician.

1930 and. was performed by Reverend Isaac Klassen in the Burwalde Mennonite Church with a text taken from Romans 12:12 where the apostle Paul writes: "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer "... which in essence has summed up her life.

Both Katherina and Johann did mandatory

many due to Rosengard being under attack. The family settled in Rochlitz, Saxony where they along with many others lived communally in a former dance hall. They slept in bunk beds lined up in rows and ate in a common dining room. Food was hard to come by and living conditions less than ideal but the children did attend school. School was often interrupted by the sirens and everyone would rush to the bomb shelters. Johann worked for a farmer in the area and Katherina worked in a factory.

Before long Johann was conscripted into service in World War II, where eventually he served as an interpreter as he could speak both Russian and German. It is believed that at the end of the war in 1945 Johann was sent to Siberia to a P.O.W. camp.

The Cold War, 1945.

By 1945 the Allied forces had invaded Rochlitz and Germany was divided and a Communist regime was established. Katherina and her children along with many others were forced by Russians to board trailers pulled by tractor and were taken to Leipzig (53 km.) from there they were to be taken to Siberia. But the transports had already left.

Consequently everyone was taken back to Rochlitz. Somehow the group was divided, most were taken away again. However, some, by luck, managed to stay. Katherina and her 3 children were among these.

After a while the family less their father and husband moved to a neighbouring village of Konigsfeld where Hans worked for a few years on a farm while the other 2 children attended school.

Life under Communist rule was intolerable so they packed up late one night and left for a refugee gathering spot close to the border. Katherina and the other women used the last of their money to buy a bottle of vodka to bribe the officials to complete their paperwork to allow them to come across the Iron Curtain to West Germany.

There the family found refuge at the "Mennonitische Altersheim Burgweintig" headed by Elisabeth Hochstettler, who later became a vital correspondence link and forwarded the letters Katherina and Johann wrote as neither knew where the other one lived.

Emigration, 1948.

With the help of her brother, Martin Enns, who had immigrated to Canada in the 1920s, Katherina was able to immigrate to Canada in October, 1948. She settled in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Like so many other immigrants of that

time, life in this new country was bitter-sweet. Bitter because of a lack of employment, travel indebtedness, strange language and being

hope of a reunion with her husband, she would disagree with them, saying, "Mien Johann kjhempt."



Son Jasch in coffin. Born August 22, 1938, died April 1939. Tina and Hans (John) mourning by their brother's coffin. John Kasdorf later became a successful businessman and property owner in Steinbach, Manitoba.

without her husband. Sweet because of freedom of religion, freedom from the horrors of war, and to be reunited with her oldest brother Martin and Leise Enns.

Reunited, 1964.

Her commitment to God was never ending. Nor was her commitment to her husband and relatives in the Soviet Union as witnessed by the many parcels she helped send despite meagre earnings.

When others suggested there was little

Endnotes:

Note One: Another son, Gerhard Enns, was the father of Henry Enns, well-known as the former President of the World Handicapped Association and the recipient of many prestigious awards for his humanitarian work on behalf of the handicapped. Other members of the Enns clan in Steinbach include grandson Jake Enns, formerly of the Steinbach Post Office and John Enns, Meat Department Manager at Penner Foods.



Photograph of the Kasdorf home in the village of Rosengard, Chortitza Colony, South Russia, today Ukraine. This house was built in 1938. Photo taken by son George Kasdorf on a trip to the U.S.S.R. in the late 1980s.

And HE DID!

Katharina's prayers were answered. Johann was allowed to leave Russia in late-fall of 1964 to start a new life with his wife and family he so desperately longed for.

However, that new life was short lived. God called Johann Kasdorf home on April 25, 1971.

Life continued for Katharina and her children. There were many good times in the years to follow. Close to the end, Katharina struggled with Alzheimers disease losing the battle to old age weariness. Katharina died January 4, 1997, at the age of 95.

In honour of you Oma, that my children may somehow know **you** a little.

Material Culture

Alfred van Vogt: Science Fiction Master

by John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2J 1V7

A.E. van Vogt has been described as the most popular science fiction writer in the world during the 1940s and 1950s. His books still abound in book stores and libraries. Few readers of the fiction written by this Hollywood writer suspect that his roots are in southern Manitoba.

Alfred Elton van Vogt was born in Edenburg near Gretna on April 27, 1912. The birth is recorded in the family record of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of the West Reserve.

His grandparents and great-grandparents were pioneers on the East Reserve. Great-grandparents Peter and Judith (Penner) Wiebe and Wilhelm and Anna (Quiring) Vogt immigrated in 1874 and were founding members of the village of Chortitz on the East Reserve and were signatories to its village agreement. The former came from the Bergthal Colony in Russia and the latter from Neu-Chortitza.

Great-grandparents, Jakob and Katharina (Heinrichs) Buhr settled in the village of Schoenwiese on the East Reserve in 1874 and Abram and Maria (Heinrichs) Friesen also lived on the East Reserve when they arrived in Canada in 1876. Both came from the Bergthal Colony.

By 1881 the families were all living on the West Reserve: the Quirings, Wiebes and Buhrs in Edenburg and the Friesens in Halbstadt. In 1890 the Wilhelm Vogts went to Dallas, Oregon but their children, Heinrich



A. E. van Vogt: From Reflections of A. E. van Vogt: The Autobiography of a Science Fiction Giant, courtesy of Prairie Fire, Vol. 15, No. 2, page 205.

and Judith (Wiebe) Vogt, remained in Manitoba. On May 9, 1886 Judith gave birth to a son Henry. Just over a year later, on September 30, 1887, Aganetha (Friesen) Buhr gave birth to Agnes. Henry and Agnes were married in the church at Edenburg on November 3, 1907. To this union was born on April 27, 1912 a son whom they named Alfred.

“Much of his childhood was spent in Neville, Saskatchewan where his father practised law”: see Harold J. Dyck, *Lawyers of Mennonite Background in Western Canada Before the Second World War*, pages 177-126, for a more detailed biography. The family moved, first to Morden and finally to Winnipeg, where Alfred spent his teen years. He was a precocious child, skipping two grades and entering Kelvin Technical High School at age thirteen.” [“Surrational Dreams: A.E. Van Vogt and Mennonite Science Fiction” by Ellis.]

The Depression prevented him from entering university. Instead he worked at odd jobs - as clerk, thresher crewman, trucker and trapper - while refining his writing skills, selling romance stories and other articles. He lived at home till age 23. In 1936 he met and married Edna Mayne Hull, a writer from Brandon. During WWII he tried to join the army but was rejected because of poor eyesight. After some time in Ontario, the couple

moved to Los Angeles in 1940, where his career took off. He is a long time resident of Hollywood and his last book was published in 1980.

One writer (Ellis) notes that van Vogt was influenced by his Mennonite tradition - a social life centering around the church, radio broadcasts from Moody Bible Institute, travelling Mennonite evangelists from the United States. He was a product of his era, which included the Depression, followed by crop failures and then the war. He was also influenced by self-help salesmen and the growing motivational industry as it was promoted by men like Dale Carnegie and Earl Nightingale. All of this gave direction to his writing.

Van Vogt's series of Null-A books included such titles as *The World of Null-A*, *The Pawns of Null-A*, etc. “During the late forties and early fifties this Manitoban was the most popular science fiction writer in the world, surpassing Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein. His books have been translated world-wide and his reputation remains undimmed in Europe and South America. He is the acknowledged forerunner of SF [science fiction] giants like Philip K. Dick and presages cyberpunks like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling and Michael Swanwick.” Ellis.

Alfred Van Vogt was an important part of East Reserve diaspora. He is part of the culture and history of the Hanover Steinbach area and one of its more famous sons.

Sources:

Scott Ellis, “Surrational Dreams: A. E. van Vogt and Mennonite Science Fiction,” in *Prairie Fire*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Summer, 1994, pages 204-219.



Cover of *Astounding*, one of A.E. van Vogt's many novels. Courtesy of Prairie Fire, Vol. 15, No. 2, page 208.

Attention Readers:

If you have not paid your 1996 or 1997 membership fee, this may be the last issue you will receive. To avoid being taken off our membership list, send your membership fee of \$10.00 to HSHS, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba Canada, R0A 2A0. Members outside of Canada should pay in U.S. funds to cover additional mailing costs.

Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg 1819-1905

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

Introduction.

The biography of Gerhard K. Schellenberg (1827-1908) by David K. Schellenberg was published in the Dec. 1996 issue of *Preservings*, Part One, pages 36-40. But only little has been known about his wife, nee Elisabeth Warkentin (1819-1905), a woman of considerable courage.

The story of her younger sister Anna Warkentin Willms (1824-1910) was first documented in 1970 by her granddaughter's husband, John B. Wiens, who wrote a book about her with the title, "*Taunty Wellmschy*". In 1978 an abridged English version of this somewhat fictionalized biography by Mary Regehr Dueck was published in the anthology, *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women*.

The story of Anna Warkentin Willms as written in these accounts is factually somewhat incorrect in certain respects. This was probably because Anna's descendants had to flee Russia in the aftermath of the Soviet takeover in 1917 and were unable to take records with them. It was only by careful comparison of oral tradition, as recorded by John B. Wiens, with family records compiled by daughter Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg and her family, and the recently available 1835 Molotschna census, that a more accurate compilation of the Warkentin family history can be established.

The writings by Wiens and Dueck were written to some extent to show how Anna came "to the light" through the interdiction of missionaries from Germany who came as early as 1820 to "convert" the Russian Mennonites to the teachings of Separatist Pietism. However, a careful reading of these sources also informs the reader regarding the spiritual journey of sister Elisabeth and her desire for a holistic faith more suited to her sensitive, intellectual and conservative nature.

Cornelius Warkentin (d. 1803), Halbstadt, Prussia.

The story of Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg starts with her grandfather, Cornelius Warkentin, a wealthy farmer in the village of 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 (Note One).

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 (Note Two).

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, yet, 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 grandchildren 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; and whether he wanted to or not, Cornelius was forced to take these books along when he immigrated to Prussia in 1818.

Cornelius Warkentin Jr. (1777-1847).

Cornelius Warkentin Jr. "later inherited most of his father's property, and with the money he obtained for it he was able to purchase the land of his choice in Blumstein, Molotschna..." The Warkentin family is listed in the 1835 census as the owner of Wirtschaft 17: "Kornelius Kornelius Warkentin, age 64, wife Katherina 52, children Kornelius 20, Elisabeth 16, Anna 11 and Maria 5, son Aron 28, wife Katherina 27, children Katherina 11, Maria 5 and Aron 4."

Blumstein had a strong Kleine Gemeinde (KG) fellowship. In 1835 16 of 36 Wirtschaft owners were associated with the reform movement in some way, including Martin Warkentin (1764-1853) whose sons and son-in-law alone owned 4 Wirtschaften in Blumstein (Note Three). Cornelius Warkentin was opposed to



Photo One: On April 4, 1841, Elisabeth Warkentin completed a beautiful bookplate for her Gesangbuch, hand drawn, lettered and coloured: Photo courtesy of Elisabeth Abrahams, Fraktur und Schönschrieben, page 96. Gesangbuch courtesy of Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.

continued on next page

the KG just has he had once been opposed to religious values of his already deceased father. One wonders, why did he chose to settle in Blumstein? Was his second wife possibly related to the prominent Martin Warkentin clan?

Cornelius Warkentin soon became a prosperous Vollwirt. "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 2 young sons in Prussia. He was proud of his 2 daughters Liescjhe and Aunhcjhe but still they were only girls. Nevertheless he raised Auncjche, and presumably Liescjhe as well, as the sons for whom he had yearned.

The sisters Warkentin.

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 a 1980 book about *Fraktur* art.

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 and 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 "... She was open to the teachings of Klaas Reimer and despite her father's opposition...she left the Grosse Gemeinde (Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde) and joined the Kleine Gemeinde".

Elisabeth 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 very difficult thing for a single young woman to do at the time. Cornelius Jr. also forbade Anna to visit with Elisabeth and made Anna his sole heir. It is written that 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 were she considered being baptised and joining the church, presumably the Grosse Gemeinde 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 conviction, 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."

Anna's Conversion.

"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 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 *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 she diligently studied the catechism lessons. Her sister had told her to study the old books they had at home. She dusted the old volumes her grandfather had insisted should go to Russia and pored 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 (Note Four).

Death of Father, 1847.

Anna Warkentin (1824-1910) was baptised and joined the Grosse Gemeinde. At this time 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, the famous social reformer. 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



Photo Two: Anna Warkentin Willms and her husband Heinrich Willms of Tiede. Photo courtesy of Full Circle, page 193.



Anna Warkentin Schellenberg's medical remedy book: Plate One--Title page reads, "Elisabeth Schellenberg in Ohrloff 1863". Plate Two--reads, "For swelling in cattle, vinegar with salt," Plate Three--Elisabeth drew a picture of a red German cow on the back book plate of her remedy book." Remedy book courtesy of D. K. Schellenberg, great-grandson.

allowed to paint their premises in more subdued colours such as blue, etc.

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.

The book by John B. Wiens goes on to detail the leanings which Anna had favouring the adherents 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.

The Schellenberg Family.

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 (Note Five). It is interesting that Elisabeth apparently had not seen her way through to marrying a KG-er 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 for she was a talented woman.

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 demonstrate that she had a sound knowledge of Biblical truths and speaks for her faith and personal courage. Their neighbour Jakob A. Wiebe and Gerhard's brother Aron were not so fortunate.

Elisabeth was knowledgeable in medicine 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, Mol. to Rosenfeld, a new village founded by the KG in the 18,000

Cornelius Warkentin Genealogy

<u>Gen</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Marriage</u>	<u>Death</u>
2	Cornelius Warkentin	Apr 1,1777		Oct 14,1847
m	(?)			ca. 1806
3	Aron Warkentin	Jun 6,1805		Nov 20,1883
m	Katerina Petkau	1806		
4	Katerina Warkentin	1824		
4	Maria Warkentin	Jan 27,1830		Jan 11,1911
m	Franz Ginter	1827		
4	Aron Warkentin	1831		
2	Cornelius Warkentin	Apr 1,1777		Oct 14,1847
2m	Katharina Warkentin	1784	1808	1852
3	Margaretha Warkentin	1809		Mar,1875
3	Cornelius Warkentin	1814		July 25,1879
3	Katharina Warkentin	1816		1832
m	Isaac Fast			
3	Elizabeth Warkentin	May 11,1819		Jul 10,1905
m	Gerh Schellenberg	Dec 13,1827		Jul 28,1908
4	Gerh Schellenberg	Jan 4,1852		Oct 31,1932
m	Anna Regehr	Nov 9, 1858	Oct 12,1876	Nov 23,1938
4	Marg Schellenberg	Dec 6,1861		1875
3	Anna Warkentin	Apr 14,1824		Jan 4,1909
m	Heinrich Willms	Jun 12,1815		1887
4	Cornelius Willms	1859		1923
m	Margaretha Heidebrecht			1941
4	Anna Willms			
m	Penner			
3	Maria Warkentin	1830		

continued on next page

continued from previous page

acre Borosenko settlement 20 miles northwest of Nikopol. On November 23, 1866, Gerhard was elected as a minister of the KG.

In 1874 they moved to Manitoba where they were one of the pioneer families in the village of Rosenfeld, west of Steinbach: see 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.

Cornelius Warkentin Family.

Son **Aron Warkentin**, the only child of the first marriage of Cornelius Jr., married Katerina Petkau. They were living with his parents at the time of the 1835 census with children Katharina age 11, Maria 5 and Aron 4. The Blumstein school records of 1861/2 list children Anna 12 and Agatha 10 attending school. These records also list another Aron W. with a son age 12 attending school. Daughter Maria W. married Franz Ginter and lived in Blumstein. In 1878 they emigrated to Parker, North Dakota. Her son Cornelius Guenther was a minister of the MB Church in Parker (Note Six).

Daughter **Margaretha**

Warkentin married Isaak Fast. Nothing further is known about this family at this time.

Daughter **Elisabeth Warkentin** married Gerhard K. Schellenberg. Their only son Gerhard married Anna T. Regehr, a niece to Bishop Peter Toews, and some of their descendants were listed in the article by David K. Schellenberg already referred to. Another well-known descendant is Rudy Schellenberg married to singer Henrietta.

Daughter **Anna Warkentin** married Heinrich Willms. Their son Cornelius Willms married Margaretha Heidebrecht who died in 1941 on a transport to Siberia. Their daughter Margaretha Willms (1889-1966) married John B. Wiens, who wrote the book *Taunte Willmsche* in 1978. The Wiens family later lived in Winnipeg.

Conclusion.

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



Gerhard W. Schellenberg (1858-1938) and family. Elisabeth Warkentin Schellenberg (1819-1905) had one child who married and had a family, namely, Gerhard W. Schellenberg who married Anna Toews Regehr (1852-1932), a niece of one-time KG Aeltester Peter Toews. L. to r. standing: son Johann R. Schellenberg, father of Levi of Kleefeld, and Jakob R. Schellenberg, father of David K. Schellenberg, former editor of the E. M. C. Messenger. Another son Gerhard died in 1917: see article by Audrey Toews elsewhere in this newsletter. Seated: Daughter Anna R. Schellenberg, Mrs. Jakob B. Koop, founders of Koop's nursery in Kleefeld; Mr. & Mrs. Gerhard W. Schellenberg; and oldest daughter Elisabeth, Mrs. Henry L. Fast, grandmother of historian Henry Fast, Steinbach.

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 the women pioneers of the Hanover Steinbach area. Elisabeth's *Fraktur* art symbolized the quiet testimony and beauty of her steadfast faith.

Notes:

Note One: In 1993, I used the story of Ohm Cornelius Warkentin (d. 1803) as an introduction for an article "Prussian Roots of the Kleine Gemeinde," *Leaders*, pages 41-82, in which Henry Schapansky and myself traced the Prussian roots of over 100 KG families identified in 1808 Revisions Listen of the Molotschna Colony, South Russia.

Note Two: The foregoing quotation includes some parts of both accounts.

Note Three: Plett, "Cornelius Warkentin 1777-

1847 Genealogy," unpublished paper, Steinbach, 1992, 5 pages.

Note Four: This section is quoted verbatim from Mary Dueck Regehr, "Taunte Willmsche," pages 196-198. The major correction is that Anna's sister is incorrectly referred to as Margaret in this article and also in the original book by John B. Wiens. As already mentioned some factual errors are understandable given the lack of records which Russländer families had access to.

Note Five: Plett, "Gerhard Schellenberg Genealogy 1725-1802," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 441-443.

Note Six: The information about Maria Warkentin (1830-1911) is courtesy of Robert Guenther, *Passionate Possessions of Faith* (4074 Koko Dr., Honolulu, Hawaii, 1994), pages 144-6. This is a beautiful family book, most tastefully done.

Sources:

John B. Wiens, "Taunte Willmschy" *Anna Warkentin Willms (1824-1910)* (Winnipeg, Man.: Kindred Press, 1970), 75 pages. Summarized excerpts from this book were published by Mary Dueck Regehr, "Taunte Willmschy Anna Warkentin Willms," *Der Bote* (1981), 10.

Mary Lou Cummings, editor, *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, Kansas, 1978), pages 192-202.

Heinrich and Charlotte Fast “Kjist”

The Chest “Kjist” of great-great grandfather Heinrich Fast (1826-90), Steinbach pioneer;
by Henry Fast, Box 387, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0

Introduction.

The “Kjist” or dowry chest was the most popular item of furniture used by Mennonites who immigrated to Manitoba in 1874 and after. These chests were constructed by expert furniture makers among the Mennonites in Russia and earlier in Prussia. According to a major study by Historian Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen of Kansas, these chests were finished with designs and motifs based on those of the renaissance masters: see Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)* (Intercourse, Pa., 1991), 229 pages.

As the immigrants prepared to leave Russia they carefully packed the dowry chests with the important family keepsakes, books and heirlooms. During the journey across Europe and the Atlantic, they were opened several times and inspected by Customs Officers. Upon arrival in Manitoba, the Kjists were used as treasured items of furniture and continued to occupy a prominent place in the homes of the settlers for decades to come.

Some of these chests, such as the one belonging to Bergthaler Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) actually experienced 4 major emigrations: 1) originating in Prussia where it was built, and taken to the Chortitza Colony, Russia around 1800; 2) from there to Bergthal Colony, 1836; 3) from Heuboden, Bergthal Colony, to Chortitz, Manitoba in 1875; and 3) from Chortitz, Manitoba, to Menno Colony, Paraguay, in 1927, by Gerhard’s son Dietrich: see *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1993, pages 6-8.

Heinrich Fast “Kjist”.

As a young lad I was unaware of the importance of the large chest standing in the small hallway upstairs in the home of my



Side view of the Heinrich Fast “Kjist”. The chest has been painted at some point. It is now in the possession of Joyce Fast Friesen of Texas, a great-granddaughter of Heinrich Fast.

Grandparent’s Heinrich Fasts in Kleefeld, Manitoba. In fact, I had forgotten the fact that many a time we as cousins had used it as a bench as we visited together during the Christmas and Easter holidays. I use the word visit, in contrast to playing, because Aunt Marie even though she was totally deaf, could evidently sense any unusual vibrations coming from the second floor, and had no difficulty communicating her displeasure to her undisciplined nephews.

When I next became aware of the chest I had already gained an appreciation of my history, but too late. Cousin Joyce Fast Friesen had just purchased the chest moments before I arrived at uncle Ben’s auction. Fortunately I had some time to inspect this valuable artifact before it once more broke root and was taken to Texas, U. S. A.

From the scant information available to me I believe that this was the travel chest of Heinrich and Charlotte Fast who emigrated to Steinbach,



The other side view of the Heinrich Fast “Kjist” showing the lock and latch mechanism.

Manitoba in 1874 as part of the large Mennonite migration from Russia. Evidently my Grandfather, Heinrich Fast as the youngest of the family inherited the chest and took it with him to Kleefeld when he got married to Maria Dueck, daughter of the Jacob L. Duecks: for a biography of Heinrich Fast (1826-90) one of the original 1874 Steinbach pioneers, see: *Preservings*, No. 9, Dec 1996, Part Two, pages 37-39.

The chest was constructed of solid lumber with elongated iron hinges securing the lid. It stands on a standard 5 pedestal base.

It is what is inside the lid that catches our attention. Two large posters are centred among numerous other pictures and poems. The poster on the left is a portrait of Maria Feodorowna, Kaiserin von Ruzland, the other is a picture of Victoria, Kronprinzessin von Schweden und Norwegen. An Easter picture in the upper left is



Photo shows the “kjist” with the lid open displaying posters, Fraktur art, and pictures typically found glued to the inside of the lid. The lid of the Heinrich Fast chest included various items, 2 portraits and a number of pictures and poems.

copyrighted 1883, and one picture has the signature of my Grandfather, Heinrich Fast and is dated 1877.

It seems that the inside of the lid functioned as a family bulletin board (or shrine) with pictures and writings being added and deleted as time progressed. I can only speculate as to the significance: are they only some souvenirs picked up in their journey through Germany on their way to Canada.

I am indebted to my cousin Joyce Fast Friesen of Texas who kindly supplied the photographs and deciphered some of the writings inside the chest.



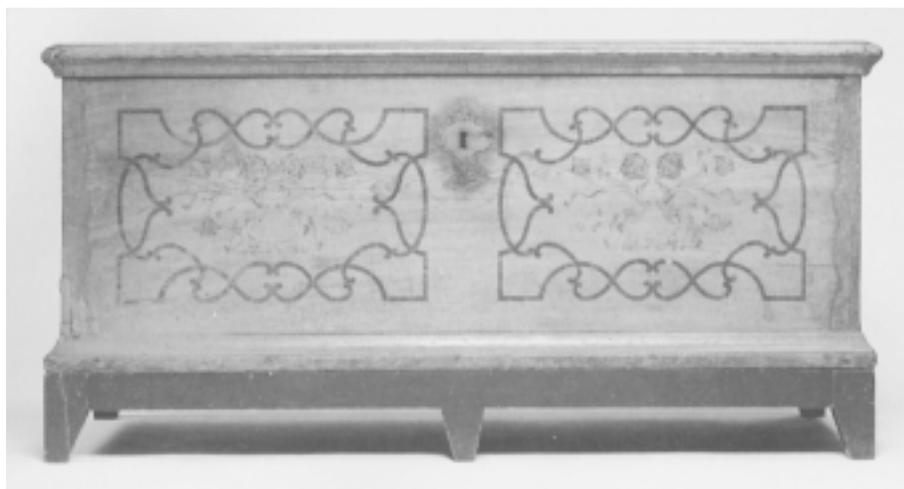
Close-up view of the portraits found in the Heinrich Fast “Kjist”. The poster on the left is a portrait of Maria Feodorowna, Kaiserin von Ruzland, the other is a picture of Victoria, Kronprinzessin von Schweden und Norwegen. All photos in this article are courtesy of Joyce Fast Friesen, Texas.

Helena von Riesen Dowry Chest

Another famous chest or “kjist” relevant to the history of the East Reserve or Hanover Steinbach area was that of Helena von Riesen (1822-97). Helena was the daughter of Peter von Riesen, a wealthy estate owner in Rosenort, Prussia who together with his Kleine Gemeinde (KG) brothers Abraham and Klaas in Russia published a beautiful 3/4 leather-bound, 3 volume German edition of Menno Simons’ “Foundation of Christian Doctrine” in 1833.

In 1845 Helena had a watercolour portrait made of herself, a beautiful representation of a young KG woman of this generation. Helena was a cousin to 4 important E. Reserve pioneers: Abraham F. Reimer, a.k.a. Stargazer; Blumenort Mayor and teacher Abraham M. Friesen; school teacher Cornelius P. Friesen; and Jakob K. Friesen of Gruenfeld, who drowned in the Red River in 1875 while on a mission of mercy for the infant community. Helena corresponded with her relatives in the Hanover Steinbach area: see article on matrimony in Part One of this newsletter.

The readers are indebted to Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen whose research uncovered Helena von Riesen’s beautiful dowry “Kjist”, a finely preserved specimen of the genre. Reinhild’s brilliant historical research and analysis on Mennonite furniture



Dowry chest of Helena von Riesen. “Probably made in Gdansk (Danzig) circa 1800, owned by Helena von Riesen who married Cornelius Jansen in Schildlitz-Gdansk in 1846. Brought from Berjansk, South Russia in 1873. Oak, 6 solid boards, dovetailed joints. Inlaid veneer ornament of flowers with interlaced borders. Till on the left inside and mounts for the kerchief board across the back. Embossed ornate-tinned iron hinges and handle plates, tooled cast-iron handles, brass key plate. Bottom board was replaced. Independent 5-legged bracket base may be a later replacement. Key and lock are missing: Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910), page 122. Used by Permission.

has provided not only an analytical model for researching Mennonite decorative culture but has explained the historical origins of many aspects of the Mennonite furniture tradition and craftsmanship: see Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*, page 121.

Helena von Riesen’s dowry chest is representative of what young KG women would have received from their parents for their wedding: “The bride’s dowry of linens, silver and other household items was often kept in a dowry chest that had either been newly built for her or had been inherited from her mother or grandmother. Men’s dowrys also consisted of clothing such as linen shirts, tools and sometimes even farm animals. Wardrobes, chairs, clocks and other pieces of furniture were also given as dowry”; Janzen, page 77.

Among the KG, naturally, there were no rings or silver heirlooms. But linens, furniture, and clothes were standard dowry items. In addition, the daughter of a wealthy landowner would also have received 2 or more cows, depending upon the financial well-being of the parents. The groom, for his part, would receive 2 horses, and in this wise the young bridal couple were fully equipped to start their own household.

The reader is given a further glimpse into the dowry chest from the following journal quoted by Janzen:

“From this house came the large chest of ash wood with its brass fittings, the dark star and its framing motif in inlaid work, which

grandfather had taken along on his emigration and which [he] had given to his eldest daughter as her inheritance. It stored the heirlooms of old linens, sild kerchiefs. The large tablecloth lay in there, with the woven patterns of twelve stages in the wreath of leaves which signified the place setting. Great-grandmother had woven it herself still before the time of the French [Napoleonic wars and occupation]. The little gold ring which had been inherited by the sister too stayed behind [in Prussia], was kept in the chest, and passed on, engraved with the date of the emigration, so that it should belong to the eldest daughter who bore the same name as her grandmother, Agathe. But the beautiful cigarholder of amber with the carved fox was equal in the eyes of a boy to the heirloom ring which in any case had to become his sister’s inheritance”: Janzen, 122-123.

One-third of the original 18 pioneer settlers of Steinbach--being all the Reimers and Friesens except for the Klaas B. Friesen family on Wirtschaft 1--were related to Helena von Riesen, being either her cousin-nephews or cousin nieces.

Coming in the next issue: An article and photographs of the kjist of Gerhard Doerksen (1825-82) of Fischau, Molotschna, and later Rosenfeld, Manitoba.



Helena von Riesen, 1845, Schildlitz-Gdansk, one year before her marriage to Cornelius Jansen. Watercolour portrait by an unknown artist. Photo courtesy of Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910), page 121. Helena von Riesen’s son Peter Jansen (1852-1923) became a member of the Nebraska House of Representatives in 1892 and State Senate in 1910. Used by Permission.

Gerhard F. Giesbrecht house SE12-7-6E

“Gerhard F. Giesbrecht house SE12-7-6E” by daughter Mrs. Ben D. Penner, nee Anna L. Giesbrecht, Box 1990, Steinbach, Manitoba, assisted by son Ernest Giesbrecht, Box 2424, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Our parents, Gerhardt F. Giesbrecht and Elizabeth Loewen, were married in February 1903. They settled in a house which Father had built, located on Main Street in Steinbach. Father was in the lumber business with his brother-in-law, Cornelius T. Loewen. Three children, George, Anna, and Katie were born during this time.

In 1907 Father decided to farm and went to Lanigan, Saskatchewan to obtain a Homestead. He built several buildings there and Mother with her three small children followed, all travelling by train. Another son, Jacob was born in 1908. Farming at Lanigan did not turn out too well. Our family was also lonely for their Manitoba relatives and friends.

So in 1909 we moved back to Manitoba, where Father purchased the Anderson farm in

Clearsprings, being the SE 12-7-6E. The farm was fully equipped with livestock, machinery and overflowing well. The buildings were very old but our parents made the house as comfortable as possible. Four children, Albert, Elizabeth, Mary and Edwin were born during this time.

Then in 1917 a new and modern house was built just south of the old house. The two-storey house, measuring 28 by 32 feet, had a large dining room, kitchen, parlour and bedroom on the main floor and four bedrooms and bath upstairs. Other features included a verandah at the main entrance over which there was a balcony off the second floor. (A great place to enjoy the fresh air, watch the moon rise, or hang out the bedding to air on a sunny day.) With an unfinished attic and a full basement, this home provided

room for a growing family.

This modern house also had a plumbing system that worked without the benefit of electricity. Since the artesian well yielded an endless supply of water, it was piped into the house and ran constantly from and back to the well house. The water was then pumped by hand to the bathroom upstairs where it was stored in a cistern that hung from the ceiling. By the force of gravity we had running water for the tub and toilet. Hot water was generated in a tank incorporated into the cook stove. A series of underground pipes drained the sewage into a gravel-filled hole and from there to the nearby creek. The contractors who built the house were Ben and George Rempel. Father hired men to clear more land for seeding crops and grain prices were good so that the house was paid for the same



The yard site of the Gerhard F. Giesbrecht home SE12-7-6E, as it appeared on an old photograph from “before Andersons bought it.” The back of the picture has the following inscription: “May 21/70. This picture was taken of the farm before my father’s day. Thompson was the owner. I don’t know the initials. I found no pictures of the place, while my parents lived there. Looks to me like a museum picture, doesn’t it? I did enjoy your visit so much I hope you come again. Regards to you both “(Mrs) B. Rankin”. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Ben D. Penner, nee Anna L. Giesbrecht, Steinbach, Manitoba.



The Gerhard F. Giesbrecht house, situated on SE12-7-6E, view from the northeast. Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Bairstow are currently the owners of this home.



Gerhard F. Giesbrecht in 1952 on the Atlantic Ocean on board ship on his way to visit the Holy Land. Photo courtesy of daughter Anna, Mrs. Ben D. Penner.

continued on next page



Another more contemporary view of the Gerhard F. Giesbrecht farm. View to the southwest. The farmyard is currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Bairstow.



Another view of the Gerhard F. Giesbrecht house with the old barn. View to the west.



A view of the Gerhard F. Giesbrecht farm from the air. View to the northwest. To the right hand side is the creek which ran across the corner of the property.

year it was built.

After moving to the new home, six more children were born, Adina, Minna, Charlotte, Waldon, Josephine, and Ernest. Adina and Waldon died in infancy. Four of the daughters wedding receptions were held in the farm house. Delicious meals were prepared by our parents and family members. There was no outside caterer, and no running to the bakery.

In 1935 a new barn was built, the contractor being Peter F. Barkman. Wages were five cents and hour and up, plus board.

The artesian well was a great asset to our family and farming at Clearsprings. Livestock had a constant supply of fresh, cold water, and ducks and geese swam in the creek in the summer. In winter the creek became our skating rink even if rather bumpy. And water was used to ice the slide that our Father built. We had so much fun sliding into the coulee and on to the creek. The cold running water was also a very good cooling system for milk and other perishable food.

Information Request

We at the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society are very interested in the history of other dowry chests such as the one belonging to Heinrich Fast. Obviously hundreds of these chests were brought to Manitoba in 1874 and 1875, as many families will have packed several of these functional pieces of furniture.

If you possess any pre-emigration items such as a chest or have information regarding such pieces of furniture which may have been in your family in the past, please contact the writer Henry N. Fast at Box 387, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0, or telephone 1(204) 326-6693. We are compiling a file of information on these chests and would also like to publish photographs and articles regarding these and other similar items of furniture and artifacts which were brought over from Russia.

Blumenhof Cemetery SW 25-7-6E

“Blumenhof Cemetery, 1900-1997,” by Harvey Bartel, Box 260, R.R.#1, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

“Blumenhof”: that is where my orphaned grandpa Heinrich Bartel came to Manitoba in 1875, together with his foster parents, “Dr.” and Mrs. Isaac Warkentin, from Imperial Russia, today part of the Ukraine. He grew to manhood on SE24-7-6E. When he married Anna T. Reimer, the couple settled on Section 6-8-6 in Greenland near her parents’ location. In less than 10 years his wife died. After the second marriage the Heinrich Bartals took up residence on 3-6-5E for 20 years, then moved to 7-7-7E and lived there for another 30 years. Both grandpa Heinrich and grandma Anna are buried in Steinbach’s South Side cemetery.

Likewise my wife’s grandfather Johann W. Reimer came to Canada on the same ship, and also to Blumenhof. He grew to manhood on SE23-7-6E, then married and continued there until about 1916. After an auction sale they loaded a railroad car with farm equipment and livestock and started again in Texas. In a few years they turned back and arrived in Steinbach on SE 6-7-7E. About 5 years later his first wife died and was buried in the Pioneer Cemetery, Steinbach. After remarrying in Kansas, he eventually lived there until he was past 90 and is buried in a rural cemetery near Inman Kansas.

Blumenhof Village 1875-87.

In 1875 the second wave of Kleine Gemeinde left Russia and came to Manitoba where 10 of these families established a village on Sections 23 and 24-7-6E, just 3 miles north of the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach. Unlike our grandparents some of these settlers continued at Blumenhoff until they died.

The group of pioneers consisted mainly of the families of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) and Johann Warkentin (1817-86), both of whom had farmed in the village of Blumenhof, Borosenko Colony, South Russia, and hence the name. Plett and Warkentin, were brother-in-laws--their wives were sisters, and both had been large-scale farmers in Russia. In addition, the Blumenhof group included Peter H. Unger and Heinrich Reimer (1818-76), the latter being married to Warkentin’s daughter.

Immediately upon their arrival in the new land the pioneers established a school which was initially conducted in a private home. In 1882 a school building was constructed, located at the east end of the village. They hired Abraham R. Friesen, a highly acclaimed, teaching veteran from Lichtenau, Molotschna, as their first teacher.

Just adjacent to the school yard was the village cemetery where burials were made during the village period. According to old-timers the original Blumenhof cemetery was



The scene at the commemoration service dedicating the memorial monument at the Blumenhof cemetery on Sunday, September 1, 1991. Some 150 people attended the event. It looks like Harvey G. Plett standing at the loudspeaker. Photos for this article are courtesy of Emil D. Reimer, Box 3070, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.



Emil Reimer, Master of Ceremonys. Some of the graves are visible in the background.

located on a slight rise (gravel ridge) on the East half of NW24-7-6E, about 200 feet north of the half-mile and 3/8th of a mile east of the western limit of the section.

In 1887 Blumenhof was the first East Reserve village to dissolve. This meant the villagers relocated their homes and yards to a specific quarter section of land, in North American fashion.

In 1890 the school building was moved one mile north of the previous location, to a new site on the northeast corner of SE26-7-6E, owned by C. S. Plett Sr. at the time.

Cemetery Background.

As already mentioned, the first cemetery was at the east end of the village on NW24-7-6. When the village disbanded in 1887 some home burials took place on various sections. Regrettably there were very few markers, so that some of these locations have been lost permanently.

Late in the year 1900, on November 16, Johann L. Plett, the step-father of above mentioned Johann W. Reimer, died. He was buried on SW25-7-6E on what was his own acreage. Two days later his father also died and was buried close by his side. Actually due to the frozen ground only one opening was made and the grave widened at the bottom to accommodate the two caskets: see “Dedication of C. S. Plett Road,” *Preservings*, Dec 1996, No. 9, Part Two, pages 53-56, for the story of the reconciliation of the 2 men.

This then was the start of the Blumenhof cemetery which continued to serve the com-

continued on next page



Ben P. Doerksen, originator of the project and Harvey G. Plett unveil the Memorial Cairn. The photograph is taken from the south end of the cemetery to the north, and provides a good view of some of the gravestones.



The "Singing Grandpas" sing "Grosser Gott wir loben dich." Left to right: David J. Reimer, Jake P. Friesen, Henry K. Plett, Aron D. Reimer, John P. Doerksen and David L. Plett.

continued from previous page

munity for some time. The burial place was declared to be their cemetery and about two dozen more burials were made here. A one-and-a-half acre parcel of property was transferred by the family in 1901 to "Johann F. Unger, Jakob L. Plett, Abraham W. Reimer (Aron?), Johann S. Janzen, Peter L. Plett, Abraham L. Plett, Cornelius F. Unger, Peter F. Unger, Heinrich Wohlgenuth, Bernhard Doerksen, Gerhard Doerksen, David L. Plett, Heinrich H. Enns, Margaretha Plett (widow of Johann L.), Johann W. Reimer, Cornelius L. Plett, and "Dr." Isaac L. Warkentin, all of the village

of Blumenhoff (sic), in the Municipality of Hanover, in the Province of Manitoba, farmers." Presumably these were the members of the Blumenhof community at the time. It is noted also that the village name was generally spelled with two "F"s in Russia and during the early years in Manitoba.

In 1903 the school building was relocated again, this time to SE 25-7-6E, adjacent to the newly-founded community cemetery. The building was frequently used by the Blumenhoffers, both the Holdemans and the Kleine Gemeinde for their local church services. In 1932 the school building was relocated yet again, to the northeast corner of the NE26-7-6E, where it operated until

Consolidation in 1967. At some point after the school was relocated for the third time, the property on SW25-7-6E was disposed of and acquired by the local land owner.

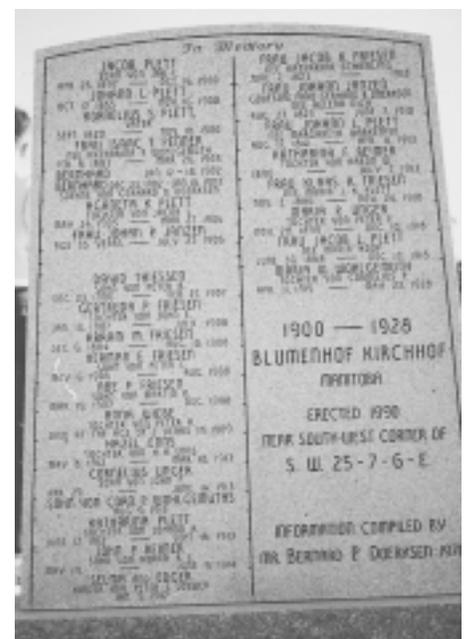
In 1918 a new church building and cemetery were started for the entire Kleine Gemeinde (Blumenort, Blumenhof, Neuanlage) church district, one mile west on SE27-7-6E, just west of the present-day P.T.H. 12 on "C. S. Plett Road." Thereafter the Blumenhof cemetery was only rarely used.

Cemetery Restoration.

Eventually the Blumenhof cemetery location also fell into disrepair. However some brave souls consisting of family members did their best to remember by planting flowers, repairing markers and clipping grass. Sorry I don't have all the names but Cornelius P. Friesen, Isaac W. Wohlgenuth and Sid F. Barkman come to mind.

Another one of these was Rev. Ben P. Doerksen who took an interest in gathering history and rallying the interest of families. Volunteers came forth to help: Harvey G. Plett represented Prairie Rose, Emil Reimer represented Blumenort, Eric Toews and Sid Barkman represented Blumenhof. A nearby resident John G. Penner had the lot legally surveyed on behalf of "Ridgewood EMC premises committee". However he found it necessary to leave the duties of the committee and so, "yours truly" was approached to continue.

Frank P. Penner of Triple P. Farms donated the acreage. Delbert Plett donated the legal work and subdivision costs. The "Blumenhof Community Cemetery" is now legally registered in the Land Titles office in Manitoba under the names of the "Trustees of the Ridgewood Evangelical Menno-



A photo of the north face of the Memorial Cairn includes a list of those buried in the Blumenhof cemetery.



Rev. Harvey G. Plett, outlines the historical background of the Blumenhof cemetery and the people who lived in the village.

nite Church. The majority of the members of the Ridgewood Church are descendants of people who are buried at the Blumenhof Cemetery.

Eric Toews and Harvey Bartel took care of fencing and landscaping and actually leaning on the shovel, fencing, landscaping, repairing markers and planning for a master monument. In 1990 a foundation was laid for the grey granite stone 5ft high x 4ft wide and about 8 inches deep. The memorial stone was installed by Altona Memorials. The north side has a list of all known names of the graves. The street side has a brief history inscribed.

Dedication Program, 1991.

On September 1, 1991, this memorial was unveiled after a short program chaired by Emil Reimer:

- 1 Emil Reimer - Words and Welcome
- 2 Emil Reimer - Scripture and Prayer
- 3 Ridgewood Laddies Trio sang "My Jesus I Love Thee" Luella Hiebert, Eileen Thiessen, Ruth Doerksen
- 4 Harvey G. Plett - Historical Backgrounds
- 5 Singing Grandpas sang "Grosser Gott wir loben dir" - D.J. Reimer, Jac P. Friesen, H.K. Plett, Aron D. Reimer, John P. Doerksen, D.L. Plett
- 6 Delbert F. Plett spoke - History of people buried here
- 7 Emil Reimer - Restoration and Invitation for contribution
- 8 Garth Doerksen - Presented "Graveyard Book" by B.P.D.
- 9 Geo R. Wiebe - Report
- 10 Sons of Cornelius sang "Unto the Hills" - John G. Reimer, Ben K. Plett, Alvin K. Plett, Leonard K.P. Plett and A.K.P.
- 11 Ribbon cutting by Ben P. Doerksen and H.G.P.
- 12 Dedicatory prayer - Harvey G. Plett
- 13 Sons of Cornelius sang "Unter Deinem sanften Futich" - J.G.R., Ben, Alvin, Leonard, Abe K. Plett.
- 14 Dave J. Reimer - Benediction.
- 15 John G. Reimer led "Faith of Our Fathers"

Funding.

After having spent \$8,000.00 the biggest job still lay ahead, that of finding donors. Emil Reimer negotiated the loan at the Credit

Union. The committee members Ben P. Doerksen, Emil Reimer, Harvey G. Plett, Eric Toews and Harvey Bartel made themselves personally responsible by co-signing the loan note. This committee appealed to local families for funds and wrote letters to far away relatives. The funds rolled in till all was paid for. Gilmer Penner of Ridgewood and George R. Wiebe of Greenland received the donations.

Prologue.

There is continued interest in the Blumenhof cemetery. In 1994 the remains of Heinrich Wohlgenuth and his daughter were exhumed from their farm graves on NW26-7-6E and reburied here by his descendants.

A year later Mrs. Minna (Plett) Toews was buried here right after the funeral. There have been further inquiries about reserving a plot.

And, yes, the remains of my great-grand-

mother Katherina Schierling Friesen are resting here since 1912. Also my wife's great-grandmother, Margaretha Warkentin Reimer Plett was buried here in 1913. I would like to pay tribute to all buried here.

Time to say "thanks" to all who were involved and also the donors, a beautiful example of pulling together.

Sources:

Royden K. Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort, 1983), page 152.

D. Plett, *Plett Picture Book* (Steinbach, 1981), various pages.

Bernhard P. Doerksen and Garth Doerksen, *Kleine Gemeinde (Evangelical Mennonite Conference since 1952) Grave Sites of Blumenort, Manitoba and Area (East Reserve) 1875-1990* (Blumenort, 1990), 111 pages spiral bound.

Anna Barkman Trunk

by D. Plett

Probably one of the most famous immigrant chests in the American midwest was the so-called "Anna Barkman Trunk". This "kjist" was renown as it came to represent the introduction of Turkey Red winter wheat to Kansas and the mid-western States by the Russian Mennonites.



Anna Barkman Wohlgenuth and Johann Wohlgenuth and family. Photo courtesy of Pictorial Highlights of Gnadenu, page 7.

The chest was actually brought to Kansas in 1874 by Peter M. Barkman, a brother to Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde minister Jakob M. Barkman who drowned in 1875: see *Preservings*, Dec 1996, No. 9, Part Two, pages 1-10.

Anna was the 8 year old daughter of Peter. Back in the family home in Annafeld, Crimea, Anna spent hours picking 3 gallons of choice Turkey Red wheat kernels as seed for a new crop in Kansas. The wheat was packed in the trunk with clothing and household goods. In this manner Turkey Red winter wheat was introduced to Kansas and other mid-western States.



Anna Barkman Trunk. The trunk which transported her precious seed wheat is currently on display at the Tabor College Archives in Hillsboro, Kansas. Photo courtesy of Pictorial Highlights of Gnadenu, page 7.

The Peter M. Barkman family had moved from Rückenau, Mol., to the Crimea where they had joined the KMB. The trunk reflects Kleine Gemeinde cultural values of simplicity and functionality.

Anna married Johann Wohlgenuth, brother to Heinrich who lived in Blumenhof, Manitoba. Anna died in 1929 and was buried in the Gnadenu Cemetery near Hillsboro, Kansas. Anna would have been a first cousin to Martin G. Barkman who married Anna Doerksen, see feature article in Part Two of this newsletter.

Mennonite Burial Customs: Part Three

Mennonite Burial Customs: Part Three - Last in the Series, by Linda Buhler,
Box 2895, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0.

Introduction.

In the previous two parts of this series, the customs of some of the different Mennonite denominations were examined and compared according to the information available through oral interviews from senior members of the community. Although there were some variations, many similarities existed.

But I began to wonder how old these customs actually were. What customs had existed before the late 1800s--a period during which little documentation or oral history exists? Was it possible that some of our traditions had been picked up along the way from our neighbouring Prussian and Russian communities as we migrated from country to country?

Funeral Practices.

While in Russia, the Mennonites favoured the use of a community cemetery within their village as their village layout allowed everyone easy accessibility. After emigration and re-settlement on their new homesteads in Canada, this proximity no longer existed and while many cemeteries were later established, it was not uncommon for families to bury their loved ones on the edge of their garden plots. However, this freedom to bury their church members did not always exist in earlier years.

According to M. G. Neff (*Menn. Ency.I.*, pages 473-475), numerous decrees in different European geographical regions resulted in burial privileges being obtained as well as withdrawn as tolerance of the Mennonites was not always evident. The Mennonites in Holland never had their own cemeteries and did not hold mourning services until the 18th century as the preachers were usually not present at the burial.

In West Prussia, the Mennonites paid burial fees to the Protestant and Catholic parsons but were not allowed to give the funeral address themselves as this was forbidden by the decree of 1852 which allowed only clergy to deliver addresses at the grave site and as the Mennonite preachers were considered lay ministers, this did not apply to them. However, in 1898 a lay minister was declared innocent of these charges on the grounds that the church in Rosenort was an accepted religious organization and that its preachers were in keeping with the prescribed regulations and thus were in fact clergymen that could deliver graveside services.

Funerals held for the Mennonites of Prussia and Danzig did not include sermons before the beginning of the 19th century. Prior to this time, they consisted of the singing of one song composed by a friend or relative and written especially for the occasion. These songs consumed as much time as a sermon as they consisted of numerous stanzas, sometimes numbering as many as twenty-eight!

While we are accustomed to the hand-writ-



Funeral picture of Maria Neufeld in Rosenort, Fernheim Colony 1930. The coffin which is made from a hollowed out bottle tree has a wide lace border which conceals the trunk somewhat. The "lid" is visible in the foreground and is decorated with garlands of freshly cut vines. Note the four wreaths hanging directly behind the bereaved family. Photo taken from Jubiläumsschrift zum 25 - jährigen Bestehen der Kolonie Fernheim by Peter Wiens and Peter Klassen, 1956.

ten funeral letter that was passed from neighbour to neighbour informing and inviting the listed people to a funeral, this was not always done. In earlier times, the Prussian Mennonites had an *Umbitter* who was a person called to a special church office for the purpose of announcing and inviting relatives and friends for funerals, weddings and other occasions. However, this office gradually disappeared during the 19th century.

Historical Origins.

Aside from the funeral procedure and the license for burial in a cemetery, where had our other burial customs originated? Had some been adopted from the neighbouring cultures in the "Old Countries"? Was there any correlation between the use of the Mennonite shroud as our burial dress and that used by the Ukrainians?

My oldest contact in this regard was the late Mrs. Maria Dawydiuk of Vita who was born in 1896 in the province of Bukowina, W. Ukraine. One similarity noted from the information from Mrs. Dawydiuk is the use of the myrtle vine which corresponded with the information received and recorded below in the interview with Miss Janzen.

As mentioned in Part Two of this series,

the Mennonites that stayed in Russia following the emigration in the 1870s, used the myrtle vine as a decoration for both weddings and funerals. Whereas Mennonites had placed the myrtle vine around the body in the coffin (regardless of gender or marital status of the deceased), the Ukrainians used it only for adorning the bodies of unmarried people and in a similar fashion as would have been done for a wedding. The myrtle was woven into a wreath and placed on top of a woman's head but for men, it was entwined into a circle and placed beside the hat that was placed into the coffin of a bachelor.

Although the Ukrainians did not use a shroud, the bodies of both men and women in the homemade coffins were covered up to the waist with a white sheet. The homemade rectangular coffins were left unpainted but were also lined with a white sheet. Once cameras became more commonplace, it was also a custom among the Ukrainians to take photographs of the deceased in the coffin. A number of these photographs dating back to around 1920 are in Mrs. Dawydiuk's possession. (Mrs. Dawydiuk passed away March 16, 1997).

Mrs. Anne Podolski, age 91, of Vita remembers the homemade coffins as being wider at the top and narrower at the bottom with tapered

continued on next page



Funeral Picture of Mrs. Susanna (John K.) Hiebert who died on November 6, 1927 on the road to the Chaco. She was born on May 2, 1879 to Franz Kehler (b. Sept. 19, 1852) and Helena Loeppky (b. Aug. 2, 1855) of the Blumengard area, East Reserve. See Irene Enns Kroeker, "Blumengard," in Historical Sketches, page 77. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Margaret Hiebert, Steinbach, Manitoba.

continued from previous page

corners and slightly domed lids. Her husband owned the lumber yard around 1918 and built these coffins for people in the area. They were painted black at the lumber yard but were lined with white fabric by members of the deceased's family. The body was washed and dressed by female members of the family.

My interviews with various Ukrainian as well as local Lutheran people confirmed that neither group was aware that the shroud had ever been used by people of their culture and background. As was mentioned in Part Two of this series, it has been difficult to ascertain why some of the Russian Mennonites arriving in the 1920s and later had discontinued using the shroud. It would almost seem that those who had quit using the conservative "haube" (woman's black lace head covering) had also favoured the use of regular clothing in the casket.

Cultural Differences.

Cultural differences continued as the Mennonite groups moved from country to country and from continent to continent. At times geographic location as well as economic situations affected their burial practices. Betty Janzen of Niverville recalls that in the Bergthal Colony in East Paraguay where her father was a deacon, the church supplied the coffin, fabric and the black ribbon for the funeral. Her father always had at least three bolts of white poplin on hand at his home as time was of essence in the hot climate and the materials needed to be on hand immediately. About ten meters of fabric were given for each burial since it was used for the coffin lining as well as for the shroud.

In the first few years of settlement in the Paraguayan Chaco, the bottle tree was used as a "poor man's" coffin. From those people in-

terviewed on this subject it would appear that only the "Russländer" immigrants coming to the Fernheim Colony used the bottle tree for this purpose while the Menno Colony Mennonites had always constructed wooden coffins. Another significant difference noted about the Fernheim Colony was the absence of any meal served before or after the funeral.

Customs have evolved even in the conservative Menno Colony in Paraguay where the use of the shroud is slowly becoming obsolete. Although funeral homes are not always an option there, some villages now have walk-in freezers specifically for storing their dead so that a traditional 3-day mourning period may be observed before the funeral. Some, however, have taken exception to this practice because of condensation on the corpse at the time of the funeral.

I conclude with the last two interviews featuring customs from Belize and from the Fernheim Colony in Paraguay as well as a correction of a type-setting error in Part Two of this series.

Although the information from the following two interviews does not pertain to the original settlers of the East Reserve, they do give vital information about the cultural differences that occurred between the different migrations.

Correction to "Mennonite Burial Customs: Part Two" appearing in the June 1996 issue No. 9, Part Two, page 49, first paragraph pertaining to the coffins used by members of the Holdeman Church. The highlighted sentence was inadvertently omitted and the text should read: Their coffins were often fabric covered and were built with higher sides so that viewing was only possible from the top. **It was from Mr. Barkman that I first heard of glass panels being used to permit viewing without opening the coffin.** A number of other people from the Greenland area remembered these as

well, seemingly when people had died of an infectious disease.

Eva Dyck, Winkler.

Interviewed by Lori Dueck.

Eva Dyck was born in Cuauhtemoc, Mexico but moved with her husband to the Blue Creek Colony in the British Honduras (later renamed Belize) in 1973 when Old Colony Mennonites from Chihuahua relocated there due to a land shortage in Mexico. She remembers funerals in Blue Creek as follows:

Coffins were built by someone in the village only as needed because people tended to be superstitious that if they were made ahead of time, they were waiting for someone to die. Padded with sawdust, they were lined with white fabric that was left hanging over the edge and tacked on with small nails. However, no ribbon was used for adornment. Two women from within the village lined the coffins which were left unpainted. The coffin itself was built in two separate sections, the bottom and the lid. Both the top (lid) and the bottom were tapered, being wider at the top and narrower at the base.

The body of the deceased was washed and dressed by the same two women who were responsible for lining the coffin. They were very particular that only none family members would be responsible for lining the coffin and preparing the body because of their fear that ill fortune would befall the family if relatives were personally involved in this preparation. After being washed, the body was dressed in a chemise, placed on ice and covered with blankets and plastic and then put into a dark room. (The ice would have been brought in from town in big blocks and cut into pieces.) These ladies would return before dawn on the day of the funeral in order to dress the body in the shroud using heavy white cotton which was supplied by the family. Typically, it consisted of one long piece of fabric that extended from the shoulders to the feet.

The fabric was pleated at the shoulders and was also tacked onto the coffin edge using small nails. Armholes had been left so that a separate piece of material could be adjoined for the arms. White ribbon was used only on the cuffs. Shrouds for men and women differed in that the fabric was just criss-crossed at the neckline for men but was secured with a fabric bow for women. If the deceased was a woman, a white "haube" would have been sewn especially for the funeral using the same white material as had been used for the shroud. The hands of the deceased were folded over the body. No other adornment was used for the body or the coffin.

The funeral itself was held in the church unless the village didn't have their own church building, in which case it was held in the home or outer building such as a shed or quonset. The entire village was invited to the funeral but letters of invitation were also sent to relatives, pastors and deacons. People would come without invitation if they knew the person well but they would come only for the service and

not for the faspas. Funerals held for pastors or other important community figures were considerably longer as there would be many speakers at the funeral. The casket was placed in the front of the pulpit if the funeral was held in the church but regardless if it was held in a church or in a home, the family would sit on benches or chairs situated around the coffin.

No funeral wreaths were used as these were a sign of pride. Since photography was not allowed at all, there were never any pictures taken at funerals. If some were taken, it was without the consent of the family. The graves were marked with a stick at each end but gravestones with names engraved were also not allowed. Sometimes a narrow cement border would be poured around the perimeter of the grave.

In the morning of the day prior to the funeral, people from the village brought butter

(Molotschna Colony), and came to the Fernheim Colony in Paraguay. They lived in the Chaco for seven years before moving to the Friesland Colony in East Paraguay.

Both the Fernheim and the neighbouring Menno Colony were new settlements but with different backgrounds. The residents of the Menno Colony had come from Manitoba and Saskatchewan three years earlier but had stayed at Puerto Casada for half that time while their land was being surveyed, while the Russian Mennonites settling in Fernheim had fled Russia with little belongings and in many cases, arrived destitute.

Until a sawmill was established in the Fernheim colony, the "buddle baum" (bottle tree) was used for coffins. Once a tree with a trunk measuring two and a half to three feet in diameter was chosen and cut down, the tree

cially-made pillow would be placed under the deceased's head.

When Miss Janzen's mother died in 1950, a lumber coffin was made by the conventional method of using six wide boards - three each for lid and base forming a six sided coffin. Shavings were used as padding and a white sheet was used to line the inside of the coffin. The pillow that was placed in the coffin had a ruffle around the edges.

Coffins were painted black for adults and brown for children. In earlier and more frugal times before paint was available or affordable, she thought it was possible that ashes would have been mixed with starchy water from cooking cassava, or "mandioka" as it was called locally, and smeared on the unpainted wood to darken it.

Unlike some of the other Mennonite denominations where preparing the body was exclusively a woman's job, certain men in the village (one of these being Miss Janzen's father) were called upon to wash and dress the body if a man had died. People were buried wearing their regular Sunday clothes and stockings but without shoes. A palm leaf or flower was often placed in the folded hands of a deceased woman and her ribbon bow was placed on her head.

Having long lost the tradition of wearing a full "haube" (head covering), married women typically wore a ribbon bow that was pinned onto the back of the head, just above their "schupz" (coiled hair). This bow was made from one and one half inch wide ribbon that was tied in a double bow. Older women wore black bows while middle-aged and younger women wore white ones.

If an unmarried woman died, she was sometimes dressed all in white as if she was prepared to meet her groom in heaven. A myrtle vine wreath would be placed around her head much as would have been done for a wedding.

The myrtle vine was also hung around the outside of the coffin as a garland. In Fernheim the women shared cuttings from the myrtle vine and grew them in pots since it would otherwise not have survived the arid conditions. However, the vine was often grown in the gardens once they reestablished in Friesland.

Young girls in the village would braid numerous funeral wreaths with freshly cut foliage from trees and white flowers were gathered from whichever garden had some available as only white flowers were to be used. If a woman with a family had died, there were often as many wreaths as there were children. At the interment, some of the wreaths would be thrown on top of the lowered coffin and thus buried as well, while the remaining wreaths were placed on top of the freshly closed grave.

Funeral letters were quickly sent home to house within the Colony to announce a death as funerals were often held the same day or the following day. Unlike other Mennonite groups, the custom of serving a funeral faspas did not exist in Fernheim or Friesland where only the officiating minister would return to the home of the grieving family.



Mrs. Maria (Heinrichs) Neufeld, formerly Mrs. Abram Penner, standing behind the coffins of her sons Bernard (left) and Jacob Penner (right) who died of the flu in 1918 on November 11 and 12 respectively. Note that these purchased coffins have lids with separate openings for viewing. Photo taken in Blumenthal, W.R. on Mrs. Neufeld's yard. Three of Mrs. Neufeld's children (Barbara, Mrs. Johann W. Sawatzky; Maria, Mrs. Jacob Martens, and Diedrich Penner) settled in the Krongard, E.R. (See article on her granddaughter, Mrs. Sarah Sawatzky Funk appearing elsewhere in this newsletter). Photo

and milk to the deceased family's home. The women would then make dough for the "kringel" (twisted bun dough) and divide the dough between themselves. Each woman would be responsible for baking a batch and delivering it to the home of the deceased that same afternoon. Two meals were served at the home of the deceased on the day of the funeral.

For the lunch meal which was served before the funeral, a cow would have been butchered and the beef cooked into huge cauldrons of "Komst Borscht" (Cabbage Soup). Some meat was left in the soup and the rest was cut into pieces and served on a plate. The rest of the menu consisted of "Pluma Moos" (cold fruit soup), crackers and buns. After the funeral, faspas consisting of buns, "kringel", sugar cubes and coffee was served.

Helen Janzen (Winnipeg).

Miss Helen Janzen was eight-years old when her family left Alexanderkrone, Russia

trunk was split into two sections to form the base and the lid. Both sections were hollowed out to minimize the weight as much as possible since the water logged tree was very cumbersome and heavy. The end product would then have a shell of about two to three inches.

The inside of the tree was spongy and was similar to cork in texture so it was easily removed with a spade (this was then used for fodder for cattle). The ends of the bottle-shaped trunk were narrower than the centre so allowance for this had to be made when cutting the tree to size for the individual person. The lid was nailed down to the base immediately prior to interment. A wide strip of white paper was attached to the outside upper edge of the open bottle tree coffin if lace or fabric was not available for fringes as would normally have been used on a typical coffin.

The deceased would be placed on a layer of padding (possibly straw or shavings) that was covered with a white sheet. As well, a spe-

Book Reviews

Please forward review copies of books of relevance to the history and culture of the Hanover Steinbach area to the Editor, *Preservings*, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, Phone 1(204)326-6454 Steinbach, 1(204)474-5031 Winnipeg, Fax 1(204) 326-6917.

Loewen, Harry; Nolt, Steven with Duerksen, Carol and Yoder, Elwood, *Through Fire and Water: An Overview of Mennonite History* (Waterloo, Ont: Herald Press, 1996); 350 pages.

Schools in North America teaching Mennonite history courses have had to rely on textbooks geared for first or second year university students. In the book *Through Fire and Water* an attempt has been made to create a readable, high school level textbook on Mennonite history. This history begins with Jesus Christ and the origins of the Church and, from this starting point, embarks on the historical journey of Anabaptism through to the present.

The authors of this textbook have rightly emphasized the many moving stories over mere exposition of Mennonite beliefs and identities. In fact, the book opens up with several short stories from different eras as "ghosts and echoes" of the collective Mennonite story. At the end of each major section one encounters a series of questions which are designed to generate discussion and introspection on whether favoured Anabaptist principles and values are still at work in the present. This addition completes the textbook as a sort of catechism for students seeking the Mennonite identity.

The major divisions are as follows: firstly, from Pentecost to the early 1500s, where Anabaptist principles can be found in Jesus and the Apostles' life and teachings; second, 16th century emergence of Anabaptism proper--the courage of people to defy state and Church authority, Menno Simons emerges as a leader in difficult times, Mantz, Grebel, and so on; thirdly, Anabaptists seek peaceful places in which it grows and eventually divides; fourthly, the authors cover the Russian Mennonites and migrations from 1874-1975. The very last chapter deals with the global presence and influence of Mennonites. The authors have seen fit to place many pictures, maps, cartoon drawings, and reproduced etchings throughout the book to capture the young reader's imagination.

The weakest link of any historical work is what it leaves out. In this case it seems to be the Mennonites of the East Reserve and the diaspora from that region in general. The Kleine Gemeinde, specifically, are bound by one page of exposition and are referred to incidentally in two other places.

The multicultural fact of the Mennonite faith, brought across very clearly in the last section, is one of the more inspiring and challenging aspects of this book. The global vision defended in this textbook looks to a Mennonite body of believers transcending

race or gender. There are stories to support the role of women in shaping Anabaptist history as well as the influence of other countries and culture, many of them developing or poor nations.

There was a strong need for a Mennonite history accessible to young people. *Through Fire and Water* is written in a lively way, telling the momentous and inspiring stories from the past to the young reader, or to one who wants a history uncomplicated by complex historical issues.

Review by James Kornelsen
James Kornelsen, Box 1420, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0 is an instructor at the Steinbach Christian High School.

David Bergen, *A Year of Lesser* (Toronto, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1996), 215 pages.

We were excited to see this book on the Book-of-the-month selection list and ordered it immediately. Bergen is, after all, one of our own Manitoba authors, the brother of a dear friend at that.

His characters in this story live nearby, travel the same roads, stop at the same stops, seek the same answers, make the same mistakes. But by the end of the book I was glad to leave them behind, relieved even. In this intricately woven set of lives they share a dismal mediocrity, guided only by their own various visceral preoccupations. And no one breaks out of it, even as the book ends. Those who don't disappear completely, are doomed to continue their sad and sorry lives forever.

It takes a master of the art to draw such people and maintain such control of their lives. Bergen is such a master as he forces the reader to look into the very depth of that human viscera, raising many dark questions, the biggest of which is: is that really all we are?

Although the author sets his story in his own native setting, this is not another Mennonite witch-burner. His characters are touched by their setting but are by no means a part of it. These are fringe-dwellers which perhaps gives them all the rope they need to hang themselves. We are given only brief glimpses of the core community. The only religious leader given any part in this story is a somewhat untraditional minister who does shepherd his small flock which from time to time includes the salvation-seeking main character, Johnny. He even provides a baptism for Johnny, for which the only real lasting revelation is the minister's nakedness before and after the plunge.

The title changes meaning between the

beginning and the end of this work, as good titles often do. At first, it suggests a place which could be found on a map. (Some will be tempted to put it on a map and give it another name) By the end of the story, it has assumed a qualitative relevance.

My optimistic nature requests that the next venture by this gifted author be somewhere where the land is fertile, the air as clean as the wind-swept prairies, and the spirit has a chance to soar. Where there is at least a possibility for salvation of some kind for someone. Someplace like Greater perhaps.

Review by Sheila Reid, Box 1305, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Ike and Sarah Friesen, Ernie and Elma Harder, Abe and Tina Funk and Abe and Eileen Klassen, *The House of Funk: Abraham T. Funk (1875-1944) and Susanna D. Wiebe (1878-1967)* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981), 96 pages.

This genealogy traces the family of Abraham T. Funk (1875-1944) and Susanna D. Wiebe (1878-1967) who lived in the Barkfield area, also known as Alt-Bergthal. The book includes a biography of each of the 14 children who reached adulthood and founded families. Included in each section is a genealogical listing as well as photographs of various family members.

One of the things I found of particular interest about this book was the fact that Susanna Wiebe, the family matriarch, was the daughter of Cornelius Wiebe (b. 1853) who was a brother to Heinrich Wiebe (b. 1866). These brothers were the sons of Cornelius Wiebe (b. 1826), one of the Wiebes of Eigenfeld southwest of Steinbach where Homestead Crescent is today located. Heinrich Wiebe, in turn, was the great-grandfather of Armin Wiebe, famous author of *The Salvation of Jasch Siemens*: see *Preservings*, No. 8, Part One, page 49.

Unfortunately this excellent family book sold out some time ago.

Three Hundred Years: Peter Penner (1850-1924) and Margaretha Wiebe (1854-1945): From Danzig and Elbing, Prussia to Chortitza and Bergthal, Russia to Rudnerweide, Manitoba. Published by Penner Family History Committee. Price \$50. Cdn. (taxes included), prepaid in Canada or \$40. US prepaid in USA. Order from: Penner Heritage, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2J 1V7.

This book traces the family of Hans

Penner and Maria Loewen who lived at Elbing in 1717 when their son Gehrt was born. Gerhard returned to Elbing to marry Anna Pries and, after her death, Helena Driedger. Gerhard and Helena emigrated to Russia in 1796, where they became property owners in the village of Chortitza. In 1836-1839 three of their sons helped establish the Bergthal Colony while a fourth son remained in Blumengart. Most of the descendants of those three Bergthal brothers emigrated to North America in the 1870s, many of them settling in Minnesota and some in Manitoba.

Gerhard Penner's grandson, David (1819-1886), settled in the East Reserve village of Osterwick (now New Bothwell) in 1875. David's eldest son had married Margaretha Wiebe in Russia and had left with his wife's relatives in 1874. Three of Margaretha Wiebe's sisters married three Stoesz brothers - Jacob, David and Kornelius - and two married sons of Oberschulze Jakob Peters. Some of that group helped establish the village of Hochfeld near St. Anne. In 1880 this entire Penner clan established the village of Rudnerweide on the West Reserve.

This book follows the descendants of Peter (1850-1924) and Margaretha (Wiebe) Penner. While a concentration of Penner descendants can still be found in the Rudnerweide area, there are more in Winnipeg and some have returned to the East Reserve. Many others can be found between Montreal and Vancouver in Canada, in various parts of the United States, and in several Latin American countries.

Older documents reproduced in the book include a page from the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church of the 1700s recording an ancestral family. There is also a valued photo taken by HSHS president Orlando Hiebert which shows the only headstone still standing in the Mennonite cemetery of the former village of Bergthal in Russia. This solitary marker stands on the grave of Peter Penner (1792-1849), a patriarch of this Penner family: see Orlando Hiebert, "Bergthal cemetery 1994," in *Preservings*, No. 6, June 1995, pages 19-20.

The 284 page hardcover book contains 500 photographs relevant to Penner family history. Numerous ancestor and descendant charts help to clarify both current and earlier family relationships and identify the several branches that settled in Minnesota. A full page bibliography lists published and unpublished materials and archival collections that relate to this extended family.

Reviewed by John Dyck, 48 Coral Cresc., Winnipeg

William Schroeder and Helmut Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas: Second Edition Revised and Expanded* (Springfield Publishers: 1996, Winnipeg), 183 pages. Hardcover \$35.00 and softcover \$25.00 plus postage and handling.

William Schroeder and Helmut Huebert

have with their second edition of the Mennonite Historical Atlas made a good atlas even better. The second edition's 183 pages, versus the first edition's 132 pages, allow the authors to provide the reader with additional information (42 pages of text) as well as more detail.

The atlas again is 8 1/2 by 11 inches in format, maps are black and white. There are 128 maps on 110 pages drawn by cartographer Weldon Hiebert using a computer graphics package. Thirteen maps show European areas, 64 cover Russia/U.S.S.R., 14 are of North America, 26 of Latin America, 4 deal with the Aussiedler, and 6 with the Hutterites. The book includes a three page bibliography and a 24 page detailed index.

Although the maps have a reduced magnification in the second edition, they have not been reduced to the point where they start to become jumbled and hard to read. With the reduced magnification and the fact that the lines extend to the edge of the page and with state-provincial boundaries drawn in, the reader now sees the area of focus within a greater context.

Other improvements include legends which are more complete. The use of in-map notation eliminates the inconvenience of matching a number on the map with text at the edge of the page. The maps are featured in a chronological as well as a logical order in that they start with the Reformation and Holland and end with the Aussiedler settlements in Germany.

The maps are logically arranged so that first the province or country is shown with all its Mennonite colonies and then on the following pages the details of the individual settlements. There are maps of Ukraine listing the current Ukrainian names of what used to be Mennonite villages. The Second Edition also features maps of the WWI battle fronts and Nestor Machnov's sphere of influence, within the Mennonite colonies in South Russia. The maps indicating where the Aussiedler from the former USSR settled in Germany as well as the those showing the Hutterian settlements in Europe and North America are probably not well known.

The 42 pages of brief but concise historical facts and explanations about each colony and or settlement and a complete index, allows the reader who has only a cursory knowledge of our Mennonite history to make sense of the major events and the geographical area in which they happened.

Schroeder and Huebert state that they intended this book to "...allow the old to review their memories and the young to make new discoveries." I am confident that for many readers this will become reality. An excellent reference book that every one interested in Mennonite history will want to own.

Book review by Orlando Hiebert, Tourond, Manitoba

Copies of the Mennonite Atlas may be ordered from Springfield Publishers, 6 Litz

Place, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R2G 0V1.

Margaret Penner Toews, *Through The Scent of Water* (Praise Hymn Publishers: Neilburg, Box 345, Saskatchewan, SOM 2CO, 1996.), 320 pages.

When I noticed the subtitle of Margaret's book- *A devotional book for women*- I wondered if Delbert had mistaken his reviewer. But my misgiving left me once I had gone through these meditations. This devotional guide will be an inspiration to all readers.

It is written by a wife and a mother, and so the stories flow naturally out of her experiences. Some Scripture is feminized. The prodigal 'son' is Dinah; In Acts the 'sirs' become 'sisters'. But here we have an oasis where no gender wars are fought--we as human beings are pointed to the One who teaches humility, self-sacrifice, and mutual sharing.

The framework is simple. A Scripture verse serves as text. Then a story, often adapted from Scripture, from world headlines, or from Margaret's own experience illustrates the text. A follow-up Bible reading is cited; then aphorisms or her own poems close the daily reading.

How I wish Sunday morning sermonists would all have this writer's eye for the personal, the down to earth! Life is lived not in the abstract but in the particular. Here we meet a Real Woman: one who writes about being 'babied out', who jars the choir with 'sol' where it should be sung 'la', whose hope is that in heaven she will meet the Muslim housewife bearing the gift of a cucumber.

The characters from the Bible come alive: Zacchaeus whose passion to meet Jesus has made the sycamore legendary; the jailer washing the wounds of Paul and Silas that he himself had inflicted; 'wise' Solomon, who lost his vision for the sake of swift horses and beautiful women.

And there is more. The love of nature evident in the title (through scent of water the tree may bud...) shines through the readings. The Anabaptist teaching on true non-resistance is illustrated by a modern real estate deal. There is even a nostalgic glance back at *Plautdietsch*, the language our generation was raised in.

We in the Red River are enduring the threat of a flood. Margaret speaks to us of their fire loss, where their livelihood was lost to a shop fire. But her husband's song--the old German one "When troubles make us tremble..."--reminds her that "the treasures that were most precious had not been touched by fire"; the flames had destroyed "neither our salvation nor our song." This hope--that though our lives may be cut down, yet the tender branch will renew itself if we stay in faith--will be strengthened by the reading of this work.

Reviewed by Wilmer Penner

Copies of *Through the Scent of Water* may be ordered from Praise Hymn Publishers, Neilburg, Box 345, Saskatchewan, SOM 2C0, \$14.95 each plus postage and handling.

Piet Visser and Mary S. Sprunger, *Menno Simons: Places, Portraits and Progeny* (Krommenie, Netherlands: Knijnenberg; Altona, MB: Friesens; Masthof Press: Morgantown, PA; Kumpers-Verlag: Hamburg-Altona, Germany, 1996), 168 pages, 23x30.3 cm.

This 168 page portrait of Menno Simons was published in Dutch, German and English. The writers, aware of the wide dispersion of the Mennonites during the 16th century, intentionally limited it to the Netherlands, 1525-1740. This history of Menno Simons and his followers is more a pictorial collage than a written narrative.

There are three sections in the book. Section I entitled, "in the Steps of Menno," follows the life of Menno chronologically and geographically. Two pages are given to each location where Menno spent time. On those two pages you find a brief description of Menno's activities in that place as well as pictures of the town or area and a map of the surrounding area.

The written part is kept brief. It's brevity will appeal to those who prefer to look at history through pictures. The brevity required the ability to succinctly summarize the events of that place. The authors have done an amazing job of doing just that. By choosing a few high lights the writers carry the reader rapidly through Menno's life.

They refer to the ellipses in Menno's story rather effectively as is illustrated by the questions raised concerning Menno's education. Menno's colleagues' education is known but whether Menno attended University or not is not know. (16)

Each quote from Menno at the beginning of each chapter effectively summarizes the focus of the chapters as well as give the reader a glimpse into the heart of Menno. However, one feels at times they judge Menno somewhat harshly when they say the movement was "cracking on all sides" (54) or they speak of his "gnawing conscience." Certainly the ban created strife and division but the movement survived and is still continuing today. That Menno at times asked whether he was moving in the right direction is a logical assumption that any serious preacher and leader does. However, to say that he had a gnawing conscience needs slightly better substantiation than given here.

The many and variety of pictures add a meaningful dimension to this short walk in "Menno's shoes."

Part II, entitled, "The Many Faces of Menno," is a fascinating study of various portraits and pictures that have been attempted of Menno. Since the earliest portrait of Menno originated some 45 years after his death, any attempts at a portrait must be

based on various comments that are made about Menno by himself in his writings or the writings of others, especially his enemies.

For example, in 1557, Menno is on crutches for he says, "if I find those of Harlingen of the same mind, then I will jump for joy upon my crutches." (54) A picture of him on crutches is found on page 65.

The various portraits of Menno found on pages 65-105 is a worthwhile study not only of Menno but also a study of the artist. How Menno is portrayed of course gives us a glimpse into the way the artist thought of Menno.

Most of the pictures showing Menno standing, have his hand in one or another way on the Bible, emphasizing Menno's focus on the Scripture. He is portrayed almost exclusively with a serious face. This reflects what one finds in his writings, life is serious and not to be frittered away. A few portray Menno baptizing another person. (78)

The reader interested in the kind of prints being presented will find the brief descriptions provided helpful.

Many of the pictures are busts only. On page 66 is a picture of a tombstone having pictures of the various Reformers on it including Menno Simons, as well as busts of Calvin and Luther. Those of Anabaptist persuasion say that is his rightful place.

Part III is entitled, "The Changing Image of Menno and the Mennonites in Dutch Art (Ca. 1535-1740)," 108-153. Starting with times of persecution the picture gallery in this section leads us to the time when the Mennonites became people of wealth and had family pictures painted by famous artists such as Rembrandt.

The pictures of torture leave one with the uncomfortable questions, "Would I be willing to give my life for my faith?" On the other hand they also encourage us that our faith is worth dying for and that one can be faithful, even in the face of death. That godly heritage is ours, we dare not lose it.

A sub-section deals with "Caricatures of Mennonite Morality." Mennonites were ridiculed not only in speech and written word but also with pictorial caricatures. Those unaware of this type of ridicule, will find this section interesting. There was a not so subtle attempt to make the Mennonites appear less moral and upright.

The poem, "Mennonite Courtship," seeks to portray beneath the piety and clean front was lust and immoral passion. It tells the story of how a non-Mennonite seeks to court a Mennonite girl but is unsuccessful until he changes his clothes and speech to conform what is expected of the Mennonites. Then without too much difficulty he is able to worm his way into the house of the girl and seduce her.

Then there is the series of three pictures (121) of how a young unmarried couple Claasz and Saartje connive to get permission to get married. They do this by Claasz dressing up as a girl and comes to visit Saartje

and stays for the night.

The next morning the parents grudgingly agree to the wedding.

These and other not so subtle attempts at ridicule by the enemies of the Mennonites give another insight into the society of the day. An intriguing question that remains unanswered is, "Are some of these ridiculing incidents based on some factual data?"

There are a number of portraits of wealthy Mennonite business people. The pictures, some in color, tell the story of great change in attitude by society towards the Mennonites, from persecution to acceptance.

One picture that I found rather tasteless and question the value of including it is the picture of the purgative beans (122). It is described as a satire and pictures a room full of people suffering from diarrhea because they had mistaken purgative beans for sweets at a wedding. The result was mass diarrhea. The picture shows people defecating all over the room. It is believed the satire is based on a historical event. It may be humorous to some but it tends to leave a poor taste in my mouth.

I found this book intriguing because of its focus on pictures. Telling the story in that way is certainly enriching and adds a helpful dimension to the study of Mennonite history.

The book is an excellent coffee table piece or a good addition to any one's library collection on Mennonitica.

Reviewed by Harvey G. Plett

Sarah Unger de Peters, *Mennonites in Mexico/Mennoniten in Mexiko: Original Mennonite folk art* (Mennonite Post: 1996, Steinbach), 80 pages.

In 1997 the Mennonites in Mexico will mark their 75th anniversary since arriving there from Canada in 1922. There is no comprehensive history that tells their story and to a large extent the mostly Old Colony people there who now number over 45,000, prefer to remain the "Stille im Lande" (quiet in the land). Little has been written about them.

Art has not been an acceptable form of expression in the conservative Mennonite colonies in Mexico in the past and that is why this rare collection is an important celebration of the lifestyle of some of the people.

Sarah Unger de Peters is not a trained artist. She grew up in Kronsfield in the Manitoba Colony near Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico and as a child drew pictures of events and people around her. She has captured the lifestyle of her people in these drawings.

Due to a heart condition, Sarah was not able to do hard labor on the farm. She got no encouragement from her family, who considered drawing a waste of time. Sarah was 19 years old when she was encouraged to print some of her drawings as a coloring book for children. Even though her drawings were

initially intended for children to color, this collection can be considered an art book, where each picture, drawn with great details, tells a story of the conservative Mennonite life.

Sarah grew up in a poor family with no medical insurance and therefore was never able to have the necessary heart surgery. She is married, but is not able to have children until she has this surgery.

In March 1996, when I visited her in Mexico, she was operating a “second hand” store. Her husband was mostly unemployed. They then moved to Kansas, USA, where he got a job. They might earn enough money to afford the heart surgery in the future.

Another interesting thing is, Sarah writes with her right hand but draws with her left hand.

Review by Anne Froese, Steinbach



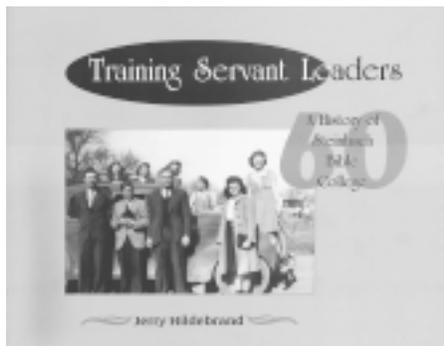
This book, 80 pages, is available at *Die Mennonitische Post*, 383 Main, Box 1120, Steinbach, MB ROA 2A0 for \$12.95 in the store or \$15.00 plus GST if ordered by mail.

Hildebrand, Jerry, *Training Servant Leaders: A History of Steinbach Bible College 1936-1996* (Steinbach, 1997), 160 pages, paperback. \$20.00.

This history of Steinbach Bible College for the years 1936 to 1996 is part of the celebration activities of the school's commemorations of its sixty years of service to the local community and the country. It is a “coffee table” layout in an 8 1/2 x 11 format with two columns plus a sidebar for pictures (I'm still looking for one of me. Don't we all?) Short sketches and quotes make it a very accessible history book.

Rather than outlining the story of SBC in strictly chronological order, the eight chapters are thematic treatments of various aspects of the school spanning, in many cases, the entire sixty years. Topics such as leadership, curriculum development, facilities and mission endeavour are presented in a very readable and attractive format.

For a popular history, as this is intended to be, the story is very liberally documented, obviously thoroughly researched. The appendices include the 1937 constitution, lists of all staff and faculty, and the names of all



Training Servant Leaders: A History of Steinbach Bible College 1936-1996 is an attractive book with a well-designed and reader friendly layout.

graduates for the full sixty years.

The book is a welcome addition to the historical writings of the Steinbach area. It provides the history of an institution that has had an impact far beyond the campus as graduates have entered careers of ministry and service around the world. This history deals with an aspect (preparation for church ministry) of the community that has made its influence felt both locally and globally.

The book is one that will be of interest to all former students and graduates, giving a glimpse, not only of a particular few years, but of the wider vision that has guided the school in its emphasis and influence. In addition, individuals in the community will benefit from a better understanding of an institution that has attracted students since 1936.

Reviewed by Don Thiessen

Don Thiessen is the conference pastor for the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

Announcement

The Board of Directors of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society is pleased to announce that Randy Kehler has been appointed “Photo Archivist”. He will be responsible for a program of scanning photographs of historical value and storing them in a computer memory bank.

All residents of the Hanover Steinbach area and others who may have such photos are asked to contact Randy at 326-3139.

With the scanning technology now available photographs can be scanned in a matter of minutes and returned to their owners. In this way, valuable historical photographs can be preserved for posterity. If you have any such photos or have any questions regarding the program, please call Randy at 326-3139.